



Many people came down with food poisoning by eating frozen Gyoza made in China. Gyoza is originally Chinese food but it's very popular among Japanese now. It's minced meat and vegetables covered with a thin skin made from kneaded wheat. It's a little bit troublesome to cook it from the ingredients so ordinary Japanese, including me, usually buy packed frozen Gyoza at the supermarkets. At first we toast them with a little oil in a frying pan and then pour in a little water to smother them. To eat hot Gyoza with soy sauce is quite delicious. Anyway one company imported frozen Gyoza from China and sold them all over Japan. It is said that they found a chemical poison in the packages. No way! Last year we had some injustices concerning food in Japan. One of them was expired food and the other was improper food labelling from the production area. However nobody became ill by eating them. We are so nervous about food. I'm sure food from China will be soon gone from the markets in Japan.

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According to a survey, it is said that the rents in Tokyo are the highest in the world. Real estate in Tokyo is approximately two times more expensive than in Nagoya, the fourth largest city in Japan, where the Toyota headquarters are located in. Actually my son, who used to live in Nagoya but now is living in Tokyo, tells me that Nagoya was much easier to live in than Tokyo. The average prices of food and rent are cheaper and people are friendly. "I could go to the office in 30 minutes from my house which was in a green zone. It was in a natural setting and the air was clean. Here in Tokyo there is no good place to enjoy nature." I live in the suburbs in Tokyo. It takes just one hour by train from my station to a Tokyo station. Many people commute to their office in Tokyo from my station so the trains are crowded every morning. They can't arrive at their offices in one and a half hours. I bought my condo over 20 years ago but it's still popular among the inhabitants because it's close to the station and faces the big park. The real estate agencies quite often put fliers into my mail box that say, "Don't you want to lease your house? You can get one hundred and thirty thousand yen every month from it. Many people who will be transferred to Tokyo from a local region want to rent your house. Please contact us if you want." Now I'm thinking that I will rent my house to someone and move to Nagoya after my retirement.

### ✚ Civil servants

2008,1,29



Civil servants have to obey some rules. They shouldn't work part-time and announce that they support the specific political party. They have an obligation to devote themselves to duties. In addition, it is banned to leak secret matters which they got through their public job. On the other hand, as ordinary citizens they also have basic human rights such as freedom of speech. Sometimes this contradiction is discussed. It is explained generally that civil servants are working for the benefit of the public so their rights have to be restricted to some extent.

### ✚ Three terrible stories

2008,1,28



My Kiwi friend told me that the other day he had found his house in a terrible state when he came back home after his one week away. There were fleas all over the house because it is summer in NZ now, so he closed all the windows and he feeds his two cats in the room. A similar thing happened to me over 15 years ago. I was away for 5 days in midsummer. When I came home, I found all the tropical fish in a water tank were floating. The temperature in the house and water rose very high and every tropical fish died. Though tropical fish usually live in quite warm water, they couldn't stand the high temperature. Another similar story is more terrible. One of his friends opened the door after she had been staying in America for two months. The smell in the house was strange and soon she found that the tap water was splashing on the floor and the kitchen was flooded. What's worse, the kitchen was covered with black mold. Something might have dropped on the handle of the faucet and water began to flow. Nobody who could stop the water was in the house. Take care when you go away for a long time.

### ✚ The death penalty

2008,1,27



According to the BBC news China is trying to use lethal injections for executions. When I first

read the headline, I thought it was very cruel and dangerous. It seems to be easy to kill people by injecting them but where do they keep the poison? What would they do if someone used it by mistake? After reading the article, I realized that this was a kind of merciful way to execute convicts. Actually it is said they use this method instead of electric chairs nowadays in America. In Japan we adopted hanging and I'm not familiar with executions. We have been discussing if the death penalty is constitutional or not in Japan but we still can't arrive at a conclusion about it. Life is more important than the earth. It's a quote of a famous judgment given quite a long time ago in Japan. I studied it at university. However murderers killed innocent victims. Almost all the victims' families want criminals to be executed. It's a really difficult issue.

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## Describing trends

2008,1,26



The population in the world will reach 8 billion by 2050. In Asia it has increased steadily until this year. There has been a huge rise in the number of the population in Africa. There will be a gradual increase in North America. The fact that the population is increasing is probably a result of an uneducated society. The drop in the birthrate is most likely due to the high cost of educating kids. The increase in the number of older people could be an effect of the developing of medical science. I think the rise in the population of the developing world is going to create hunger. The decrease in the birthrate will probably cause the stagnation of the economy. The fall in the number of people of working age could lead to a decline of the economy.

### Big numbers

For Japanese to understand big numbers in English seems to be difficult because the units of counting numbers between English and Japanese are quite different. Can I say two point eleven thousand when we describe 2110?

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## The speech about the economy

2008,1,25



Japan is no longer an economic power. Recently the Minister of the Economy and Finance

addressed and declared that. What can we do about the economy now? Should I work overtime? Should I invest spend a lot of money at department stores? Many experts say it's a big problem that the stock prices are declining. Should I invest a lot of money in stocks and bonds without being anxious about losing my money? Her speech only made us worry about our future. I think the low birth rate is the worst problem. Who will produce cars in the Toyota plant two decades from now? Who will buy clothes at stores in the future? The economy depends on enough population, not elderly people but an energetic young population. How will less people be able to support more old people in the future? It's obvious that the economy is declining in such a country. Ironically the Minister who made the speech is single and has no children. I didn't have a good impression with her speech.

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#### Genetically modified food

2008,1,24



What's the difference between natural food, organic food and genetically modified food? Genetically modified food means food whose genes have been modified by scientists to produce better ones compared to the natural products. Natural food means non GM food but they might be produced by using agrichemicals. Organic foods are not produced by sprinkling agricultural chemicals on them; farmers use only organic fertilizers to produce them. Genetically modified foods are delicious, tough and have good shapes and appearances. I'm not sure they are completely safe. Organic foods don't look good and prices are high. However they must be safe.

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#### Smoking

2008,1,23



It was proved that smoking was a cause of lung cancer and heart disease. I firmly disagree with smoking. In my opinion the government should assess a higher tax on tobacco and ban smokers from smoking in public. Second-hand smoking should completely be avoided. In Japan I think we don't have a law to prohibit it but recently there are areas where we shouldn't smoke in restaurants, trains and public offices. However Japanese rules seem to be far behind the U.S. and the other western countries. Regarding my office, we can't smoke inside and sometimes I find my

colleagues smoking outside in the very cold weather. In Japan the tobacco business originally belonged to governmental businesses like the post office. About 20 years ago they privatized the business and now the private company, the Japan Tobacco Corporation, is running the tobacco business. They can't advertise for tobacco openly due to public opinion. They can't improve their business if they stick to only their old business: they are trying to produce medicines and foods. Today I read the HP of the company. The following is a quote from their HP. JT is no longer just a tobacco company. We continue striving to establish valuable brands in the pharmaceutical and foods businesses, in addition to our mainline tobacco products.

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#### **How to save energy**

2008,1,22



It has been freezing cold these days. We can't rise the temperature of governmental offices over 19 degrees according to the nation's policy. We can't take it for granted that energy is exhaustless. There is a wide aisle in the center of the office and visitors often open the door. Whenever the door is opened, the cold air enters the office. My desk is located close to the window on the northern side. I'm working while shivering with a blanket on my knees. The staff near the passage complain that they can't put up with the creeping cold from below. Now we have allowed them to use the electric heaters. As a result, the circuit breakers sometimes blow out. Such incidents occur every day. I'm not sure which can save energy more, to raise the whole temperature higher or to partly use some electric heaters. But it's true that working in bad conditions discourages the employee's motivation.

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#### **Recent technological advances**

2008,1,21



It's 1pm in San Francisco now. It's 10 degrees celsius and the sun is shining there. On the other hand, here in Japan it's 6 am, 5 degrees and cloudy. Probably my son is working at the office safely. I can check his condition as soon as I turn on my computer every morning. On the right side of my computer's display there is a small icon which shows the weather in San Francisco and the time. My computer is also connected with his computer through Skype and MSN

messenger. When his computer is on line, I can recognize it because of his small colored icon. Usually I don't send a message and call him because I don't want to bother him. However I'm relieved when I find him on line every time. I don't feel he is living so far from Japan. Now the world is getting smaller and smaller thanks to convenient goods like computers and cellphones.

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## About eating fish

2008,1,20



### About eating fish

Both beef and fish contain the dangerous ingredients to eat like BSE and mercury. However eating fish is considered safer than eating beef. Thinking of mercury contained in fish, tuna is almost safe. Expectant mothers are worried about eating fish because of the bad effect of it on their babies in their wombs but the experts say the recommendation for pregnant women to eat various types of fish is reasonable. People who want to eat fish are also worried about PCBs which might be contained in fish. However scientists also prove the levels of it in fish aren't harmful.

### My dream after retirement

I know that I will not be able to improve my English so much and use it for my next job. Unfortunately I'm too old to do them. However I can use my skill to travel abroad by myself, guide foreigners for sightseeing and have them stay at my home. Not only using English but also I would like to enjoy a lot of things, for example going hiking, playing golf, swimming and appreciating the arts. One thing I'm worried about is my pension plan. According to the aging society with fewer children, I can't expect much of a pension. Now I don't worry about my salary but I don't have a lot of free time to use it. After retirement the condition will reverse. It's kind of ironic. It's obvious I have to save money as much as possible during the time I'm actively working.

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## The French restaurant

2008,1,19



Last night I had dinner with my staff at the French restaurant near my office. Now I have a little

bit of a hangover because we drank too much wine. My office is located in the old town and the atmosphere of the town is very folksy. The price of merchandise seems to be cheap and the cuisine was not so expensive. I prefer Japanese food to French food because Japanese food tastes much plainer and must be healthy. Western food is much richer compared to Japanese food. After eating it, I always have heartburn. But sometimes I want to eat a French full-course dinner. I eat it almost three times a year, once every four months. Now I regret having eaten and drunk too much. Being moderate is important.

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#### **BBC and VOA**

2008,1,18



I usually try to listen to the BBC or VOA website news every day. I can easily listen to the topics of them with the scripts through the Internet. The contents of both of them are really solid. I can learn not only English but also various issues all around the world for free. What's more, I can understand how people in the world are thinking about Japan. By the way the BBC is the abbreviation of the British Broadcasting Corporation and VOA is Voice of America. How about NHK? NHK is the Japanese version of the BBC. It's actually the abbreviation of the Japanese, Nippon Housou Kyokai. Housou means broadcast and Kyokai means corporation in English.

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#### **Surrogate mother**

2008,1,17



Now experts are discussing about surrogate mothers: should it be allowed or should it be banned? They say there are two kinds of surrogate mothers. One is when the surrogate mother delivers the baby whose mother is actually herself. The other is she gives birth to a baby whose mother is another woman. Almost everything has two viewpoints, pro and con. The first pro is it's a hope for a couple who don't have children. On the other hand the big con is it's profanity to Mother Nature. It is said that it's pretty common in America. In Japan, after a celebrity couple asked an American woman to deliver their twins several years ago, it became the center of attention. Anyway we couldn't imagine such kind of things a long time ago.

## ✚ How to wear a Kimono

2008,1,16



On Coming of Age Day a lot of 20 year-old girls were wearing Kimonos. They must have got up early in the morning and gone to beauty parlors to be dressed in Kimonos. Foreigners might think every Japanese can wear Kimonos by ourselves but I'm sure almost every Japanese can't do it. Actually to wear a Kimono is very difficult. Moreover to dress someone in a Kimono also requires a special skill. Obi is a very wide and long sash and not soft. We tighten an Obi and shape a beautiful ornament like birds and flowers from it by only using several strings. It's a kind of art. There are some private schools to learn how to wear and dress in Kimonos. Honestly, I can't wear and dress someone in a Kimono by myself but I want to master it someday. Last New Year's Day I dressed a Canadian girl in my old Kimono but I couldn't do it very well. That was quite a shame.

## ✚ Animal rights

2008,1,15



I have two fur coats and an ivory necklace. I bought them quite a long ago. Though I wear the necklace every summer, I didn't wear my coats recently. Actually Japan is not so cold that I don't have opportunities to wear them. I'm regretting that I bought them, not only spending a lot of money but also doing cruel things to animals. Now I firmly believe that fur coats are not necessary in Japan. If residents are living in the Frigid Zone, it's OK with them to wear fur coats. Regarding ivory, I guess now they can't sell it in any store in Japan according to the Washington Treaty: the international treaty to protect rare animals. In addition, we used to eat whale meat but now we can't do it except at the high class restaurants. It was far cheaper than beef and pork so it was a common menu of school lunch in my younger days. Environmentalists are still protesting against Japanese whale catching now even though we catch them for research. Sorry but I don't know why we can't eat whales while we can eat chicken and beef. I miss whale meat. The salty-sweet boiled whale meat with ginger was delicious.

## ✚ Coming of Age Day

2008,1,14



Today is a national holiday, the celebration of becoming 20 years old. In Japan we consider 20 years old as adults. We can get the franchise and the rights and duties of civil law at the age of 20. Every municipality holds a celebration ceremony and new adults attend them wearing gorgeous costumes. Especially young girls tend to wear long sleeved Kimonos. Actually only single girls can wear long sleeved Kimono according to our tradition. When I was young, my parents bought me a Kimono but I wore it only two times, my graduation ceremony at the university and my wedding. I don't remember exactly but I didn't attend the ceremony of 20 years old. Probably I was busy with my studies to prepare for examinations.

## ✚ Playing golf in Japan

2008,1,13



Today I played golf in Chiba but the conditions were absolutely not good. It was cloudy and very cold. The wind was howling all over the time. I felt I played golf in ski resort, even though there was no snow. What's worse, I had to leave my house at 5:45 in the morning. Can you imagine why I started so early? Because it took about 2hours from my house to the golf course by car. There are some golf courses near my house but the fees of those courses are quite expensive. The fee in Chiba is by far cheaper than in our town. If we reserve the golf course, we shouldn't cancel it except if the course is closed. In the event of rain, of course I should go there. We must obey such kinds of strict rules. It might sound ridiculous to foreigners to play golf in Japan. I've played golf twice overseas in America and Indonesia. In America golf is a very common sports and people can play golf after work in the summer. I envy them. Nevertheless, I'm satisfied with today's golf thanks to my good friends.

## ✚ Expressing levels of enthusiasm

2008,1,12



I always look forward to checking e-mails after I have posted my English on the website. I usually make an effort to write some sentences in English every day. Studying English is my favorite part of free time. I feel a sense of accomplishment if I get a good score in a TOEIC test. I'm usually pretty motivated to learn English. When I was young, I got a kick out of watching American movies. I've always been one to learn new things. I go out of my way to go to theaters to watch Kabuki now. There are times I can't be bothered with socialization. I don't have the patience for their idle talk. I don't really have any motivation when it comes to doing household chores. I dread going to a restaurant with her. Chatting gossip doesn't interest me in the slightest. Going outside on a cold day is the last thing I want to do. At school, I'd do just about anything to avoid singing in public. I'd just as soon perform a play in front of an audience.

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#### The priority in my life

2008,1,11



I prefer to spend money to study English rather than buying clothes and shoes. Speaking English is kind of an important part of my life. I really need to master English in order to be able to travel abroad by myself. Without experiences of visiting new places, I don't think life would be much fun. I don't really understand how some people can be satisfied with staying at home all the time. I couldn't imagine myself staying only in Japan. What's the point of studying English if you can't go abroad? I don't think I could spend my life on only working for a long time to earn money. Wearing expensive outfits just isn't that important in the long run. Spending money on accessories isn't nearly as meaningful as learning a lot of things. Living in a big house just doesn't matter as much when compared to having good experiences. It's much more important learning new things.

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#### Global warming

2008,1,10



This year it has not been so cold. Actually there is no dew condensation on the panes in my house early in the morning. When the temperature difference between outside and inside is a lot,

dew drops occur. So it means during the night time it is not so cold outdoors. I don't know why? It might be due to global warming and the green house effect. I read an article that said the average temperature would rise 4 point 7 degrees Celsius more than the present at the end of the 21st Century in Japan. Since the ocean will go up, the bay area in the big cities like Tokyo and Osaka will sink in the sea. Heavy rain and floods will often happen. Crops will be damaged and hay fever will spread to a lot of people. Of course ski resorts will not be able to open. Now it's time everybody should consider the environment and try to protect the earth.

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## Schools in Japan

2008,1,9



The trains began to be crowded again this morning because winter holidays finished yesterday at almost every high school in our area. In Japan elementary school and junior high school are compulsory education and usually pupils go to school on foot if they study at public schools. But high school is not compulsory education and students have to pass the entrance examination to study there. They can choose the schools where they want to enter. Strictly speaking, they are chosen by schools according to their achievements. Some high schools are public schools and the others are private schools. These days parents prefer private schools to public schools because of their high quality education. Of course there are some good public high schools but the entrance examinations are difficult to pass for such schools. Anyway a lot of high school students go to school by bus, subway and train and they are quite noisy on trains. I miss the quiet days of yesterday.

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## To the ex- teachers of NOVA

2008,1,8



You are lucky, because you didn't work for NOVA when it offered the Company Rehabilitation Law at the end of October. The Japanese government banned NOVA from selling tickets in June and they soon lost students and money. The mass media were writing bad rumors about NOVA in magazines and newspapers. There was no money in the company and Japanese staff couldn't

get their salary in September and October. Finally they couldn't pay the salaries of their foreign teachers in October. They also couldn't pay the rent on their school buildings and teachers' apartments for several months. Finally teachers boycotted their jobs. Three executives, except the President, decided to apply the law and the lawyers became the receivers. Soon they found a company which wanted to purchase NOVA and until now the new company has opened about 120 schools.

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### The New Year's Parade of Firemen

2008,1,7



Yesterday the New Year Fire Fighters Parades took place in lots of regions all over Japan. In Tokyo the members of Edo (previously Tokyo) fire fighters' performance conservationists group performed high technical acrobatics in front of the audience. The crowds were really excited to watch their show. I watched the live broadcast on TV. The members ascended very tall ladders and stood on their hands on the top of them. In the Edo period there were no fire engines. The fire fighters wearing short Kimonos struck bells on the tall towers to notify residents about a fire and climbed up ladders to pour water into burning buildings to extinguish fire. They improved on their skills and mastered difficult actions. It must have been dangerous but they were proud of their skills. Now, since we have very high quality fire engines, there is no way that fire fighters try to do the same to fight a fire. However some people still love their old performances, inherit the skills and continue training to perform them on New Year days.

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### A small talk with my friend in the U.S.

2008,1,6



Last night I talked with my American friend living in a small town close to Chicago through Skype. He was going to prepare Omerice for breakfast at that time. Omurice is rice which is covered with thin fried egg. I think it's a modern Japanese food. I mean it is not a traditional Japanese food but Japanese created it about 80 years ago. It's a kind of fusion of western omelet and boiled rice. He told me that they could buy rice at supermarkets in America but it was not so delicious compared to Japanese boiled white rice and asked me how we could cook it well. He said, "The

boiled rice here is gummy.” I think the strains are a little bit different between American rice and Japanese rice. I explained to him that to wash the grains carefully in a pan was very important. “Please wash them with your fingers in a pan by using running water several times until the water became clear. Stir the grains in the pan.” After that we were talking about movies. He asked me again how we Japanese understood American movies. We usually watch American movies with subtitles written in Japanese. Some movies, especially animation cartoons for kids like Disney movies, are dubbed into Japanese. Then I explained to him about some events performed during the New Year Days. Since these days are a special period in Japan, we have lots of ceremonies, for example the parade of firemen, tea ceremony and special New Year calligraphy. Anyway, speaking about these Japanese traditional events to foreign people requires a good ability in English but it’s fun.

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#### **Who killed Bhutto in Pakistan?**

2008,1,5



I knew little about Pakistan little but the biggest international news at the end of the last year in Japan was the assassination of Bhutto. At first the government announced that somebody killed her by gunfire but soon they changed the cause of her death. They said she passed away because she hit her head against the ceiling of the car. That sounded strange. They might have wanted to say that nobody killed her. She died by accident. The country is a developing country even now but she was a daughter of a hero in that country and graduated from two of the most famous universities in the world. She mastered her aggressive way of making speeches when she was a student there. There must have been both many of her supporters and a lot of opponents around her. Anyway what matters is to unveil who ordered the assassin to shoot her to death.

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#### **Dear Jyunko,**

2008,1,4



Thank you for your good information. I also miss the good days in NZ with you. Is your fianc the boyfriend whom you told me of in NZ? Congratulations! Would you mind sending me some pictures of your wedding ceremony in April? About English, I’m still taking lessons from Roger through

Skype and he told me that you had bought a car and visited South America. That sounded great. I lost quite a lot of money when NOVA went bankrupt last October but I've already started to take lessons from the new NOVA, even though I had to pay extra money to the new company. Have a good time and keep in touch.

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## My New Year Holiday

2008,1,3



We finished our job in 2007 on the 28th of December. I took a rest on the 29th but I had been very busy to prepare for the New Year days for 2 days since 30th. I mean I cleaned my house completely, prepared some special food for the New Year called Osechi, decorated round rice cakes in every room of my house and wrote my family member's names on the small paper bags for our chopsticks. To tell you the truth I didn't cook so much food. I only packed several kinds of delicatessen in the Japanese traditional style tiered food boxes. Now many Japanese don't cook Osechi at home but we buy them at the supermarket. Moreover it's getting more and more popular to order Osechi from famous restaurants. My first son's family came to my house by car at 3 o'clock on the last day of 2007. My two grandsons, who are 3 years old and one and a half years old, were very excited and began to scatter the toys around the living room as soon as they entered the room. I prepared Sukiyaki for dinner but we had to take turns to eat it to take care of two naughty kids. Finally the noisy kids fell asleep at 8:30 and we adults drank beer while chatting small talk. Just before midnight my son, his wife and I went to the temple which is across the street near my house to strike the big bell. In Japan it's the custom to welcome the New Year while striking bells 108 times in temples. It is said that everybody has 108 worldly desires and we should remove them by striking bells when the New Year is coming. At first the priest struck the bell three times and then each of the ordinary people did it three times. The next morning, New Year's morning, we celebrated the happy New Year while eating Ozouni and Osechi. I gave two kids some money in the small paper bags called Otoshidama. My son and his wife drove to the big electric store to buy some special bargains for the New Year while the grandparents were playing with the kids. We could see the very beautiful Mt. Fuji with snow from the park near my house. Kids were running around the park cheerfully and I was exhausted to chase them. They went back to their home in the evening and my quiet life started again.

## ✚ My New Year resolutions of 2008

2008,1,2



I have a lot of things I want to do in this New Year, 2008. At first I want to improve my English skills. I finally decided to take the TOEIC test and the Eiken test and since I will be taking these tests, I really want to get good results. Then, I think I need more exercise. I have to try to walk to the next subway station from the nearest station to my office every day. It seems to be an easy way to build up my health cheaply and constantly. If I have a chance I would like to climb up some mountains near my house. I haven't played golf since last spring. I had better continue to play golf every two months. About traveling abroad, of course I'm going to visit my son in SF or travel to another place during the summer holidays. For the last three years I had opportunities to visit foreign countries twice a year, once with my family and once by myself. The last year I stayed in Fiji by myself for 10 days and traveled in Singapore with my whole family for 4 days. Both of them were very wonderful. Now I don't know if I will be able to go abroad and what countries I will visit. It will depend on my family's condition and my job. Anyway I hope we will be able to spend a good new year and that I will also enjoy this year like my past several years.

## ✚ Japan's New Year's Day

2008,1,1



I'm glad to explain to you about Japan's New Year's Day. We celebrate New Year's Day because we can welcome the New Year happily and in good health. I think it is originally related to the special Japanese old god, Shinto. Many Japanese visit shrines to pray to the god. However nowadays the religious reasons are lost and people visit shrines only to enjoy the New Year's atmosphere. In the morning of the new year I eat Ozouni, a hot soup with rice cakes and several vegetables, with our family members. Then I read New Year's greeting cards from my friends, relatives and acquaintances. Anyway the New Year's holiday is the most relaxing time in Japan.

## The importance of a transfer

2008,2,29



When we move to a new section, we have to master a new job. It requires a long time and quite a lot of energy. Is it effective for our job and individuals to improve our carriers? If it's not why should we transfer so often? It's important to avoid corruption and collusion with an outside party. It also refreshes workers' minds. We can't choose our staff, bosses and co-workers by ourselves. It's really difficult to fire civil servants without obvious reason even if their personalities and behavior are not good. We can't get along with some co-workers. On the other hand some staff becomes too friendly with each other. They are always chatting about co-workers' rumors and accompany each other everywhere. It's like working in tepid water. I believe we need a change of scene even if some problems occur and become busy just after it.

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#### The spring

2008,2,28



It was quite warm this afternoon. A strong wind, which is called Haru Ichiban, meaning the first spring wind in English, blew last Saturday in the Tokyo area. Haru Ichiban is the first wind from a southern direction between the beginning of February and the end of March and it is said to be a sign of the spring. Regarding the spring, it's a season of change in Japan because the school year and the financial year of a lot of companies begin from the first of April. Actually today they announced the schedule of the transfers this year at my office. In my office every staff member, except on special occasions, has to transfer every three or four years and the managerial staff has to move every two years. I will have worked in my present department for 2 years at the end of March. Honestly I'm looking forward to the transfer because I need a challenge in my job. I don't like the cozy atmosphere in my office.

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#### Styles of marriage

2008,2,27



I met my present husband at the office; He and I got a job with the same office on the same day. In Japan arranged marriages were prevalent before World War Two and it was also still common when I got married about 30 years ago. Sometimes parents' decisions were more important than the actual people. I mean parents asked their acquaintances to look for suitable young men or

women for their daughters or sons. Now arranged marriages have become a dead language. People meet their future husbands or wives at schools, offices and parties. In the old days seniors like aunts and parents' friends introduced good partners to young people, but nowadays young friends usually introduce their friends to each other. I heard during World War Two that many young women got married with men whom they only knew from pictures. Now according to the Japanese civil law, girls can get married at the age of 16 by their own decision but boys can't get married until they become 18 years old.

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### **The suspicious bullet**

2008,2,26



All Japanese who were over 35 years old were very surprised to hear the news that said the LA police had arrested an elderly Japanese whose name was Kazuyosi Miura. He was quite famous in Japan in the eighties. The mass media broadcast the news about him day after day and not only the tabloids, but also ordinary newspapers, reported on him every day. He was the prime suspect in the murder case of his ex-wife which happened in LA. Somebody shot her in the head on a lonely parking area in LA and she passed away one year after the incident due to the injury. He received a lot of money from an insurance company. The Japanese police arrested him on suspicion of two incidents: one of them was this murder case and another was knocking her head in a hotel room that happened before the murder. He had been in a prison for six years for striking a person but the court found him innocent in the murder case. Those days he was a kind of celebrity, he claimed damages against a lot of media outlets and got married to a model who is still his second wife. Almost all of us had already forgotten about him but the other day he was arrested at the airport in Saipan by an arrest warrant published 20 years ago.

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### **A package tour**

2008,2,25



My friend is coming to Tokyo soon. He will stay in a famous hotel for one night and then look for some cheap hotel for several nights. Why is he going to reserve such a luxurious hotel for only one night? Actually he bought a package tour set including a one night stay at the hotel and

round-trip airline tickets. These days such kinds of packages are very popular. They are cheaper than ordinary plane tickets.

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### The shrine of direction

2008,2,24



This morning I went to the Hochigai Shrine : the shrine of direction which is near my mom's house. My first son's family will move to Nagoya in April because of his transfer. In Japan ancient people were concerned about directions when they went anywhere. When a medium told them the direction was unlucky, they stayed at a lucky place for a little while and then moved to the original destination. For them to believe in a lucky direction was very important to avoid a misfortune. Therefore there are still many shrines of direction in Japan and the Hochigai Shrine is one of the most famous and popular shrines for people who are going to move to new houses. My mom always visits the shrine to pray for her family's good days in new houses when we moved to new places. However she didn't go to the shrine before my second son moved to the U.S. In her opinion the Japanese god has only power in Japan and she didn't need to go there. I'm not sure if it's true or not but he has been living in America happily.

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### My hometown

2008,2,23



Now I'm staying in my mom's house in Sakai in Osaka. Sakai is my hometown which is in the south of the City of Osaka: a quite big city in Japan. It became an ordinance-designated city, one of the largest population cities, last spring. I was born and had been living there until my family moved to a new house in Tondabayashi which is in the more southern part of Osaka at the age of 16. After my dad passed away, my mom sold our good old house and moved to the present condo in Sakai. Actually she bought the used apartment in the same condo where my sister had been living. My mom's house is on the 14th floor and her daughter's house is on the 20th floor. It's a very good location. We say a good distance between which a soup has not got cold. I'm looking at a night view from the window on the high floor. A lot of lights are twinkling. My heart is filling with my old recollections.

## ✚ How to protect me from a cold

2008,2,22



Now it's the season for colds. I realized having a cold is a waste of a valuable time because I can do nothing except lie on a bed. I can't think deeply and spend my leisure time actively. Now I'm trying to do four methods to protect myself from a cold. They are washing my hands, gargling, nose gargling and wearing a mask. As soon as I come home from outside, I'm doing them. What's nose gargling? It's been getting common recently in Japan. We can find several small gadgets and also bottles of liquid medicine at pharmacies. The gadget looks like a cylinder made of plastic and we pour the medicine into it. Then we put the top of the gadget in a nostril to pour in the liquid. The liquid flows from one nostril to the other. We can clean our noses in this way. The bottle of medicine is quite expensive: it costs over 500 yen and we use all of it in three or four days. I checked websites where many people explain how to clean noses. They said we could use lukewarm water with a little salt instead of a medicine. Now I'm doing it this way. At first it was difficult for me to clean my nose and it felt strange but now I can do it well. The fourth method sounds strange, too. It's as follows. While I'm sleeping, I cover my mouth with a wet mask. The air is very dry in the winter and the cold dry air hurts my throat when I'm unconscious. While I use a mask, I breathe from my nose and I can protect my throat. Some doctors write these comments on the websites. I think it's worth believing them. I want to prove this method is effective.

## ✚ A tour coupon

2008,2,21



I had a tour coupon for 25,000 yen and its deadline is the end of April. It's a gift from my office welfare work and I can get it every year. Actually I always forget to use it by the end of March and sometimes wasted it. Tomorrow I'm going to my mom's house in Osaka. I recalled that I can use it to buy a train ticket there. Tonight I dropped at a travel agency to buy a round-trip ticket from Yokohama to Osaka. Last weekend I was staying in Nagoya and this weekend I'm going to Osaka. I'm a kind of busy woman who visits the three busiest cities in a week. While I was waiting at the office, I read several travel brochures about Europe. Suddenly I began to want to travel there.



## Homemade bread

2008,2,20



It was a trend in Japan to make bread at home about 20 years ago. My sister got into it and baked several kinds of bread like sweet roll and loaf bread at home. She served me slices of her homemade bread proudly and they were very delicious because she used high class ingredients. In Japan a lot of families use a Kotatsu as a heater in the winter. It's a kind of table with an electric heater under the board and we cover it with a futon to keep warm inside. We sit down around a Kotatsu and eat mandarin oranges there in the winter while watching TV. It's a very common style in Japan. When I opened a futon in her living room to sit down at a Kotatsu, I was very surprised to find dough inside a Kotatsu. She had to warm dough to ferment it with yeast so she put it in the Kotatsu. Of course she took care to keep it clean. Probably she wrapped it in plastic but it was kind of funny. She took after our mother in personality and is very tidy. I couldn't imagine that she put food in such a place where we spread our legs.



## A school reunion

2008,2,19



This year is a leap year. Does a person who was born on the 29th of February get old once every four years? That sounds great, doesn't it? We also have the Olympic Games in a leap year. It's a kind of intimate affair but our high school reunion is held in the summer every leap year. Yesterday I received a post card which told me about the next reunion schedule and one of my old friends also sent me an e-mail about it. I graduated from high school in Osaka and my memory of my high school days is not so good. I mean I was a teenager and sensitive. I was always worried about my grade because the lessons, including English, were very difficult. Many years have passed since our younger days. I miss those days now and I'm happy because I still have some friends who are looking forward to seeing me again.

### A good house

2008,2,18



We should consider a lot of things when we purchase a house because there is no fixed price. Is it a suitable price compared to other similar houses? Is it located in a convenient place? Is it close to a school, kindergarten and shopping center? Is it close to the office where you have to go every day? Is it built in a quiet area? What kind of neighbors do you have? Who lives next to you? Is it the best thing to your family? However the most important thing is whether you can afford it or not. After you decide to purchase the property, you have to negotiate well to beat down the price. Don't hurry to make a contract with a real estate agent. Anyway conduct yourself with care and I hope you can do well in your trade.

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### A big decision

2008,2,17



I've just come home from Nagoya. My son decided to purchase a condo in Nagoya because he will transfer there in the spring. We visited three buildings yesterday and six buildings today. All of them have some good points and also some bad points. One of them is located near his office but it's expensive and the environment is not so good. Another one is cheap but it requires a full renovation and it needs a long time. It's an important decision and needs a lot of knowledge and wisdom to buy real estate. We have to consider a lot of things. Anyway I'm only a looker-on. It depends on my son and his wife. It's them who decide everything. I'm tired now because of a busy two days but they look very energetic and happy. I hope everything will go well.

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### Don't be too eager for success!

2008,2,15



My new year resolution was actually to take a TOEIC test and pass the Eiken test in 2008. I started studying hard in January but now I have completely lost confidence. I had a cold in the beginning of February and couldn't accomplish my plan about preparing for the test. It requires a rich vocabulary and for me memorizing difficult words is the most difficult task. Now my memory is worse than in my younger days. Keeping motivation seems to be tough when I study only for my

pleasure. Actually taking English conversation lessons from native English speaking teachers is my pleasure but reading difficult English sentences and solving complicated questions are not so interesting. Is it better for me to change my aim to enjoy my study? I know when I want to use my English skill as a volunteer interpreter and translator, I need those qualifications. Don't be in haste. Enjoy your studies and improve your English skills.

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## **Journalists**

2008,2,14



If I was a reporter, at first I would like to report on sports because it seems to be very interesting to visit athletic meetings and interview a lot of athletes. What's more it's not dangerous at all. On the other hand covering the events happening in the Middle East seems to be very hard. Some reporters were kidnapped and killed there. In spite of the danger I think someone should visit such areas to report the fact to the people in the world. It's the mission of journalists. It must be challenging work but I'm not so brave to take a risk. As other interesting areas, I would like to report on travels and environmental issues. As for Hollywood and gossip, I think it's a waste of time to spend a lot of time to be concerned with such events.

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## **A scent of spring**

2008,2,13



I found narcissuses blooming in our yard. White cute flowers with straight, long and green leaves were shivering in the cold air. I always feel that the spring is coming close here when I see these flowers even it's still very cold. Obviously the light of the sun is getting stronger and stronger even though it's still faint. When I left my office at 5:30 in January, it was absolutely dark but now it has become a dim light. There is no midnight from which morning doesn't follow and there is no winter from which spring doesn't succeed.

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In the language of advertising they usually use comparisons to give concrete images of merchandise to consumers. One of them is called a simile and it makes a direct comparison using “like” or “as”. For instance, “This coat is as soft as a feather.” “You feel like living in a white castle.” The other is a metaphor and it makes a direct comparison without using “like” or “as”. For example, “It’s a luxurious dining room at home.” “You can drive a living room on the high way.” For Japanese to understand what they want to explain is very difficult and the mood of advertising between western countries and Japan seems to be different. The sensibilities of consumers differ widely from each other.



Yesterday I went to The National Art Center in Roppongi to appreciate the Japanese Media Arts Festival. My second son’s works, titled “Ordinary View in the City of Angels”, were selected as Jury Recommended Works out of the finalists and exhibited there. His works have received the awards from this Festival every year since 4 years ago and I always enjoy exhibitions in this season every year. However this year they hold the festival in the new wonderful museum, “The National Art Center”, for the first time. It was built in 2006 by the world-famous architect, Kisho Kurokawa, who passed away last year. It looks like huge waves of glass walls in appearance and is very showy. The crowds of people were enjoying with not only the exhibitions but also the striking buildings. Roppongi is one of the most fashionable towns in Japan and this museum has added a new attraction to this vivid town. Now it seems to have become a good dating spot. Anyway I was glad that I saw many people interested in my son’s works even though I couldn’t honestly understand my son’s art.



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#### ✚ A food allergy

2008,2,10



My second grandson is liable to have rough skin. We were worried about his condition and my daughter-in-law took him to a doctor's office who specializes in allergies. The doctor tested for several antibodies and diagnosed him as allergic to eggs, milk, meat, wheat and so on. He is an energetic infant, always drinking milk when he is thirsty. From now on what can we give him for a meal and a drink?

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#### ✚ Taroko in Taiwan

2008,2,9



Today's topic is about the pictures of Bolivia which you sent me just before. What amazing pictures they are! The ancient Inca might have built this road, right? I don't know how long it took to complete it. They might have spent over 200 or 300 years, right? I think such roads are located not only in Bolivia but also in some other places in the world. Actually I saw a similar road in Taiwan. The scale of the road is less than Bolivia but there is a canyon made of marble. The name of the canyon is Taroko and there is a tiny lane along the valley. It's one of the most popular sightseeing areas in Taiwan and I walked the passage with a guide when I traveled in Taiwan with my husband about 15 years ago. Surprisingly he told us that the great lane had been built by Japanese soldiers during World War Two. Japan dominated many Asian countries, including

Taiwan and Korea, until the war ended and forced the native people to speak Japanese. The old guide was grateful for Japanese control during the war and told us again, " Thanks to Japanese education I can now speak Japanese and work as a guide." The attitudes towards Japanese domination between Taiwan and Korea were completely opposite. When I visited South Korea two years before that time, the Korean guide criticized Japanese control and I found a lot of monuments which were full of anger. They said that they couldn't forget the terrible 36 years while Japan dominated Korea before the end of World War Two.



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## Super Tuesday

2008,2,8



Super Tuesday is over. The campaign and the process that decides the Democratic Party's candidate to be the next President of the U.S. is really interesting for even me, a Japanese. The runners are a woman and an African American. In Japan we can't expect such people to become Prime Minister. Women Ministers are still few and probably there is no possibility for a Japanese whose father is not a real Japanese to get such an honorable position. I think America is still full of possibilities and dreams and it's the reason why the country is the strongest in the world. Regarding the nationality of a newborn baby, now the baby whose father or mother is Japanese

can get Japanese citizenship, but until 1984 only the baby whose father was Japanese could get Japanese nationality according to the old law. It was so out of date that we changed the law concerning nationality not to be behind the world. However I'm sure the society of Japanese politics is far behind the U.S.

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✚ **writing skill and reading skill**

2008,2,7



In retrospect I sent a lot of e-mails to Chris. Actually I had been writing short sentences in English almost every day for three years and sent them to Chris at least once a week. As Chris corrected my mistakes in my e-mails, I could improve my skill of writing English. I think he was very patient to read and correct them. Now that Chris has become busy with his own business, I thought it was time for me to improve my reading skills. During January I tried to read the BBC news and CNN student news while listening to those announcements.

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✚ **Symptoms of a cold 2**

2008,2,6



I went to my office in the cold weather this morning even though I felt a little bit dizzy. Last Monday, the day before yesterday, about one third of the employees took the day off due to a cold. Anyway I finished my job safely and came home. I didn't have a good appetite and only wanted to drink hot milk. I thought I had a fever again and checked it. I still had a slight fever. I had better go to bed as soon as possible.

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✚ **Symptoms of a cold**

2008,2,5



When I have a cold, I usually feel something strange with my throat and nose at first. Then I ache around my eyes, begin to cough and my nose begins to be stuffed up. I especially suffer from a

bad coughing. Sometimes my coughing fit is so hard I feel I could die. However I don't have a high fever and I have an appetite. I can go to my office wearing a small white mask which a lot of Japanese wear to protect themselves from viruses during the winter time. Surprisingly, in this case my symptom was very different from these symptoms. While I was sleeping last Saturdays, I woke up several times because of feeling cold. In the morning I began to suddenly feel a headache suddenly but I didn't know the reason. I was lying on the bed, checked my temperature and noticed I had a fever. After that I had a splitting headache and could hardly walk to the toilet. After having a headache for three days, I finally got rid of my fever and now I feel pretty fine. Anyway I'm glad I didn't have a bad case of the flu.

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#### a terrible cold

2008,2,4



I have been in bed with a cold and today I took a day off because I still have a fever. I had a fever for the first time after 15 years. I sometimes have a cold but I don't usually have a fever. I had a terrible headache due to the fever. I was anxious about some e-mails so I turned on my computer. Anyway I've already checked several e-mails. It's better for me to go to bed again.

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#### Final income tax return

2008,2,1



We have a final tax return season now in Japan. People, except employees whose income taxes were subtracted from their salaries, have to declare and pay the income taxes from last year. Besides, anyone who declares their income tax via the Internet can get a refund of 5000 yen even if there is no rebate.

#### Some practices

2008,3,31



The following are a little bit complicated usage of English words. Native English speakers might not be able to understand why they are so difficult but for Japanese it is truly difficult to use

these words perfectly. Unless you study hard, you can't pass the entrance examination. Without memorizing a lot of words, you will not be able to speak English fluently. I hope he will get a good job. I wish she could cook delicious food.

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### **Difficult grammar**

2008,3,30



There are three kinds of transitive verbs. One of them is a transitive verb from which only an infinitive follows. For example, I expect him to take care of kids. He allowed her to come home at 10pm. The recruit failed to make the important contract. She offered to drive her uncle to the station. I promise to visit you early in the morning. She will prepare to bake a cake. The others are transitive verbs which take a gerund after them and which take both an infinitive and a gerund. For instance, I will appreciate receiving the answer soon. Would you mind lending me your book? We enjoyed chatting a lot with each other. You should avoid smoking here. Would you consider going there with me? I miss travelling in Europe. "Forget " and "remember" can be followed by both infinitive and gerund. However the meanings are different in each usage. I forgot to take my umbrella. I forgot calling her three days ago. Please remember to drop in at a grocery. You don't remember arguing with me. The word "to" is used as a preposition and an infinitive. The former examples are as follows: I'm used to suffering from stiff shoulders. He confessed to stealing the money from a billionaire. We also have to memorize many idioms such as "Inheriting a lot of estate". How to use the correct tense is also incomprehensible. As of next May, we will have been married for fifty years. As of last August, I had been working for this company for fifteen years. As of the day before yesterday, I had finished my job. To get a high score in a TOEIC test we have to memorize special business phrases. In Japan a seniority-based salary system has been very common but recently many companies began to adopt performance-based salary systems like America.



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#### ✚ a computer problem

2008,3,29



Approximately five days ago I tried to use a DVD drive of my computer but it didn't work at all. This morning I called a customer service center and an adviser told me to do several things to check my computer by telephone. I did what he said and moved the mouse to check my computer. He finally decided that my computer was broken and they needed to fix my computer at a factory. It takes about one week or 10 days. No way! I bought my new computer just last December and I've never done anything wrong with my computer. It cost over two hundred thousand yen. It was not cheap. Why did you produce such a fragile computer? NEC is one of the leading companies, isn't it? Will you lend me an alternative one? Car dealers always lend us alternative cars when they fix cars. I have to use my computer to study English every day. I know I can't get what I want even though I complained to the adviser. Tomorrow evening a deliverer will visit my house, pack my computer and take it to a factory. Of course I need to pay nothing because it is still under warranty but it will be really inconvenient for me to spend several days without the computer.



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### ✚ My speech at a farewell party

2008,3,28



Thank you so much for holding such a wonderful farewell party at this gorgeous restaurant. I didn't imagine that I would be leaving our office when we chose this restaurant for this party a few weeks ago. I was sure I was a person who had to see some staff off to new departments until just yesterday. However I have to move to the new office because of a kind of surprising personal transfer. I have been working for this office for two years and have never experienced terrible matters thanks to you. I really appreciate it. Anyway there are lots of delicious dishes on the table. Let's start to eat and after that I would like to talk to you about my old memories with the new manager. Cheers!

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### ✚ The spring

2008,3,27



The spring has come. Our office is facing the river and there are cheery trees all along the banks. It's one of the sights where we can enjoy seeing cherry blossoms in Yokohama. Yesterday the cherry blossoms began to bloom and today they are at their best. I think the time of the cherry bloom is gradually becoming earlier and earlier due to global warming. When I was little, the cherries didn't bloom until April. These years they usually bloom at the end of March. By the way today personal transfers were announced. I'm going to move to the new office in a rural area

from the beginning of April. I did not expect it but I will be promoted to a little bit of a higher position. I have to get a grip on myself and do my best to meet their expectations.



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✚ **To my American frind**

2008,3,26



Thanks for sending your story. However I can't open your attached file that you were worried about. I used an application named "Word" from Microsoft. would you mind sending it again?

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✚ **How to make interrogatives**

2008,3,25



We asked some questions to each other and continued the discussion. My questions were a little bit ironic like as follows: Why do you think he got divorced three times? How do you think his last wife felt when she knew about his will in which he hoped to give a lot of money to many people? Was she disappointed or proud of him? What's your opinion about his father, especially about his attitude towards his job as a policeman? Do you think he was loyal to his duty even though he arrested nobody in his entire occupational life? Don't you think she was smart because she could read a newspaper when she was 6 years old? Who do you think most hated her? Why did her daughter establish the hospital, to earn a lot of money or to help poor people? Who do you think helped more people in the long term?



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## ✚ the two articles

2008,3,24



We had a lesson about discussion skills and articles. After reading two articles we made some questions concerning them. The articles described two quite contrasting late millionaires in the U.S. One of them was the most generous man in the world. He was born as a Russian immigrant policeman's son and succeeded as a businessman. He gave a lot of money to people who suffered from personal disaster. He divorced three times in his entire life. The other was the richest and meanest woman in the world. She was a daughter of a rich businessman and began to read a daily financial newspaper at the age of six. She inherited a lot of money from her father and also earned a lot of money from investments. She got married to a rich man and had a daughter and son but she didn't use her money like ordinary people. She was a penny pincher and tried to save her money. Her son's leg was amputated because she didn't take him to the hospital when he injured his knee. After her death her daughter built a hospital with her money. There were two

pictures of each of them in the articles. He looked so kind wearing an expensive tuxedo with a beautiful model whom he helped. On the other hand she looked arrogant wearing a long black dress like a witch.



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## ✚ The last day

2008,3,23



The first lesson was about Discussion Skills by a teacher from New Zealand. In this class I heard the word “The Commonwealth”. It’s an organization of fifty three nations which were previously colonies of the U.K. like Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the U.K. All of the teachers and staff were from several countries belonging to The Commonwealth. Actually I never met a person from America. Surprisingly a young waiter with whom I talked yesterday was from the Bermuda Islands. The Kiwi female teacher told us proudly, “Here all of us speak British English, not American English.” The last lesson was a conversational Lunch in the Ascot Tea Room with another New Zealand male teacher. At this point I became fed up with Tsutomu’s English. Critically speaking, he was a typical old style Japanese English learner. He knew difficult words and seemed to be good at grammar. However his spoken English was terrible. It was not a conversation but a kind of monologue, speaking very very slowly while thinking how to use difficult words and how to speak grammatically correct English. Once he began to speak, he dragged out his boring story with harsh pronunciation. Yesterday I admired his effort but after hearing his same story twice or three times, his long talk tired me. After lunch I took a walk alone and spent two free hours reading magazines until a bus took visitors to Shin Sirakawa Station. There was no means to go

down the mountain to the base town except the shuttle bus which they drive only twice a day.



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## ✚ The second day in British Hills

2008,3,22



This morning I took a 90 minute man to man lesson twice and in the afternoon I also took two lessons with one Japanese middle aged man student. The quality of all the lessons was very very good. Teachers are from England, Scotland and South Africa. They are not so young as the teachers at NOVA and are full of motivation. I think they have had a lot of experiences in their lives and it might be the reason why their lessons were so interesting. The last teacher used to be a diplomat and looks so good at mastering languages. His lesson about presentation skills was educational and he also gave us special tips about how to improve the pronunciation of English during the extra time. Now I'm really satisfied with today's studies. One item was the movie titled "Pride and Prejudice" and I could learn about the background of the movie. I realized the more deeply I understand the history and society of England, I can enjoy the movie more. I should rent the movie as soon as possible after I go home. I ate a gorgeous dinner with a Japanese student whose name was Tsutomu. While we were eating, he was talking about how he had been struggling with English for 15 years. He had been subscribing to Dairy Yomiuri for over 15 years. His story was also very motivational.

After dinner I visited the Snooker Room and tried to play it for a little while and drink a beer at the Falstaff Pub.



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## ✚ The first day in British Hills

2008,3,21



Now I'm staying in the U.K. in the Middle Ages. It sounds a kind of Joke but it's true. There is a small village named "British Hills" in the lonely mountain in Fukushima, a little bit of a rural area in Japan. I arrived here about 11 o'clock and finished my check-in. The reception clerk was a young Australian girl. There is a huge Manor House and several old style houses which they use as accommodations. There are offices, a library, a chapel, a dinning room, a gymnasium, a swimming pool, some classrooms and so on. The atmosphere is really magnificent. However there is nothing to go around the village. I ate lunch by myself in the Ascot Tea Room and strolled outside in the village, then I walked around the Manor House. Even though it's a huge house, it takes only one hour to visit all the rooms. I had a lot of free time and spent a kind of boring 4 hours. I was supposed to take a walk along a Nature Trade to see beautiful Lake Hatoru but there was still heavy snow so I couldn't go there. At 3 o'clock a British teacher came to me and guided me about the Manor House. He gave me a lot of information about the Manor House and British history but it took only one hour. Now it's about 6 o'clock. From six thirty I'm going to eat dinner with another teacher in the big dinning room named a Refectory. It looks like the dinning room which became famous in the movies of Harry Potter. Now it's time to go to the Manner House to eat dinner while wearing a black cloak that also became popular in Harry Potter. After dinner, I swam in the pool. I swam 10 laps with a Scottish teacher.



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## ✚ The earliest memory of mine

2008,3,20



I entered kindergarten when I was five years old and spent one year there until I became an elementary school kid. I have quite a clear memory of those days. I was a crybaby at first but I gradually got accustomed to my new life. Just before graduation I performed a Japanese style dance wearing a Kimono with three kids and addressed the audience at the school play. However I hardly remember my infant days before I entered kindergarten. I was the youngest of three sisters and my one-year younger girl cousin was living in the house next to my house. As my mom was a teacher at an elementary school, my paternal grandma usually took care of me. She was careful that I didn't get injured and made me keep away from naughty neighborhood kids. I might have been playing house with my cousin and dolls inside the house or in our garden. Anyway I was a lion at home and a mouse abroad before I began to play with many kids at the kindergarten. I vaguely remember my grandma's old Japanese traditional style everyday live. Actually she was born in the nineteenth Century and always wore a blackish kimono. She washed clothes by hand and boiled rice by using an old Japanese style oven, even though our family bought an electric washer and a gas ring. My aunt-in-law sometimes might have looked after her daughter and me at her home. I still distinctly remember some melodies of old Japanese children's songs because they had a manual gramophone and we, as little kids, were looking forward to listening to the music from it. One image which I remember really clearly is where I was playing house in a cemetery. There were many rectangular shaped gravestones and I was placing toy plates on the grave. Probably my grandma took me to her sister's house which is located in a precinct of a temple. She was renting a detached room from a temple because she lost her own house during

the war. Maybe I was playing alone while the sisters were chatting with each other in a porch. I don't know which is the oldest memory of mine but I'm sure these are the earliest memories that I have.

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#### ✚ How to cook sunny-side up eggs

2008,3,19



At first you need to prepare two eggs, using a little oil and salt as ingredients. You have to heat a frying pan on a stove for a little while. This allows the oil to spread smoothly. After the pan becomes quite hot, drop a little oil into the pan and spread it evenly. If you don't use oil, the eggs might stick to the pan. Then, break two eggs into the pan and pour a spoonful of water around the eggs to steam them. Put a lid on the pan immediately. Once you've done that, don't take the lid off for 3 minutes. You need to do that, or they will be hard. Lastly, serve the eggs on a plate and sprinkle a pinch of salt. It's OK to add ketchup and other sauces to season them. It depends on your taste.

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#### ✚ How to buy a train ticket at a station

2008,3,18



Almost every station in Japan has a ticket vending machine to reduce the cost of personnel. I'm going to describe how to buy a train ticket from a machine. First of all you need to check the fee by looking at a large route map above the machine. There is the station name where you are standing now in the center of the map and you have to find the name of the station where you want to go. The figure on the name is the fee that you have to pay. Then you should drop a coin or insert a bill into a small hole. Several buttons begin to light up and you should push the button which shows the correct figure. Soon the ticket comes out of the bottom of the machine. Don't forget to receive your change that also rolls down from the mouth of the machine.

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## to my teacher

2008,3,17



As it's a season of retirement and transfers now so I have to attend some farewell parties. I'm sorry but I will not be able to take your lesson next Wednesday because the farewell party of my office will take place. I should have told you earlier but I had forgotten altogether. This morning I checked my schedule for this week and recalled. I will also be busy Wednesday next week (26th). Sorry but please let me take the next lesson on the third of April. See you in April again.

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## The Japanese tax system

2008,3,16



A Canadian teacher who runs his own school and has a Japanese wife and two Eurasian kids asked me about the Japanese tax system, especially about the income tax rates. According to the law, it depends on their incomes. There are several rates from five percent to forty percent and if the income is more, the higher rate is applied. We call this system a progressive taxation. One thing you shouldn't misunderstand is that the basic income is not the money you received in a year. You must have had to pay expenses such as the rent and teaching materials. I hear your wife is also working as your assistant. You can deduct such expenses and her salary from your earnings. Besides that you can subtract three hundred and eighty thousand yen per child and also your basic deduction is the same sum. There are several extra exemptions, too. The tax system is so complicated that I can't explain it very well in my English.

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## British movies

2008,3,15



I received my English lesson schedule from British Hills where I'm going to spend three day. It says the second lesson is about British movies but I don't know which movies are Hollywood movies and which movies are British movies. For many Japanese, including me, every movie where actors and actresses speak English is a western (foreign) movie. There is no big difference between Hollywood movies and British movies. I have to check on British movies not to waste the

lesson. I know James Bond and Sean Connery who played the famous spy were Englishmen. Some popular 007 movie series might be British movies. I'm sure some classic movies in the sixties and seventies, such as "Ryan's Daughter", "Lawrence of Arabia" and "Chariot of fire" are also British movies. Agatha Christie was a famous mystery author and the stories of her movies like "Murder on the Oriental Express" must have been produced in the U.K. During this decade, I watched "A room with a view" and "Shakespeare in Love", which I think are British films. I watched very popular "Harry Potter Series," but I heard they were made in the U.S.A. Regarding the hit movie "Bridget Jones Diary", I had better watch it. From the mood of the movie, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" might have been filmed in England. I guess these are British movies which I've never watched. Sad to say, I'm not familiar with the U.K. I don't exactly understand the difference between England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. However I can easily imagine the difference between American and British movies. British movies are kind of meaningful and solemn from their long history. They say if we want to master British English, we should watch the movies in which the actor Hugh Grant stars. As he majored in English literature at Oxford University, we can listen to his perfect Queen's English.

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### Miscellaneous thoughts

2008,3,14



My English teacher said that he was itchy in his throat. "I sometimes have phlegm in my throat so I can't help breaking our conversation." I didn't know both words, itchy and phlegm. "Do you have a sore throat?" "No. Itchy means the feeling when a mosquito bites your skin." "I get it now. When I have inflamed rashes on my arm, I feel itchy, right?" One of my American teachers is teaching English in Korea now. I talked with him via Skype for 30 minutes. He is enjoying living in many countries while teaching English. His job is not stable but it might be very exciting to live in many foreign countries. I envy him. If I were young, I would like to experience a lot of jobs. OK, I will travel to many places, as many as possible after retirement. Anyway the spring is on the way. Cherry blossoms will bloom soon here in Japan and I'm expecting that something new will happen in the spring. I want to change my boring every day job in the office.

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The next day I turned on my computer and started to struggle again as soon as I came home without preparing dinner. My husband cooked instead of me. I installed the card into the card reader but only an error message appeared. The connection between the computer and the card reader might have been bad, right? I double checked the instructions while being afraid of my mistake. It didn't seem to be something wrong with the connection. I made use of yesterday's experience, googled the error message and easily fixed the bug of the program. After that I finished everything smoothly. I was really satisfied with my success and I'm looking forward to receiving 5000 yen in return which is the incentive reward to spread the E-tax system to the nation. The older we become, the more difficult it will be to do new things. You should try the new thing immediately, even if you aren't interested in it. This is my policy.

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I struggled for two nights to submit my husband's and my income tax documents through the Internet. To calculate and complete the documents was not difficult but to make the computer accept the Resident Record Cards was very troublesome. The process called the first registration was really complicated. I was supposed to open the file and input my name and address there but I found the file couldn't be opened. Why can't I open the file? Did I forget to install any applications? I attempted to do it in different ways about ten times but it was impossible. It was already 12 o'clock and I decided to google the solution. I found many blogs and one of them advised us that we should have renewed the JAVA program. I downloaded the new version from the website written in English. I was so glad to finally be able to open the file and turned off the computer to go to bed. It had already past twelve thirty.

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In Japan now it's the season of final income tax returns and the National Tax Agency

recommended us to submit bills through the Internet, which they call “E-Tax”. They say it’s convenient and easy but I’m convinced it’s not true. Actually I tried it last night and finally I managed to do it. It had taken about one month since I decided to do it. It needs a Basic Resident Resister Card to do it and I applied to get the card at the city hall, but I didn’t receive it until four weeks later from that time. Moreover I had to download several applications to complete the file.



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#### ✚ Aid for a disaster area

2008,3,10



Last July quite a big earthquake hit Niigata in Japan. In Japan the Self-Defense Forces go to a damaged place first to search for victims under broken buildings. Recently robots are useful to find and help people. We usually donate money and blankets, food and so on to a disaster area. Not only donating but also people go there to work as volunteer helper. There are lots of job to do like delivering relief supplies to victims who lost their houses and are staying at shelters such as auditoriums and gymnasiums. As a prefectural office, we send some specialists who can check many buildings which were damaged, to see if people can still live there safely or not and also some staff members to help in prefectural work. Some groups hold concerts to gather donations from audiences and singers perform for free.

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#### ✚ my regret

2008,3,9



The students of my high school worked hard not only to study but also to play sports. After school many of them participated in club activities and played baseball, soccer and so on. As we were Japanese, doing judo and kendo (Japanese style fencing) were also popular. However I didn’t have enough energy to do hard sports after school. It seemed to be difficult for me to both study and do sports well. Now I really regret that I didn’t exercise so much. If I had participated in some sports club, I would have had a lot of good recollections. These are my

school experiences and also what I might like to have changed about my high school days.

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## ✚ To my American friend

2008,3,8



Thank you very much for reading my e-mail and giving me an A grade. It encouraged me to receive praise from a real American. You flatter me! Anyway, I would like to write a story from my school days. A Japanese astronaut, Takao Doi, is soon going to the International Space Station on the Space Shuttle Endeavour. Actually he and I graduated from the same high school in Osaka. He is one year younger than me. It means I might have met him somewhere during my high school days. In Japan a high school is not compulsory education so we have to pass the entrance examination to be a high school student. My high school was the most difficult public school to enter in our region. I was a little bit good at studying at junior high school and I could pass the test even though I didn't study so hard in my junior high school days. As soon as I entered the school, I realized that I was not so smart compared to some excellent school mates. The classes, especially math and English, were so difficult that I lost confidence in my intelligence altogether. I enjoyed chatting with some girlfriends about cool boys like the usual young high school girl and finally got a boyfriend. However I was always worried about the tests. I was too earnest to disregard my grade even though many students gave up understanding difficult subjects like physics and math. I'm still keeping in touch with some of my old friends from those days and they tell me that I was a sensible and peculiar girl.



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### A strange proverb

2008,3,7



The following is a famous old Japanese proverb, “When the wind blows harder, a cooper gains a profit.” Does a big wind relate to a cooper? I’m going to explain the meaning. A big wind causes dust and it results in increasing the number of blind people. They tend to play samisen; three-stringed Japanese instrument which is made from the skin of cats. So, as a result, rats multiply quickly because cats can’t exterminate rats. Rats usually nibble wooden tubs. After that coopers become busy fixing them. These are the process of this old Japanese proverb. Does it make sense?

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### An American Enka singer

2008,3,6



Have you ever heard Enka? Enka is a Japanese popular song that is sad and melancholy. Almost every lyric of Enka is related to love and sadness and it has a peculiar melody. Many Enka singers wear Kimonos on stage though ordinary Japanese don’t wear them in everyday life. Now Enka is getting less popular than J pops. However recently a young new star of Enka appeared. Even though he released his first CD at the end of February, we can watch him on TV every day and his CD has already ranked in quite a high position. His catch phrase is “the guy across the ocean to carry on the promise”. He looks like a hip-hop singer wearing a loose shirt and jeans. Once he grips the microphone and begins to sing, every audience member is totally in shock to hear his song. He is singing his own Enka very well like a professional Japanese Enka singer but he is an African American. Actually his grandmother was a real Japanese. She got married with a black U.S. Navy sailor in Japan after World War Two and moved to the U.S with her family and had a grandson. He grew up while listening to many Enka songs with his favorite grandma and decided to come to Japan to become a professional Enka singer after graduating from university in America. He promised his late grandma he would become a Enka singer in Japan and he did it.

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### Describing processes

2008,3,5



At first the sun heats the lake and causes some evaporation of the water. The evaporated water condenses into tiny drops and they form clouds. These tiny drops of water can combine together to form large drops that fall as rain. As a result, water enters the lake and so the process starts all over again. When we drink a hot coffee in a chilly room, our eyeglasses get clouded up. Why does this phenomenon happen? To start with hot water evaporates as steam. At the same time, the cold temperature around the eyeglasses causes steam to form small drops of water and it covers the eyeglasses. So, consequently we can see nothing. Recently there was a rotten smell around a lake. What happened ? There were a lot of fish in this lake. It had not rained there since three months ago in such a hot summer. It resulted in falling water levels and this caused the death of the fish. So, a terrible smell resulted from this incident.

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## British Hills

2008,3,4



I really want to visit Europe, especially England, but now I can't take long holidays to travel there. What's more now the Euro is quite strong. Anyway, it's not a suitable time for me to visit England now. Several years ago I happened to know there was a huge facility named the " British Hills " in Fukushima, a rural area in Japan. It looks like an old British village from the Middle Ages and many native English speakers work there. Originally a private language college established it to let their students enjoy the atmosphere of the U.K. There are imported gorgeous mansions, which real lords of the manor owned in England in the Middle Ages, and some accommodations, which were built in old British styles. Recently I found its website and realized they offer three day English lessons there. They're going to offer the highest-level class this March. I called the office and a Japanese staff member told me that a teacher would call on my cellphone the next day during a lunch break to check my level. Today I had an interview by telephone and the teacher proved that I had the ability to take the highest class. I decided to stay there for three days at the end of March instead of visiting the real Great Britain.



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### ✚ Making very polite requests

2008,3,3



Normally it wouldn't be a problem, but I'm going to be a little bit busy tomorrow. Do you have any free time by any chance? I don't suppose you could attend the meeting instead of me tomorrow morning. It will start at 9 o'clock in the conference room on the third floor in the main office. I'd really appreciate it if you would accept my request. Of course, I'd be willing to attend it myself but I can't. I promise that I won't let it happen again.

I know it's a lot to ask, but will you do me a favor? I'm off on vacation tomorrow and I have a plan to go to a zoo with my son. I would like to take some pictures there but my camera was broken the other day. Would you mind lending me your camera? It's just for one day and I promise I will return it by tomorrow night. It would really help me out because I can't afford to buy a new camera.

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### ✚ The meaning of the Japanese English "mansion"

2008,3,2



When we say "mansion" in Japanese, it means an apartment which somebody owns. Actually it means a gorgeous house in English. Even if my apartment, which I purchased over 20 years ago, is 80 square meters, I would say that now I live in an old-fashioned and small "mansion". We don't say we live in a "mansion" if our houses are detached houses. In Japan, especially in big cities, real estate is very expensive because of overpopulation. So that to live in a "mansion" is quite

common in urban areas. Recently my son purchased a "mansion": of course it's not such a luxurious apartment. His family will be the second residents of this apartment. The first owner was an elderly woman and she had been living there with her daughter for about 20 years. We visited there before he decided to buy it. The exterior was neat and the building was maintained well. However as soon as we entered the apartment, we were very surprised to find everything there was quite dirty. An agent smiled bitterly and told us that the two women had been so busy with their jobs that they couldn't have cleaned the house at all. My son has to renovate it completely from now on. The renovation will be large-scale, including a bathtub, a kitchen unit, a washstand, doors, flooring and wallpaper. It will cost a lot of money but we still believe it was a good buy. It was much cheaper than equivalent condos due to the soiled inside. If they had kept the house in a cleaner state, they could have sold it more expensively.

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#### How do seeds become flowers?

2008,3,1



To start with, we have to dig the soil before planting. Next, we spread seeds in the soil and cover the seeds with a little earth. Then pour a little water to wet the seeds. Water and oxygen are necessary for germination. About one or two weeks later small seed leaves appear in the earth. Soon they grow quickly in the sun and we have to water them every morning. Now they need the sunlight, water and oxygen for growth. While this is happening, several buds begin to expand. Don't forget to water every day to open a lot of flowers. The buds grow day after day and finally we can see pale colors on the buds. The bloom is getting near. One morning we find the plants have bloomed into beautiful flowers. They comfort our minds a lot.

#### The big news

2008,4,30



Unbelievable news happened in Austria. The father abused his own daughter and she delivered seven babies between him and her. She was living in the basement for 24 years without meeting anyone. On the other hand, the special tax rate law was finally extended today in Japan. The law provided that they should tax a higher rate on gasoline than the original rate for the limited term and the deadline of the term finished at the end of March. Of course the government wanted to renew the law to extend the special tax rate but the Democratic Party refused to pass the bill. As a result, during April we could buy gasoline cheaper than March. According to the Japanese

congress system, we can pass the law again one month later from the first resolution. The price of oil has been increasing recently all around the world but in Japan we could get it a little bit cheaper because of its lower tax rate. I don't know how much oil is now because I don't drive so often these days. Until four years ago I had shared our car with my husband and son. All of us used to drive many times and sometimes we quarreled about using the car. Today I want to drive to a driving range. No, I have to go shopping by car. It's raining so I need the car. We were arguing every day. We made a rule to mark it down on a calendar when we wanted to drive the car. we circled the figure of the day when we wanted to drive in red pen.

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2

2008,4,29



This book will be subject to being recommended that elementary school students should read it. He objected to starting a new business. The critic was opposed to recommending this film for the award. She is devoted to taking care of her family. He has been dedicated to operating his company for over three decades. She will get a medal because she has been contributing to the local community. We are used to working all over the night.

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Practice 1

2008,4,28



Although I happened to miss attending the meeting on time, my boss hired me. She easily avoided meeting with her ex-husband at the party. This room is capable of holding fifty people for a party. My job includes sending e-mails to our customers. She denied dating him at the movie theater three days ago. My aunt suggested taking care of her mother instead of my uncle. He is still studying in the library. He finally finished watching TV at two o'clock in the morning. You should consider studying abroad someday. She was expected to enter university even though her grade was not so high. She hardly agreed to give up studying at college. We promised to climb up a mountain next Sunday. She appeared to be very moderate, generous and delicate. He still remains single at the age of fifty. She failed to visit his office on the day when they promised to meet.

✚ **My amethyst brooch**

2008,4,27



The other day I noticed that there was no my amethyst brooch in my jewel box. I vaguely remember I used it last on the eleventh of April when I wore my purple suit. I couldn't find it on the collar of the suit. I wonder if I lost it on that day. I bought it when I traveled in Korea just six years ago and it cost over one hundred thousand yen. Oh my Gosh! I'm hardly reconciled with it. I still remember it was kind of hard to fasten the clasp and I was in a hurry to leave my house to go to the station. I didn't fix it to my jacket and it dropped down somewhere. I'm a careful woman and I've almost never lost any of my belongings in my entire life. It was the fourth thing that I've ever lost; the first was the umbrella, the second was the metallic belt and the third was the watch which I bought in Hong Kong. Where is my brooch now? Is it on the street? Is it in a car which I took on business? I still expect that somebody will find and bring it to me.

✚ **The stupid event**

2008,4,26



The Beijing Olympic torch relay took place in Nagano this morning. Runners were running while being surrounded doubly and triply with police officers doable and triply. Thousands of Chinese international students gathered in Nagano with their national flags to cheer the relay, while people against the oppression from China also protested against it with the flag of Tibet while shouting "Free Tibet!" It was not a festival of peace but a political rally between Chinese and their protestors. We performed the event in Japan but it looked like a demonstration in China. I'm sure the Chinese people have lost the international sense. What do they think about their behavior in Nagano, such as threatening the spectators with their big red flags and angry loud voices? We wasted a lot of our taxes by spending them on such a silly ceremony.

2008,4,25



I'm calling to confirm a reservation. It's better for you to conform to their customs in foreign countries. He can be compatible with his new boss. Entrance examinations to universities in Japan are usually competitive examinations because the number of entrants to each school is limited. The brooch nicely complemented her dress. Your presence is a great compliment for us. The students should comply with the strict regulation. She implied that she is going to get married soon. She is so smart and considerate that everybody genuinely loves her. There are a considerable amount of people at the conference. Her grandparents were immigrants from China. There are a lot of Japanese emigrants in Brazil. Don't decide everything from an inference. There is no reference to the traffic accident that happened yesterday in the newspaper. She is inherently very cheerful. His opinion is confirmed and very logical. He presided at the big meeting last year. They have been residing abroad. She strongly refuted the argument. She flatly refused my invitation. The firm required me to remit money by check. The factory emitted a bad smell.

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✚ 5

2008,4,24



They finally decided to file a suit against their competitive company after discussing it a lot with attorneys. I'm forwarding an email from my friend to another friend. She maintained that her colleagues should share the job. The accounts department received the profit margin from their connections yesterday. Few customers read the policy before they sign a contract with an insurance offices. He inherited a large property from his uncle. Companies usually announce their financial conditions once a quarter. The government is suffering from a lot of government securities. The accounts chief immediately settled the big payment. Why don't you discuss a shortcut instead of such a complicated procedure? I unwillingly yielded to her strong opinion.

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✚ 4

2008,4,23



I put parts of my computer on my desk. Please set the peripherals before you turn on the computer. He addressed the environmental problem at the meeting. The yen appreciated suddenly recently. It's a true friend who helps you on a rainy day. Keep the assembly of the

plastic model in a box. It is said he is a capable attorney. I'm worried about the security benefits in Japan in the future because the birth rate is rapidly decreasing now. I received the bill from the front desk and found it was incorrect. The economic climate is getting worse these days. The firm closed a big deal with one of the most famous car companies. How much is the commission on the trade. The recruits received their first compensation today. The executives decided on a new employee procedure. The international fair will take place at the convention hall.

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✚ 3

2008,4,22



The Chinese employee of the biggest securities firm was arrested yesterday due to insider trading. Many mayors in Osaka got angry with the announcement of the Governor because he wanted to reduce subsidies to the cities. They were expected to lower the duty of fifteen percent on all imports. The nation expects the new Prime Minister to reduce the tax revenue. I unpacked the parcel as soon as I received it. To get hardware cheaply we can purchase it directly from wholesalers. I got a good giveaway at the opening of the super market. The main office prepares all office supplies and distributes them to each branch. They quoted the price on the renovation of the old house. Where can I get the rebate? Will you deposit it into my account? Do you allow a replacement of the goods? He is a good salesman who gets a lot of sales incentives every year. I was shocked at the pushy sales pitch of the shop.

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✚ 2

2008,4,21



Japan is suffering from a budget deficit. If we don't buy so many souvenirs during our trips abroad, we can pass a customs declaration. At first you should try to reduce the expenditure if you want to save money. Due to the bad weather of the last year the amount of farm produce decreased. To receive insurance benefits it takes a lot of procedures. You had better keep an insurance policy in a safe so as not to lose it. Many people feel that the economy is in recession now. He reimbursed her money which she lent him last year. Our revenue for this quarter was very small so we should work hard in this quarter.

✚ **Vocabulary for TOEIC test**

2008,4,20



They say we should master a lot of words that relate to business like CEO if we want to get high scores in a TOEIC test. I'm sure I will not use my English at work in my future. However since the TOEIC test is the most popular English test now in Japan, I need as high a score as possible to use my English skills even if I work as a volunteer interpreter. Anyway, I will practice how to use some vocabulary that seems to be important for the test. He became the Chief executive officer as of April first in two thousand eight. The CEO told the COO (chief operating officer) to raise the company's sales. We have to submit the report concerning our department by next Friday. The CEO decided to dispatch extra employees to the subsidiary. It's important to diversify a company nowadays. This registration will be effective from this August. He is one of the exponents of entrepreneurs. Please check an inventory everyday if you want to do well in your business. A lot of foreign teachers were ordered to be laid off when the language school went bankrupt. Yahoo is a big multinational company now. Even though I have fifty paid leaves now, I can't afford to use them. I was working for a public relations department. In what Sect are you working? I have to get the approval of my superior.

✚ **A little bit of a complicated story**

2008,4,19



It's not so serious a story but for strangers it doesn't seem to be simple to understand after hearing it for the first time. I'm going to explain it in a dialogue style.

My son is staying in my home tonight. I guess he will arrive at my house about midnight.

Too late! Where is he coming from? By himself?

Now he is living in Nagoya alone. I think he is still working at the office. He can come here in 2 hours by bullet train.

Where is his family? Does he live away from his wife?

Yes, for only twenty-two days. They are getting along with each other. My daughter-in-law is living in her parents' house in Matsuyama with my grandsons. My son had to transfer to the headquarters in Nagoya from the Tokyo branch at the beginning of April and he purchased a used

apartment house in Nagoya at the end of February. The house is under renovation now. It took about one month to complete it. Therefore he has been living in a studio apartment for 20 days. While he is in Nagoya, his wife is living in her parents' house with her kids. Their furniture is still in their rental house in Tokyo. He has to prepare for a removal to Nagoya during this weekend.

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### Zenkouji

2008,4,18



Zenkouji is a big and famous temple in Nagano where the Winter Olympic Games took place just ten years ago. It became popular all over the world because the Olympic Games started with the sound of the bell of the temple. It was supposed to hold the ceremony of the sacred torch relay there on the 26th of this month. As I have been worried about it, the temple refused to offer their precinct for the ceremony today. They say as Buddhists they can't allow China's oppression in Tibet. According to the news there have been a lot of protests against the temple since March when mass media broadcast the incident in Tibet. They say the temple doesn't want to cause confusion by offering the place. The JOC still say that they are thinking of an alternative way and the event could ultimately succeed.

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### The political situation

2008,4,17



Now the political situation is not stable in Japan because our second party, The Democratic Party of Japan, is in a majority in the House of Councilors. The party is always trying to disagree with the decisions of the Liberal Democratic Party, our main party. We have the bicameral system in Japan as well as many developed countries. They are The House of Representatives and The House of Councilors. Even if bills cleared the former, they can't clear the latter. There was not a Governor of the Bank of Japan for a while because The Democratic Party disagreed with the candidates whom the Liberal Democratic Party recommended. The policy of The Democratic Party seems to cause the confused circumstances.

✚ Beijing Olympic Games

2008,4,16



What do you think about Beijing Olympic Games? Should we boycott them due to their Tibet problems or not? It's a very difficult issue to answer. From the viewpoint of athletes we shouldn't boycott them. It reminds me of Moscow Olympic Games. The Japanese athlete group couldn't participate in the games and it was a kind of tragedy for many athletes. They were training very hard for long time to get the medals. Olympic Games are held every four years so the opportunity to take part in the games come around only once in four years. In my opinion we should protest against China in other ways. We're going to take place the sacred torch relay in Nagano soon. Some human rights groups will gather there and demonstrate to protest the Chinese politics. There are a lot of obstacles to hold the International big games now in China such as food poisoning incidents, the repressive politics and human rights abuse. Why did IOC chose China as the next site?

✚ 3

2008,4,15



I will most likely spend this year's summer holidays in Hawaii. We can get a rebate from the company only if electrical appliances are broken without any malicious mischief in one year. I'm assured that he will win. She was assured of his success. The movie ensured his fame. You should make a detour to visit the city hall because the road is under construction now. I acknowledged his greeting with a nod. I acknowledged my failure. I assented to work with you. Don't abandon your dream to be a doctor. It's difficult to make proceeds immediately. Planning a good procedure is important for success. The scientist proceeded against his colleague. Please check the previous proceeding before you begin to discuss the issue. I'm very delighted to hear your good news. I inform you that you can get more details at the store. I informed her of his good decision. He is a competent account. This is a competitive machine. Check at least this section in advance if you want to explain it well. This is a card valid for one decade. I completed home work. You should finish completing the job by the next week.



I don't like him, nor does she. I can solve the question and so can you. Now that she has begun to work for a leading company, her mother is completely satisfied. I was somewhat confused to hear the news. She looks as if she is a rich lady when she wears a costly dress. None of the students could understand what the teacher told them. We can enter the museum only if we buy tickets. No matter when the meeting restarts, I want to join. No matter where he lives, I will visit him once a year. No matter what happens, I won't hesitate to do my best. No matter how difficult it is to master French, I'm sure she will try it. Don't enter the premises without any permission. I allow her to invest in books here beyond the guidelines.

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On the train on the way to my new office I usually read and memorize some complicated English usages while reading a text book for my TOEIC test. I will review them by making sentences which include such usages. Neither he nor his wife has arrived here yet. Either he or his wife was supposed to come here but both of them didn't. I sat down between him and his wife at the party. Not only he but also his wife participated in the party. I was late due to the bad weather. I got a high score because of my earnest studying. I've developed my English skills thanks to a good teacher. Because she studied hard, she became an honor student. Since the law couldn't be revised, we can buy oil cheaply now. As she got married to a rich man, her family received a lot of presents. She believed that her son was far superior to other kids. We should consider several methods prior to making the last decision. She was so nervous under a lot of pressure when she entered the new firm. We have to practice pronunciation as well as mastering grammar to speak English fluently. We changed the company's rule from last year. The company has been making profits constantly from the turn of the century. I majored in law at university. A majority of members didn't agree with the bill. The office measures seven meters by five. She is absolutely excellent by any measure. Please take the measurement of a dress before you purchase it. The employer means the president and an employee means people who is working by receiving a salary. Japanese companies used to have the employment-for-life system but now it is changing rapidly. The president encouraged his employees to achieve the task. An officer allowed her to bring two bags into the airplane. A section leader expected his staff to discuss the issue. Lazy

clerks are chatting with each other while on task.

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## Ben Hur

2008,4,12



I worked overtime for five days in a row this week. I'm exhausted with a terrible stiff neck. I used a massage chair to relax my muscles but I feel it didn't work at all. Recently the famous actor, Charlton Heston, passed away. He is famous for the movie, Ben Hur. I don't remember exactly when I recorded the movie but I have an old video tape of that movie. He starred in Ben Hur and got an academy award for the best actor. As I'm not familiar with the ancient history of the Roman Empire and Jesus Christ, I can't understand the movie perfectly but it was still interesting to watch the movie. A fifteen-minute chariot race scene was especially wonderful. The movie contains a lot of elements like love, revenge and opposition between races such as a Roman and Jewish. At that time there was no relationship between the ancient Japan and the Roman Empire. There is a long distance between Europe and Asia and there was no means for the Japanese to visit Rome, but I think people's minds, life style and the battle patterns were very similar with the old Japanese society.

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## About celebrity

2008,4,11



If I'm an heir of a famous company, I would like to inherit Disney most. Because Disney character give dreams to a lot of people. I want to make more and more people happier. Then I want to be an heir of Apple computer because I guess I-pod will be more and more popular in the world. I mean there is a possibility that I will be able to be the richest person in the world. I can't imagine how I would feel if I were such a rich woman. I believe that the privileged class has more responsibility than ordinary people because they can easily have an impact on many people.

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## About celebrity

2008,4,10



If I was heir of a famous company, I would like to inherit Disney the most because the Disney ideal gives dreams to a lot of people. I want to make more and more people happier. Then I want to be heir of Apple computers because I guess I-pod will be more and more popular in the world. I mean there is a possibility that I could be the richest person in the world. I can't imagine how I would feel if I were such a rich woman. I believe that the privileged class has more responsibility than ordinary people because they can easily have an impact on many people.

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## cherry blossoms

2008,4,9



Almost every cherry blossom has dropped due to the last day's storm. Even if there was no strong wind, cherry blossoms can't continue blooming over one week. The life of cherry blossoms is very short and it's the reason why we Japanese love them. We respect being graceful and love being fragile. Cherry blossoms begin to bloom at the same time as spring comes and they bloom for only one week. They let us realize that spring has come around again and make us happy. We are always looking forward to seeing them all year round and can enjoy them for only one week. The short-lived beauty moves our minds and makes a deep impression on us Japanese.

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## A spring storm

2008,4,8



Today it was pouring rain and the wind was howling. The wind was so strong that trains on the Tokaido line were delayed. When I arrived late at the station, there were lots of people who were waiting for buses and taxis in front of the small station. Some people's umbrellas were broken by the rush of the wind. They got soaked to the skin. I was being at a loss because the buses didn't seem to be arriving and there was a long line in front of the taxi stand. At that time I found my boss waiting in the line among many people. Fortunately I could go to the office with my boss by taxi.



## A seating chart

2008,4,7



In a new office the most important thing that I first have to master is to memorize all the staff's names and where they are living. I can't help acknowledging that my memory is no longer good recently. I put the seating chart on my desk and always try to remember their names while checking their faces with the chart. For me women's names are easier to memorize than men's names thanks to their colorful appearances. On the other hand every male staff members looks the same because of their sober suits. Anyway, to call each name to each face is the most effective way to learn them by heart.



## my new office 2

2008,4,6



Our office has jurisdiction over the imposition of prefectural taxes such as the inhabitant's tax, the corporation tax, business taxes and property taxes. Our territory is one city and five towns. Our staff members are sixteen including two part time workers. This office is the smallest in all prefectural tax offices but we have been working so hard while cooperating with each other. Last year we raised approximately thirteen billion, four hundred and ninety one million, five hundred and ninety eight thousand yen. It was a pretty big amount for such a small office because there are several big factories and offices like A corporation and B insurance office. Actually the tax income from such big companies accounts for sixty two point zero percent. The famous filmmaker's factory is located in the city of M and they paid approximately thirty four percent of all our income. For the second, B insurance office paid about twelve point two percent of all income. For the third, the semiconductor maker, H cooperation, paid three point six percent. So it means these three companies paid almost half of the total income of our office. One thing that we are very worried about is the relocation of the B insurance office. They announced recently that their office in our territory would be closed in three years: by 2011. The office building was built about 40 years ago and it is in an inconvenient place so they will move their main departments to the new offices in Tokyo. Now about three thousand, one hundred employees are working there but two thousand workers will transfer to Tokyo in three years. Only one thousand, one hundred workers who belong to their subsidiaries will stay in the new building in our territory. It means our

income will suddenly decrease. The tall building has been a kind of landmark in the area and white-collar workers have been good residents. We can't imagine how much the small town will soon lose.

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4

2008,4,5



It is said that consolidated companies can't get rid of their original customs and it causes obstacles to developing the new companies. The school intensified its strict rules after some students skipped class. We can hardly earn a lot of money in an emerging market. Please treat this component with care. Concern over rising prices has caused consumers to economize. Can I borrow your camera? I rent my house from a rich owner. Would you mind lending me your book? The bank loaned the fund to him. Her son's bad behavior is attributable to her discipline. He attributed his failure to his mother. I'm entitled to participate in the meeting. Every credit card is available in this shop.

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my new office

2008,4,4



My new office is in a rural area surrounded with mountains on three sides. When I first got off the train at the nearest station, I was surprised a lot because I could see Mt. Fuji covered with snow so near and it looked so big. It takes about 20 minutes from the station to the office on foot. Near the station there is a countrified shopping mall and then we have to walk across a wide river over a long bridge. We can ride a bus but at first I thought that I should walk because it's healthy. One of my staff advised me immediately that it was really dangerous in the evening. Just imagine walking alone over the bridge in the darkness. It's quite scary. I can't do it. Now it's OK to walk because it's not so hot or cold. However in the summer you get all in a sweat. There is no tree and the reflected heat from the pavement is scorching. In the winter it blows violently. I was really disappointed to hear that.

✚ **Food poisoning**

2008,4,3



I started to work at the new office from the first of April. Soon I noticed that medical officers visited our office and asked some questions to our staff who had been working since before April. They were asked to bring stool samples. Actually the old members had food poisoning after they had a farewell party at a famous restaurant in the local area. They ate a gorgeous cuisine including Sashimi, raw sliced fish, on Thursday after work. All of them except the former director were suffering from terrible diarrhea and vomiting during the weekend. The health center found a germ in their sample and announced today that they had prohibited the restaurant from opening for the time being.

✚ **3**

2008,4,2



The two companies consolidated to overcome the competition. The government has been trying to raise the tax but it has not been achieved. It's kind of risky to invest a large amount of money in the emerging market. She is responsible for the problem that happened yesterday. While I was staying in the suburbs, I was always reading books. During the summer holidays, he was spending a lot of time lazily. He was watching TV while eating snacks. He had arrived at the hospital before he passed away.

✚ **2**

2008,4,1



She always walks through busy streets to avert accidents. He had a commitment to help her. Many part time workers unionized recently. She relied on her co-worker when she became bankrupt. The natural attrition of the population is more than the birth increase. He is working for a pharmaceutical company. That big company has several subsidiaries. The boss disposed of some employees from several branches. I know some generic bags are very functional and

economical.

### **Sydney Pollack**

2008,5,31



The famous U.S. movie director, Sydney Pollack, died from cancer on May 27th. I'm sad to hear this news because he was a director of my most favorite movie, "The Way We Are", starring Robert Redford. Actually Redford has been my idol since I watched this movie. How handsome he is in the movie wearing a white navy uniform! It is said that Pollack was the director who shot the most handsome guy in the world most wonderfully. I hear the two men had been the best of friends both personally and officially for over forty years. I can't imagine how Redford is grieving about his death. Anyway I pray for the soul of the dead and hope Redford makes good films for the sake of Pollack's respect.

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### **Rational dispute**

2008,5,30



#### **Rational dispute**

This is a story which I heard recently from my acquaintance. When she gets angry with her husband, she always tries to discuss the issue calmly for each situation. After that, she writes down a list of crockery which she intends to smash. It's a good way for her to calm down and she believes it's a very rational way to solve arguments. I guess smashing pottery might be a good way to get rid of stress. However if I did destroy them, I'm sure I would regret it later. Why did I smash quite expensive cups and plates? We should calm down before we act so as not to regret it later. Consider this carefully before you practice it. From such kind of reasoning, listing items which we want to smash is a wise way to cool down our minds.

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### **Kintarou**

2008,5,29



I'm working in a kind of rural area called Ashigara. In Asigara you can find a lot of siggns of a fat boy who looks very strong. One of them is on a handrail of a bridge. A sign board in front of my office say," "No litter! Kintarou is watching you." and of coures there is a picture of a very cute Kintarou on the board. He is a symbol of this area: a legend boy called Kintarou. Usually he is drawn with a bear and a big ax wearing a wide red stomach band. We also have his doll which we display to celebrate the birth of a boy. It's still very popular now in Japan. Anyway he is a symbol of a very strong, tender and brave boy. It is said that he grew up in the mountains located in Asigara and he was playing with wild animals like bears. Actually there is a mountain whose name originaly comes from his name. The following is a lyric of an old and famous children's song which introduces him. Kintarou is practicing horseback riding with an ax while riding a bear. Haw, haw! He is practicing Sumo wrestling with a lot of animals deep in Ashigara Mountain. Hold on! Can you imagine what his shape is?



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I'm delighted that you sent me such a nice gift. She commenced to run her own company. I would like to inform you of my plan which I want to try to do with you. We need a competent auditor. Would you mind introducing someone to us? Thank you very much in advance for your effort. I hope that my son will secure a good job. This ticket is valid for only one week. He is in possession of a large house. Three hundred yen must be charged to enter the exhibition. Nowadays ordinary people are making investments in the stock market by using the Internet. I will take measures to solve the complicated problem. Since the most eligible candidate refused the offer, she re-emerged again as the strong candidate. Hardly had she entered university when her father was hospitalized. She suggested going on a picnic the next day. She suggested that we should complete the job the day after next day. If we adapted stricter regulations, our opponent would complain.



3

2008,5,27



I assent to making a contract with him. She acknowledged my greeting with a nod. What is the procedure for solving this problem? How much did you earn in the proceeds? The actress proceeded to take action against the television broadcasting station. The secretary sent me the proceedings from the latest meeting.



2

2008,5,26



We can't understand about other people's feeling until we are in their shoes. Be in my shoes. I'm lucky I'm not in your shoes. If I got a winning lottery ticket, I could buy a jewel. Many department stores take out insurance against the merchandise on the premises. The leading company is geared to current demand at any time. No matter who he is, you should refuse his offer. Today it was somewhat cold. Now that she has become a sensible adult, none of us is worried about her. He is clever and so is his brother. She couldn't solve the question, nor could he. Please be assured that we are finding the best solution. This agreement ensured the company's fame. I recommend you making a detour sometimes.



### Practice sentences

2008,5,25



The insurance office decided to terminate one of their life insurance policies unless they gained more than ten thousand customers. Because of the continuing progress of medical science, polio is no longer lethal disease. Although the manager ordered him to complete the report last Saturday, he has still not been able to do so. He has not yet arrived at the conference. The researchers could not decide what their aim should be regarding the development of the chemical. Imports of oranges are very high because of Japanese consumers. The qualification

necessary to become a teacher is to get the license in Japan. A characteristic of this new item is that it's simply designed. This microwave is not comparable to that one. Both of the two companies agreed to closely adhere to the clauses of the contract. My comment on the plan was severely criticized by my opponents. The company made huge profits last year. Should he become a doctor, his mother will be pleased. An application from a minor is subject to approval by his or her parents. He was overwhelmed by his wife's everyday complaints. I attribute his failure to his lazy personality. I will send him a book in compliance with his request. I finished my work in accordance with the new guidelines but my boss told me it was not done in an adequate manner. They did extensive research about this problem. The dinner cost ten thousand yen, inclusive of tax. He rented quite a spacious room.

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✚ To KG

2008,5,24



Long time no see! How are you doing now? I'm still writing English essays almost every day and have Peter correct my English. Surprisingly he always returns my essay one day after correcting my English. It's a really good system. Thank you for introducing me to such a good system. By the way, why did you delete your blog written in English? I was looking forward to reading it. It's a shame that you stopped uploading your writings. Are you busy at work now? I have also been very busy because I transferred to the new office which is located quite far away from my house in April. However now I can afford the time to take days off and I finally decided to travel to London and Barcelona in the middle of June with my husband to see my second son. My son is going to participate in an art festival in Barcelona to introduce his work. We are going there to see his performance. As I promised to send you an e-mail when you skipped your English studying the other day, I'm writing this letter. Even if you don't have enough time to write long sentences, please upload your writing as soon as possible. Take care and have a good day.

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✚ Odawara lantern

2008,5,23



There is a huge Japanese lantern above the ticket gate in Odawara. It looks to be over three

meters high and hangs down from the ceiling. The color is black and Chinese characters, which mean Odawara, are written on the surface. Why is there such a big lantern? Actually Odawara is famous for its lantern. Odawara is located at the foot of the Hakone Mountains, quite high mountains, and is also well-known for its hot springs. The town had developed as a good post station because travelers who were going to go over the mountains took a rest at inns there. They needed lanterns to walk on the streets in the evening. One of the inhabitants invented a very convenient lantern which could be collapsed. During the daytime people carried small collapsed lanterns and after sunset they opened and lit them. Odawara lanterns became popular right away throughout Japan to travelers. Lanterns were replaced by flashlights and now nobody uses such lanterns on a street. However lanterns are still produced and sold as souvenirs there. Customers use them as ornaments.



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### ✚ Incomprehensible grammar

2008,5,22



I had my son fix my broken computer. I had my computer fixed because it was broken. These sentences might not be complicated for native English speakers but they are very difficult for Japanese to grammatically understand the difference between them. My textbook says like the following: If a person follows the word "have", we should put an original form of the verb next to "have", but if an object follows, we should put the past participle form of the verb. I will have my nephew scrap this book. I have had the book scrapped by my niece. The next confusing example is the usage of the present participle and the past participle. For instance, I was disappointed with

the result and the dinner was disappointing. The reference book explains that when the subject is a person, you should use the past participle. Contrary to this, when the subject is an object, you should use the present participle. I was bored with his speech. His address was boring. I was discouraged at the outcome. His remarks are rude and discouraging.

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## Yoga

2008,5,21



Just now I came home from Yoga practice, which was held at the community center near my house. I'm suffering from a terribly stiff neck and stiff shoulders. I tried to take pills and spread an application to get rid of it. Sometimes I took a massage but it wasn't effective at all. When we were weeding in the common yard of our condos about one month ago, one of my neighbors invited me to participate in the yoga class. I don't know if yoga can cure my symptoms but I guess there is no harm in trying it. Besides the lesson fee is cheap to do yoga there because it's a kind of spontaneous group activity. Stretching muscles all around my body for one and a half hours was quite healthy and comfortable. If I master several poses, I can try them for a few minutes at home every day.

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## My commuting

2008,5,20



Every morning I leave my house at six thirty and walk to the station. Now they are redeveloping a quite large area in front of the station which used to be the old plant. There will be a big shopping mall, a sports center with a spa, a hospital and so on. Thanks to this plan, my condo's price is increasing now regardless of the pretty old building. It's a really good tendency for me. Then I get a train bound for Odawara which is a historical castle town. It takes about thirty minutes from my station to Odawara but sometimes I can sit down at the next station or after the next station. As soon as the train arrives at Odawara, a lot of passengers rush to the escalator. There are long lines near the escalator and I usually get irritated with the tick crowd, especially when several rude students queue-jump. Many passengers, including me, are in a hurry because we have to transfer to the private railway here. After passing the ticket gate, I rush to the other gate again.

The train is not so crowded but usually I can't sit down. After a twenty-minute-ride, I finally arrive at the station near my office but I can't rest. I have to take a bus for ten minutes or walk to the office for twenty minutes. It's kind of hard work to commute between my house and the office. It's OK now because it's not so hot or cold but I can't imagine what hard work it will be in the summer and winter.

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### To my teacher

2008,5,19



Sorry again but I can't come home early on Wednesday. Do you mind if I'm absent from your lesson? Now I guess taking lessons on Wednesday might be hard for me because I'm quite busy on Wednesday now with my work in the new office. How about changing a lesson day? During the weekends I'm also busy going to my son's house or my mom's house. Please let know a convenient day. See you!

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### The world news show

2008,5,18



I usually watch the world news show on TV on Sunday evening. Today's big topics are of course the two big natural calamities which occurred in Myanmar and China. The death toll in the former is much more than the latter but the military government in Myanmar refused offers of help from foreign countries. They don't want to show their tragic conditions to the world. In the program a twelve-year-old girl told her miserable daily life to a news reporter. There is no clean water and not enough food. She is missing her two younger sisters who were swept away by the flood. I can't forget her childlike but melancholy face. I only hope she will get food and a sanitary place to live.

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### The rescue

2008,5,17



A big earthquake occurred in Sichuan Province. It is said the damage was thirty times more terrible than the Hanshin earthquake in Japan. More than twenty thousand people were killed and the number of victims seems to be much larger. A Japanese rescue team went to the devastated area and dug out a mother and her baby under the destroyed remains of the hospital. Unfortunately they had already passed away when they were found. Now many Chinese are writing about their appreciation and saying things like "Thank you for your kindness. Japanese are so brave. I will never forget your aid." Before the calamity there was a lot of criticism concerning Japan on the websites. Many countries blamed the Chinese government for their oppression in Tibet. After the disaster, several countries, including Japan, offered aid to China, but at first they didn't accept it. After a little while they announced that they wanted to accept the Japanese rescue team first of all. Probably they wanted to show their friendly relationship to Japan. It's kind of sad there is a political consideration in such an emergency situation. Anyway the ordinary people have nothing to do with the politics and they needed quicker help.

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#### A review of the study

2008,5,16



I have to go over some phrases to master them. To make sentences, including those phrases, seems to be the best way to memorize them. The analyst foresees that an increasingly strong yen encourages many Japanese to travel abroad. I am considering this subject being discussed by them. The plane was financed by the bank. Without making a loan of five million yen, I can't purchase the house. After investment in the plant for three years, profits had been rising. He objected to spending a lot of money to buy it. One in five of the new graduates was out of work at the end of April. I'm sure I'll make up for my absence by working harder until my departure. He is considered to have already been insolvent. The arrested accountant helped the company pool money illegally. The increase in profits was extremely large.

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#### What's happening these days

2008,5,15



These days the weather is strange. During Golden Week it became very warm. We felt the early

summer had already come and began to wear half-sleeved clothes. I took many heavy jackets and pants to a laundry and also washed knitted sweaters by hand. However the last weekend it suddenly began to be quite cold. The temperature was around ten degrees. Actually there were no warm clothes which were not laundered. I put on layers of underwear and wore tights under my pants. By the way, yesterday I called at a coffee shop where we can speak English with some native English speakers. When I was in train, I happened to see a with woman whom I sometimes took the same lessons at old NOVA, the insolvent English conversation school. We still remembered our each other and exchanged greetings. We began to exchange information of our English studies and she introduced me to the coffee shop. An Asian Canadian young teacher taught us the following correct expressions which many Japanese tend to make mistakes with: I went downtown. I went shopping to the downtown of Tokyo. I used a toilet of the store. I borrowed money from him. I owe five thousand yen to my brother. I rent a house from her. I hire a boat by the hour. We lease our house from him. I mortgaged my lot from the owner. The shop is tenanted by a young couple.

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#### Problems occurred in China

2008,5,14



A big earthquake, bigger than the earthquake which hit Kobe in Japan, struck China. Now several problems have occurred in China like the big issue in Tibet, the air pollution which many athletes are worried about, food poisoning and so on just before the Olympic Games. This time a natural disaster struck. Recently the Chinese Chairman visited Japan and he announced that they would like to lend, not give, a panda couple to Japan. Actually the panda in Ueno Zoo passed away a few days before he came to Japan. The panda had been a popular symbol of Ueno Zoo and a lot of Japanese miss it now. It's not a real zoo if there is no panda. It seemed to be a symbol of a good relationship between Japan and China. Now there is a sort of rumor that the panda was killed due to political matters. Too good a timing! I believe it coincidentally happened but we still have doubts. Our Prime Minister was invited to attend the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games but he didn't answer clearly. I would like to do it if it's possible. The British Prime Minister and the French President declined attending the ceremony due to the Tibet incident. Now whether he will attend it or not is a kind of political decision.

### ✚ How to return a compliment

2008,5,13



We have a custom to return half the value of goods which we receive as presents such as baby gifts, house warming presents, present for starting school and so on. We usually return pottery and food as family celebration goods for reciprocal gifts. Actually my mother and sisters each gave housewarming presents to my son. He asked me what kind of goods he should return to them. They gave him quite a lot of money, so half the value of goods means kind of expensive items. All of them are living alone in their own houses and have enough belongings. They can't eat so much. I can't imagine which is best present in return. First of all he had better send polite letters and pictures of his new house. Then he can present seasonal fruits occasionally. This is my best idea.

### ✚ European countries

2008,5,12



Yesterday I chatted with my son through MSN messenger. Surprisingly he told me that he was in Lisbon. Uh? Where is Lisbon? Are you staying in Spain? Why are you in Spain? Lisbon is not in Spain. It's the capital of Portugal. I came here with my former classmate to attend a meeting. one half is a work and the other is sightseeing. We are going to Paris next. I've never been to Europe and I'm really looking forward to visiting there someday. There are a lot of countries in Europe and they say its easy to travel to other countries by train, car and airplane. There is a tunnel under the Channel between Britain and France, isn't there? People speak their own language like German, Dutch, Italian and so on, right? French people are really proud of their own culture and they only speak French even if they can speak English fluently, don't they? I studied a little German at university. Now that I'm a middle aged woman, I've forgotten almost everything concerning German. Only one thing I remember is it's much more difficult than English. It's said that French is also difficult to master compared to English. I hear that French used to be fighting against English to be an International language until the sixties. Anyway I had better learn some simple words like "Good morning" and "Thank you" of each European language if I visit there.

## Tricky questions

2008,5,11



I practiced the listening tests and noticed there are several tricky questions like the following:  
How can you be sure that she will follow through? She game me her word. How did you get that bruise? I tried skating last Sunday. Have you finished organizing the warehouse? Not yet. I'm still cross-checking the inventory. Why did they cancel their order? I heard they're going out of business at the end of next week. Can you see Mr. White now? Yes, thank you. Please send him in. How much longer do you think you'll be? Only two more hours. Until three o'clock. How is the construction coming along? It's been halted since last month. Would you like me to take the minutes of the conference? Yes, that would be a big help. Do you carry ABC faucets? Sorry no, but we can order them for you. Even if I try to listen to a lot of dialogs for practice, I can't get a high score if I don't know many phrasal verbs.

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## Present Japanese wedding ceremonies

2008,5,10



The Japanese lifestyle is completely westernized now. The wedding ceremony is not an exception. Our traditional wedding ceremony used to be held in a shrine and after that a wedding party took place at the groom's parents' house. We invited our relatives and neighbors to the party. The wedding was not the groom and bride's event but an important events for the two families. The traditional costume of a bride was a long white Kimono and she wore a white decoration like a nurse's cap on her Japanese hairstyle. We call this cap Tsunokakushi. It means "hiding horns" and horns are a symbol of anger and jealousy. We expected a bride to be obedient and submissive so people put it on her head. Now we usually hold wedding ceremonies at hotels and halls. There are lots of special halls for weddings, including little shrines and churches everywhere in Japan. Brides change their costumes at least three times during the party. At first they wear a white wedding dress or a white Kimono and before the party they change them to the opposite costume. At the end of the party they wear a colorful cocktail dress. It's a common style. Actually I wore a wedding dress at first even though I got married in the Shinto style, the original Japanese Gods' style, and changed to my Kimono with long sleeves when I got married quite long ago. To know about the wedding traditions of many countries is quite interesting.

✚ A cool picture

2008,5,9



This is a picture of my grandsons. My daughter-in-law took them to a photo studio and had them take their pictures. They are making themselves up as Samurai. Recently it's quite popular in Japan for a photo studio to prepare several costumes to lend to kids when they take memorial pictures of kids. Actually they are wearing the uniforms of the Samurai group, Shinsengumi. Shinsengumi was the group which was flourishing to protect the Shogun at the end of the Edo, the last period of the Samurai. Japan had not been trading with foreign countries during the Edo era but finally an American battleship visited the port near Edo and forced the Shogun to open the port. There was a big controversy among the people and they were fighting with each other. There were two strong opinions. One of them was that Japan should have been governed not by the Shogun but by the Emperor, amid continued national isolation. The other was that the Shogun had to keep governing the country while opening up trade with the world. Shinsengumi was one of the strongest groups belonging to the latter. Eventually, after a lot of arguments, the Shogun returned the power to the Emperor and decided to obey American demands. Shinsengumi was a kind of loser but they have become popular these days because of their TV drama. I'm sure the kids can't understand the history but they look brave raising their swords.



✚ A white ball

2008,5,8



What do you think it is?  
Is it a boiled egg?  
No, it tastes sweet.

From what is it made?

If I answer this question, you can guess the answer easily.

Where can I buy it, at the super market near my house?

I don't know. It depends on the store. I bought this one at a kind of exclusive grocery in a station building.

Is it a popular souvenir from Hokkaido? Now I get it. I've heard about this milk pudding produced in Hokkaido.

Yes, exactly! It's a milk pudding that looks like a boiled egg. It looks very natural. It's made from very rich milk and pushed into a balloon. Cool it in a refrigerator and just before eating it, stick it with a sharp toothpick. The balloon which covered the pudding is broken and the smooth pudding appears. It was so cute that I hesitated to eat it for a little while.



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Have you ever heard of the name Akiane? My New Zealander friend talked about her and gave me her website. She is a thirteen-year-old American prodigy for both painting and writing poems. I was so surprised about her in two respects when I first read the article on the website. In one respect of course about her gorgeous paintings which are very religious and realistic. In another respect she was born in Mount Morris in Illinois, where I first stayed in an American house for one week. My host family told me a lot about the small town, whose population was only three thousand. They never told me about the genius girl who seemed to have been quite famous in America according to the website. Her parents were atheists and she was born in a community of such people. She disappeared for a while and when she went back to her home, she told them that she had been in Heaven. Now all of them believe in God by accepting her strong impression.

Anyway I'm sure the innocent looking girl must be a sensitive talented artist.

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## My vacation

2008,5,6



I'm so sorry that I couldn't send you an e-mail for over one month. As I told you via Skype, I suddenly became busy because I transferred to a new office which is very far from my house. Today is the last day of the four holidays in a row. From the end of April to the beginning of May we have four national holidays and we call these days the Golden Week. The weather is fine so it's suitable to enjoy a vacation. Yes, I visited your home during Golden Week just three years ago. This year I visited my first son's family in Nagoya, which is between Tokyo and Osaka, and my mom in Osaka. I would like to tell you about my vacation there. My son purchased a used condo at the end of February and the renovation was completed at the end of April. His family, including my two grandsons, moved to the new house just before. I visited there the day before yesterday by bullet train, Shinkansen, which you have ridden in Japan. The house was good but very messy because they hadn't enough time to put the rooms in order. While my daughter-in-law was cleaning up the house, my son and I took the two naughty kids to the park where kids can ride bicycles, tricycles and go-karts for free. My four-year old grandson was so excited that he was riding a bicycle around the park. He learned to ride a bicycle without training wheels just one month ago. Eventually he bumped against a boy who was walking and looked to be the same age. The two of them tumbled on the ground and we were so surprised. Fortunately they were completely safe but I was exhausted to be running after two active kids. I stayed in his house for one night and we drove to my mom's house the next morning. When we arrived at her condo, my 89-year-old mother was waiting for us in front of the door. The two kids began to run towards her on the long corridor as soon as they saw her. My elder sister, who is living with my mom, prepared delicious Sushi for lunch. The kids were also excited to look around the strange house. We spent a pleasant and uproarious time with the kids and said goodbye to my mom and sister at three thirty because I wanted to get the bullet train at seven twenty-two from Nagoya Station. It was supposed to take at the longest three hours to arrive at the station from Osaka by car. As my mom is a very impatient and worrywart old woman, she urged us to leave her house earlier so as not to be late for the train. We drove smoothly at first but there was a traffic jam on the way to Nagoya. Thanks to her advice, I barely caught the train due to the traffic jam.

Have a good day and could you talk with me again through Skype with a webcam?

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### **The very convenient lesson**

2008,5,4



It has been one and a half years since I began to take lessons through Skype from that school. Their concept is comfortable, convenient and cost-efficient. I think it's true. At first we have to register ourselves on the website of the school. After receiving a registration number, we can deposit money into their bank account and eight hundred yen. There is a calendar and a table which is made up of teachers' names and a timetable on the website. We can click the space in which we want to take a lesson. That's all we have to do to make a reservation. Before the reservation we should boot up Skype and wait for the call from the teacher. Let's begin the lesson! If we can't take a lesson due to another business, we can cancel the lesson on the website. It's free three hours before the start of the lesson and it costs a half fee to cancel within three hours before the lesson time. After the reserved time we should pay the full fee. They send our statements by e-mail around the fourth of every month. We can pay money anytime so we don't incur extra charge. I don't remember exactly now but I think they didn't require a registration fee before starting the lessons. I'm satisfied with this system because it's easy to reserve and pay the fee and I can choose a teacher by myself.

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### **A welcome party**

2008,5,3



The following was my speech at the welcome party of my new office which took place last Wednesday at the local pub. When I first came here, I was really impressed with the magnificent and big Mt. Fuji. The widely opened view surrounded with mountains on three sides from the window of the cafeteria on the fifth floor comforted my mind. I'm appreciating working with you, extremely able colleagues, in such good circumstances. Let's drink a toast to our active everyday lives! Cheers!

## ✚ Introducing myself

2008,5,2



I have a lot of duties such as an accounts officer, a conversational administrative prompter, a human rights promoter and so on, but I realize that the most important responsibility of mine is to make the official circumstances easy to work. I'll try to do my best to make it happen. Now I'm living easily with only my husband but I have relatives far from my house. My eighty-nine year old mother is living in Osaka and I have to visit her once every two months. I'm worried that she would dote and forget me. My first son, who is already married, is working in Nagoya and I would like to visit his family at least once a month. I don't want my two grandsons to forget me. What's more my second son is living in San Francisco. I would like to visit him once every three months but I know it's impossible. However I want to travel in the U.S. during the summer holidays. When I'm absent from the office, please guess that I'm staying at one of those places. Anyway I hope I will work agreeably with you here.



## ✚ a mountain climbing

2008,5,1



I feel pain in my hip and leg, especially the calves because I climbed a mountain with my friend the day before yesterday. I got up at four thirty to prepare a boxed lunch whose main item was rice

balls. Then I left my house at five fifty to go to the rendezvous; the station which was near the mountain. We went to the hillside of the mountain by cable car and began to climb it on foot. I'm sorry it was cloudy so we couldn't see the beautiful scenery from the top of the mountain but it was still comfortable to eat lunch in the lovely cool breeze. I belonged to a mountain climbing club at university but I have not had many opportunities to climb mountains after graduating from university. Now climbing mountains is very popular among middle aged people. Since I bought a collapsible stick, I would like to use it many times.



### Practice sentences

2008,6,30



They couldn't help stopping studying English when they had babies. They postponed the event due to the bad weather. Most of the attendees were delayed because of the traffic jam. I decided to remodel our out-of-date house. Many politicians hold fund-raising parties before elections. We have to make detailed specifications before we put the work out to contract. Please verify these figures again before printing them. The building is near completion. Last-minute shoppers can usually get fresh food cheaply. I had trouble completing this job. Our office is currently closed. I bought several red roses at the florist on the corner. Would you mind placing an order via the Internet? Don't hesitate to make an inquiry. We appreciate your patronage.

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### ✚ Education

2008,6,29



This is a black and white picture of a classroom. Three women students are sitting at the desks and the woman teacher is writing A, B, C on the chalkboard. By comparison they look a little bit

older than me, because when I was a student, we used a tape-recorder system to study English. Regarding school uniform, as a mother I think it's very helpful because we need not use so much money to buy clothes to our kids. Many high schools and junior high schools usually have school uniforms in Japan. When I was a student, the discipline about uniforms was strict, but recently it seems to be milder. I met a lot of girls who put on make up even though they wear uniforms. I know in the U.S. they don't generally have school uniforms, but in commonwealth countries they have them. Schools in the U.S. rather respect the freedom of students, right? In our area a class size of 13-year-old students is about 40. It's quite big and in my opinion it's hard for teachers to educate all the students fairly. Have you ever heard of the a word of 'monster parents'? I think it's probably Japanese English. It means parents who always complain about teachers, school policies, the treatment of their own kids and so on, even though they don't pay fees for school lunch. It is said nowadays that such parents are increasing in Japan. How about worldwide? Concerning co-education, I think it's better than single-sex education because there are males and females in the world and we should learn how our opposite gender think about many things from when we are little. I recommended that my sons should study at co-educational high schools. Concerning punishment, teachers can't inflict physical punishment on students even though their behavior is very terrible. If teachers hit students, teachers should be punished by the board of education. I think education is facing a crisis.

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## A potential benefit and drawback

2008,6,27



The solar battery car

It will decrease air pollution and save our limited natural resource; oil. On the other hand it must cost much more than a gasoline car because we have to make capital investment to create solar energy.

Cloning technology

If we use it to make a cloned cow and a chicken, it might help human beings from hunger but if it is used to create human beings, God must get angry with us. If we use such technology to create internal organs, it might become a very useful and a great means to an end for us.

Five students group lesson of NOVA

As a short term benefit NOVA might save their costs but they will lose potential students in the long term. It's very inconvenient and there is not enough time to speak sufficiently for each

student. Now I have points from old NOVA and can get lessons cheaply so I take lessons reluctantly. Many students are obliged to study at NOVA because they we don't want to waste their points. However when I've used all my points, I'm sure I will quit NOVA.

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### A sect and a cult

2008,6,25



Does a sect mean a small religious group which belongs to a traditional and organized religion like Buddhism or Christianity? I know there are several sects such as Shingon and Tendai in Buddhism,so the shape of temples and the sutras are a little bit different from each other. A cult is a new and small religious group which forces their members in a kind of ridiculous way to pray and brainwashes them. It's not organized enough and needs to collect members and money. It usually forces its members to try to introduce their friends and family to the group and donate money to the cult group. Oumu was a typical cult group and they killed a lot of innocent people in the subway by using sarin,a deadly poison, over ten years ago in Japan. Their leader Asahara was arrested and now he is on trial. In my opinion it's our basic right to be able to believe in any religion. A cult shouldn't be banned unless it commits crimes.

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### The return from Europe

2008,6,22



When I woke up, the plane was near Korea. I ate Korean style lunch and transferred to a plane to Narita in Japan.

I finally came home from my nine-day-trip in London and Barcelona at around eleven p. m. All around my trip had been fine, even though I didn't expect London to be fair weather. When I arrived at Narita airport, I noticed it was raining. Actually it's the rainy season now in Japan. As soon as we reached our house, we emptied our bags quickly, took a shower and went to bed. As I had jet lag, I couldn't fall asleep until three a.m. Anyway I'm fine and have to go to the office tomorrow.

 **Barcelona 5**

2008,6,21



June 21st

Today we have to say goodbye to Spain and go back to Japan via London and Soule. We have to leave the hotel at 11:00 am. Since we didn't know if we would visit Barcelona someday again or not, we decided to visit as many famous viewsites there as possible. We had never been to the new urban district where there was another residence of Guell who was the patron of Gaudi. We couldn't go in there but one tourist group, probably from another European country, visited there by tour bus. We were looking at the colorful roof and the outer walls made of bricks and broken tiles. We ate a late breakfast at a local bakery, which was cheap and delicious and then went back to the hotel. We saw my son eating breakfast at the cafeteria and said goodbye. Today was the last day of Sonar and he had to perform the shadow play four times again. We went to the airport by subway and train and got the plane to London safely. The Easy Jet plane arrived at Gatwick on time but unfortunately we had to wait for quite a long time to get our baggage. Easy jet is a kind of bargain airline so problems sometimes happen, right? Not only us but every passenger had to be looking up the sign which said, "Please wait" impatiently. After getting the suitcases, we rushed to the National Express bus stop and I shouted to a driver. "I have to go to Heathrow as soon as possible. Which bus can I get in?" It was the second and the last thrill during our trip to Europe. We were able to get the airplane at Heathrow safely somehow and after eating delicious dinner on the plane, I went to sleep.

 **Barcelona 4**

2008,6,20



June 20th

In the morning we visited Casa Batllo and Casa Mila: both of them were designed by famous architect Gaudi who was born in Catalonia in 1852. At the entrance of Casa Batllo they let us use a small guide phone spoken in Japanese and I could understand how the building was wonderful and symbol of modern architecture. Casa Mila is now used as a cultural space and we appreciated

Japanese Ukiyoe exhibition there. I looked at a lot of Ukiyoe and watched the video which explained Ukiyoe in Japanese. It was also interesting for me to see how they introduced Japanese culture here in Europe. After that we visited the one department store in Spain named El Corte Ingles in front of Catalan Square. The atmosphere there was so bright and all the merchandise looked colorful. It was really Spanish mood. I realized that Spain was a Mediterranean country and people looked like easygoing Californians in the U.S. I couldn't help buying some household goods like salt cellars. It must be good souvenir for Japanese. When I reached the hotel to take a rest like siesta, I found an email from my old friend Masuyo in Japan. It said, "If you are in Barcelona, please visit my Spanish friend who runs her shop named Papirvm, where she sells paper articles in Plaza de San Jaume." I decided to go there because fortunately it seemed to be near Reial Square which I was supposed to visit to see a flamenco show. In San Jaume I couldn't find the store easily. After asking policemen and clerks in an information booth, I could finally visit the store. It was close to the busy square but along a narrow lane. I introduced myself to the owner who looked to be the same age of me. She was very surprised and excited. She gave me a small souvenir and I also bought some bookmarkers from her. My husband took pictures of us and promised that we would see her again someday in Japan. After that we went to the small theater named Los Tarantos to watch flamenco dancing. Regarding the flamenco I was disappointed about it because we couldn't watch a woman dancer. The guitarist, the singer and the man dancer performed but there was no woman dancer. I couldn't imagine such a flamenco show. Anyway it was quite cheap compared with the other dinner shows and we didn't need to book it. If I had had more time in Spain, I would have visited another theater to watch a more gorgeous flamenco show.

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### Barcelona 3

2008,6,19



June 19th

At first we went to Port Olympic and ate breakfast at the open cafeteria, near the seaside, which looks like beaches in California with palm trees. Then we walked to the old town area through Ciutadella Park, Sta.Maria del Mar Church, the Cathedral and Place del Rei. I felt I as if I was in the Middle Ages. Old buildings were standing along the narrow streets. There was a small square in front of the church. A young girl was drawing, sitting on the old stone stairs where Christopher

Columbus went upstairs to see Queen Isabella. There was the World Heritage Site and the music hall near the old Gothic area. We bought a box lunch at the busy market named Saint Josep and walked to the contemporary museum where Sonar Festival took place. Sonar is supposed to be held for three days, from 19th to 21st, and my son performs his puppet and video show four times a day: 13:00, 16:00, 18:00, and 20:00. We watched it twice, 13:00 and 16:00 showings. I was so surprised because there were many spectators even though it was Thursday afternoon. I was glad because many people looked interested in his play. After that we strolled in Las Ramblas: the busiest street in Barcelona near the sea and walked to the monument of Columbus.

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## Barcelona 2

2008,6,18



June 18th

My son is staying in Barcelona to present his shadow play, "Takashi's season", in the art festival named Sonar with his two Japanese friends. They were very busy preparing for the performance. When we started to go sightseeing in the city, they were eating breakfast in the dining room which was next to the lobby. We can't understand the Spanish language which the people speak here in Barcelona. I was a little bit nervous and decided to go to the Temple de la Familia Sagrada, the most famous building there. As soon as we arrive at the subway station, we realized that Barcelona was also a very easy city to look around, the same as London, thanks to the good subway system. Even though we couldn't speak Spanish, we could go anywhere by subway and a map. When we got out of the station, the famous tall towers rose in front of us. It was amazing to see. Many tourists from many countries were taking pictures while looking up at the top of the individual spire. There was a long line in front of the lift which took us to the top of the steeple. While I was waiting for my turn, I talked with a middle aged group from Scotland. The view from the top of the steeple was wonderful and it was scary to go down the stairs from the top. Then we went to Park Guell which was also designed by Gaudi. The park was unique and colorful, too. It was like a fairyland. After taking a nap at the hotel we went to Montjuic Hill where the Olympic Games took place in 1992. The museum building was also magnificent. We ate some traditional Spanish food, paella, at a restaurant while chatting with a couple from Holland.

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June 17th

Today was our last day in London. My husband wanted to go to Abbey Road which is famous for the Beatles. We got off the Tube at Maida Vale and began to walk there. Soon a kind young gentleman whom I asked for directions guided us to the popular zebra crossing. There was a lot of graffiti on the wall of the white Abbey Road Studio and a cleaning man also explained to me how the crossing was famous. After that we returned to the hotel while walking through Little Venice, along the sides of a waterway. After checking out of the hotel, we decided to appreciate the arts at The National Gallery. Strangely there were no Muslim kids, even though we met many school children in the gallery. Probably there were many sacred arts concerning Christianity so it was not a suitable place for them. We visited another popular place, Piccadilly Circus, and found a peculiar fast food restaurant where they sold Japanese food like boxed Sushi. It seemed to be very strange Sushi for real Japanese but looked rather delicious. We missed healthy Japanese food and decided to eat lunch there. On the way to Stanstead Airport we faced a crisis for the first time in London. Actually the very convenient and lovely tube suddenly stopped. All the passengers had to get off the train at the second station from Paddington. Oh, my Gosh!! What should I do if we are delayed for the airplane to Barcelona? Then another kind British middle aged gentleman helped us again. He told me another way to go to Liverpool Street and we arrived at the airport safely on time. We finally arrived in Spain by the cheap airline, Easy Jet and reached the hotel where my son was already staying at 10p.m. We ate a late dinner with him at the restaurant across from the hotel.

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June 16th

Today was also very fine. We visited Kensington Palace where the late Princess Diana was living. On the way to the palace there were many magnificent mansions which seemed to be official residences of foreign ambassadors. The park around the palace was beautiful. The area must have been a high-class residential area. After that we went to the British Museum and Harrods. I saw a lot of school children in the museum and surprisingly there were several Muslim kids who

wore scarves on their heads among every group. I realized that London is also a melting pot like New York. In the famous department store we ate tapas which were the most delicious food we had eaten in London. Now it's 8:30 in the evening but it's still light outside. My husband was exhausted and sleeping. I'm watching the golf program of the U.S championship on TV while writing this diary.

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## London 2

2008,6,15



June 15th

This morning we bought Three Day Travel Cards and at first went to Trafalgar Square. As soon as we began to walk to south, we could see Big Ben and the tall tower of Westminster Abbey and also noticed that there were so many police officers in the area. Actually they were working for security to protect President Bush. Then we walked to Buckingham Palace to see The Changing of the Guard. In the afternoon we visited St. Paul's Cathedral, the Tower of London and Tower Bridge. After getting back to the hotel, we ate fish and chips for dinner. One thing I was very surprised about in London was that the price of food was actually really expensive. It was almost double compared to the price in Tokyo. I'm sorry but it was not so delicious. Even I would say it was tasteless. Anyway we had a good time in London. The policemen and the people I asked for directions were very kind. The policeman who was watching the spectators while riding on horseback in front of the palace was very witty. "Don't climb on the railings. The Queen is watching people from the window and might be worried about you. Anybody might fall down from railings."

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## London 1

2008,6,14



June 14th

I'm safe in London now though my trip here was quite hard and took about 24 hours from Narita to the hotel, The Royal Park, in London. I finally arrived at Heathrow Airport through Incheon in Seoul. I transferred in Incheon to Heathrow. It was easy for us to find a train, the Heathrow

Express, to Paddington and the Hotel which my son had booked for three nights for us through the Internet. We checked in at the hotel about 7:30 pm but it was still light in London. We took a walk in Hyde Park which was close to the hotel and then fell asleep in the hotel.

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✚ 7

2008,6,13



They run the bus every twenty minutes. Please call me anytime in your spare time. I'm sorry I lost the purchase order but I'm sure I paid two hundred dollars. The locker is filled with office supplies. Should I work on the report or the filing of receipts? Whichever you want. I will present our big decision to our boss. I asked the receptionist where the toilet was. Our Tokyo regional headquarters are in Ginza. I prefer a vinyl bag to a leather one because it's much lighter. The report is due five days later from today. I noticed we are running low on ink. We should prepare an agenda and materials two days before the meeting. You can buy it cheaply at the warehouse. I rented a truck just before he crashed into the house. We have another facility near this store. I made a phone call to my old coworker. I filled out the paperwork at the information desk. We postponed the field day due to rain. Most of the attendees were late for the meeting because of the train delays.

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✚ 6

2008,6,10



When I entered the office, the attorney was on the phone. I ordered my staff to tidy her desk because the documents were piled up on it. To scrub pots required a lot of energy. Many passengers were waiting in line without complaining. I'm busy now because I'm preparing to deliver a presentation. How soon will she come back? I drove to the headquarters along the expressway to save time. The district supervisor is coming here three days later after today. What's the price of the piece of furniture? Have you ever heard who will take over after I retire?

✚ **An accidental meeting**

2008,6,9



Today I attended a party where thirty six people had gathered at the beer hall. It was a kind of business party and workers who belonged to thirteen organizations in the same area participated in it. As soon as we had toasted, one middle aged national government employee came to me and spoke to me. "I've met you before. You live in T town, don't you?" "Well, when and where did I meet you? I'm sorry I can't remember exactly." "At the English conversation caff. When I saw you at the meeting, I was not sure. After I heard your voice, I was convinced that that woman had been you." "Yes, now I recall you. What a surprise! Do you often go there?" Anyway it was really a coincidence to meet him again there.

✚ **Hillary Clinton**

2008,6,8



The Senator Hillary Clinton acknowledged her defeat and declared her support for Barack Obama. I heard her speech on TV. She is a really strong woman and her address was very majestic. It didn't seem to be the address of the loser. She said that there was still a glass ceiling in American society but many votes for her had cracked it. As a woman, I'm sorry that she couldn't overcome it. There is a discrimination against blacks as well as women. Her supporters should change their minds and stand by Obama. I don't know if she will be a candidate for Vice President. There might be a lot of expectations and diplomacy among the politicians. I could partly hear her own speech on a Japanese news TV program and she spoke so slowly and clearly that I could catch her almost perfectly. Anyway we will be able to see her speech through YouTube and read the manuscript on the websites soon. By the way I heard about the words "glass ceiling" for the first time about two years ago at an English conversation class. It means an invisible barrier within an organization or society that prevents minorities, especially women, from being promoted. The civil rights movement was active in the sixties and about 10 years later from that time the women's movement became strong in the seventies. After having an African American President, the time for a woman President must come true.



The residents tried to restore the old ruined castle to attract visitors. Then they extended the road to the castle. The September issue of the magazine featured their efforts. The Mayer acted the pivotal role among them. The construction will be done in phases. Don't judge people from their exteriors. They opened a shop on the premises. The problem was coincidental with the renovation. They solicited contributions from people all over the country. She is one of the noteworthy women in this city. Mary was the notable student in our school. He routinely left the office at six and went missing. I savored the expensive coffee. He confessed that he stole money from the lady. Nobody anticipated such a sharp decline in the birth rate. The machine is in operation at seven a.m. This is a tentative password so please change it as soon as possible. I informed the police of the truth. A grocery store means a store where we can buy culinary ingredients. I have a voucher valid for a half year which I can use at bookstores. The department store is famous for its quality. She is an eligible woman for being the first lady. I have a ticket for the world premiere of the new musical. He is a prominent singer in Japan. We've made noticeable progress. I hit my head against the shelf that protrudes from a wall.



Today's big topic in Japan is a problem with Izakaya taxis: a lot of bureaucrats had been given canned beers and snacks by the taxi drivers. Some of them also received coupon tickets. When I glanced at the headline of this news, I couldn't understand what it meant. Japanese bureaucrats were very busy and they go home after midnight almost every night. Trains are not running so they usually go home by taxi. Probably a lot of taxis are waiting for them in front of the governmental buildings near the Diet House. One night one of the drivers served a canned beer to the officer who looked very tired. "Oh, you look so tired. Please drink this beer and take a rest." "Thanks, you are very tactful. I will catch you again tomorrow night. Wait for me at the corner of the building." The rumor spread among the drivers immediately and many drivers began to serve canned beer in their taxis. The practice soon took off. The young officer said that he thought it was a service offered by the driver and didn't realize it was a kind of scandal. It happened only in Kasumigaseki, the Japanese government office area.



4

2008,6,5



Shinnitetsu is the most dominant steel company in Japan. The railroad company renewed its entire fleet. Where is the destination of the airplane? The city hall approved the big redevelopment. There are a lot of tourist attractions in the old town. He evaluated her achievement. It is necessary to take pictures of the restration to keep a lasting impression. It's difficult for untrained employees to complete them quickly. The house is in dire need of being rebuilt because of its oldness. There is a wall built of bricks near the river to stop corrosion. The neighbors remark that it is dangerous.



3

2008,6,4



Specifically speaking, he is not so smart. My diary is in print. He contributed a report to a newspaper. This novel was written by a noted author. She is eligible to become a manager. The excellent play culminated in the finale. We appreciated several masterpieces in the museum. My membership of the tennis club will expire next month. I received the invoice for the books from the store. When is the rain date of the picnic? Don't disregard preferred customers if you want to do good business. Now that the present plan has failed, let's go over another idea. Please send me an e-mail for more information. I saw a strange figure in the dark. The theater was filled to capacity. An accomplished carpenter built our house. My itinerary of my European trip was changed due to the bad weather. At first please pay the deposit if you order items through the Internet. Then we will ask you to pay the balance due. As this book is really entertaining, you should read it at least once. The area is too arid to produce a bumper harvest. The folklorist investigated the old people on the island. He has a lot of interesting anecdotes. The reporter covered the mysterious incident. This is an engrossing movie.



Can I take your lesson at 8:00 tomorrow evening instead of Thursday? I have to work overtime on Thursday. To memorize a lot of words concerning business society is a high priority to get a high score. He failed repeatedly to persuade customers to make contracts with his company. I previously worked as a secretary. Taking a bus is the preferred way to go downtown. The police reviewed the murder case. He resumed playing golf after he recovered his health. The new machine needs to be repaired at the end of the day tomorrow. You can use an exclusive bathroom by yourself. Speaking English fluently is essential if you want to work in London. She is an eligible woman as a manager. It's highly probable that she will get married with Tom. This is an advisable way to appease her. He is a potential scientist. She nodded approvingly. I'm entitled to check a lot of classified information. I got a replacement for the broken radio. Please let me know your affiliation.

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We must obtain permission from our personal manager before taking a day off. As your associate I want to give you useful advice. Please feel free to have a complimentary beverage. I will still remain in my hometown even if it has declined. A majority marked either crosses or circles to answer the survey. She is the most reliable person among them. You have a chance to attend the workshop during this year. He assured his colleagues that he could get through the job by himself. He owns the accounting firm. Don't open the door until you are notified otherwise. I received a pen-written manuscript from the elderly lady. The deadline will be delayed due to the unforeseen accident. The chief officer will issue a statement concerning the solution. We have to accept several conditions to merge with the big company. We should avoid the mutual distrust in order to continue our married life. We enjoyed a momentary rest. The magazine featured the current incidents. Receipt of the order should be expected in five days.

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Today I went to Yotsuya to take the volunteer interpreter examinations. I'd never been there even though it's one of the most famous place-names in Tokyo. Yotsuya reminds Japanese of the famous ghost story written in 1825; in the Edo era. Now there is no atmosphere of the horrible ghost story in Yotsuya, where there is a big church and a Catholic university. Anyway I entered the small building of the English language school and took two types of examination. In the morning they held the easier type of test called B class and in the afternoon the difficult type was carried out. They are kind of minor tests which the Japanese Interpreter Association promotes. Each test was composed of two parts; a reading part and a listening part and takes about two hours. I had to concentrate on the tests for two hours twice. It was hard work and now I'm worn out. However, as I was satisfied with my effort, I decided not to worry about the results.

## Awaodori

2008,7,31



Awaodori is one of the Japanese folk dances for the summer festival. Many dancers walk around town while dancing in a group. It was originally a dance from Awa, the present Tokushima prefecture, as the name is taken it, but nowadays a lot of local towns hold festivals for that dance to activate them. In fact the town where our office is located has its Awaodori festival every September and workers from our prefectural building make the group and participate in it. The other day they looked for participants and I applied for the dance team. The recruiting guy and I will attend the festival in September and from tomorrow we're going to practice after work in the humid weather. It will be hard work but I want to enjoy it.



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# ✦ From my NOVA lesson

2008,7,30



Today I went to Odawara NOVA which was opened about two months ago. I transfer train in Odawara from the Tokaido line to the Odakyu line every day and found that they open a new branch there recently. Nowadays it's really hard for me to book TV lessons so I decided to also take lessons at school. It has been a long time since I took the last lessons at a school. Anyway, I would like to review today's lessons. An advantage of a big shopping center is of course that we can purchase various kinds of merchandise cheaply compared to a small local shop. As a housewife who has to make ends meet on her husband's salary, I would say the cheaper the better. On the other hand a disadvantage of it is that it might actually hurt a local business. I believe that a lot of family owned stores will be forced to close and the people will lose their jobs. Do you think acupuncture is effective for a cold? I don't think so. I hear the cause of a cold is a virus. How do they get rid of viruses by using needles? I'm sure it can cure muscle pain because actually I tried it twice when I had stiff shoulders. From my experience, only taking rest and sleeping like a log are effective to cure a cold. Now Yoga is in great vogue, especially hot Yoga which is when people practice Yoga in a humid room like sauna bath. People sweat a lot and they say the sweat detoxifies their bodies.



### What happened on my first day at a language school?

2008,7,29



I clearly remember my first experience at a language school. I was so nervous and I stood up and try to bow when an Australian teacher entered the classroom. This is a Japanese respectable attitude for strangers. It's my unconscious custom to stand up to salute. The teacher seemed a little bit surprised and stopped me to bow. I was ashamed of my behavior and upset more and more. Nearly four years have passed since that time. I miss these days. I soon became friends with teachers from Australia, America and England. I had good time there. The school went bankrupt and the school was closed. All of them went back to their home countries and there is a real estate agent office instead of NOVA in the building.



### My memory

2008,7,28



What happened on my first day at a language school?

I clearly remember my first experience at the language school. I was so nervous and I stood up and tryied to bow when the Australian teacher entered the classroom. This is the respectable attitude of Japanese for strangers. It's my unconscious custom to stand up to greet someone. salute. The teacher seemed a little bit surprised and stopped me from bowing. I was ashamed of my behavior and became more and more. Upset. Nearly four years have passed since that time. I miss those days. I soon became friends with teachers from Australia, America and England. I had good times there. The company which runs the school went bankrupt and then the school was closed. All of them went back to their home countries and there is a real estate agent office instead of NOVA in the building.



### The TOEIC test

2008,7,27



Today I went to a women's university to first take the TOEIC test. Now this test is the most popular and important test for Japanese who are studying English. I took the test among a lot of young people. There is no age limit for this test but I'm sure I was the oldest in the classroom. It's made up of two hundred questions: one hundred listening parts and one hundred questions for the reading part. We have to solve the listening questions in forty-five minutes and then the reading question in seventy-five minutes. Just imagine that you focus on the test for two hours. It's very hard work for every person, especially for middle aged people like me. It needs not only good English knowledge but also physical power. I couldn't solve all the questions but it's OK with me.

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## Kimono

2008,7,26



The Japanese folk costume is Kimono but the people hardly wear Kimono in their daily lives. Actually when I attended the school reunion last Saturday, only one lady among over one hundred participants was wearing Kimono. Why don't Japanese people wear Kimono so much nowadays? I'm convinced it's because it's inconvenient and expensive. It's difficult to wear Kimono by myself and it's not effectual. Especially during the summer time it's too hot to wear Kimono. It's tight and we can't wash Kimono at home. The washing fee at a laundry is also very high. How can I promote people to wear Kimono? In my opinion we have to change some disadvantages of Kimono to make them more handy to use. For example I have to consider changing materials, from real silks to synthetics. I wonder if we could make a one-piece style Kimono and ready-made Obi : a belt which we use to wear Kimono. Anyway we have to respect our traditions and try to make more opportunities to wear Kimono.

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## Japan's 62,000 dying communities

2008,7,24



This is one of the headlines of the Times online. I think it means that the population of many towns and villages in rural areas in Japan is ageing and decreasing. There are no industries where young people can work in the countryside so they have to seek jobs in urban areas. The local

governments are trying to promote industries to activate their small towns but it seems too difficult to succeed. However in my opinion it's not a trend only in Japan but also in many countries all around the world. The population density is very big in Tokyo but I heard the population concentration in Seoul in Korea is much more than in Tokyo in Japan. When I was staying in New Zealand they said there were many small villages where only a few people were living. In big cities real estate is so expensive that it's not comfortable to live there. It's an ideal that inhabitants decentralize all over Japan. .

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### The result notifications

2008,7,23



I have some news: one is good and another is a little bit unlucky. As I wrote before I took two kinds of volunteer interpreter examinations in June: the easier one was a B test and the more difficult one was an A test. I passed the B test with a high score and failed in the A test with just one step away from a pass. Actually the results are the same as I expected after I took the tests. The Interpreter Association which offers the examinations publishes a newspaper twice a year and they asked me to write about my experiences: how to study English to pass the B test. Anyway I'm glad that I finally got a qualification concerning English.

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### busy three days

2008,7,21



Just before I came home from Osaka and Nagoya, the two big cities in Japan. I attended the school reunion of my high school. Over one hundred old boys and girls gathered at the hotel in Osaka and reminisced about the old school days and talked about our recent news. There were many schoolmates with whom I had never spoken at the party even though we spent three years in the same school long ago. One of them was Ms. S who now lives in the same condo as my mother. One of our common friends let me know that she was living there and we went back to the condo together. I went to Osaka with my old friend named Ms. I, who was living near my parents' house when we were high school girls in Osaka and is now living near my present house in Kanagawa. My first son and her two children graduated from the same high school and what's

more her daughter and my second son graduated from the same university. Her grandsons are living in Nagoya and my grandsons are living there, too. There are so many coincidences between her and me. Both of us were wearing pant suits and eye glasses in the train, but she told me that she wanted to change her eye glasses to contact lenses before entering the reception hall because she wanted to look younger. I was a little bit surprised because I was thinking the same thing and kept my contact lenses in my purse. At the beginning of the party a famous archaeologist, who was our classmate, gave a lecture. I think he was an ordinary boy at that time, not an excellent student. He also introduced himself as having failed to pass the entrance examination of K University but now he is a professor of that famous university. Many unlikely truths happen in our real lives and it's interesting. Anyway he is a nice guy and told us that he observed the research in foreign countries and tried it in Japan earlier than anybody else. It was the secret of his success. The next day I spent all day long with my mother and did housework in her house. In the morning of the following day I went to Nagoya and had a good five hours with my son's family.

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#### the Akutagawa Award

2008,7,17



A Chinese woman, who first came to Japan at the age of twenty-two, decided to receive the Akutagawa Award approximately twenty years after she arrived. It's the most authoritative award for novelists, which originates from one of the most famous authors in modern Japan. Recently the number of foreign novelists who write their stories in Japanese are increasing, but she will be the first foreign person to receive this canonical honor.

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#### 5

2008,7,16



Cars need a periodic check to drive safely in Japan. The pupils in this school are excellent on average. You had better remove the deposit in the bottom of the bottle before you drink it. She accumulated enough money to purchase the condo by herself. They will dispense the new legislation to ban smoking by next year. The room is equipped with a TV set and a computer. I will

not call you again other than an emergency. I will specify the details in an e-mail. You can inquire about the information of the event at the reception. I adjusted the chair to my height. He chose her to be his assistant. She indicated that she would get married with Tom. I will give a lecture on behalf of our association. They are discussing legislation which prohibits citizens from smoking in public places. There are more boys than girls in the proportion of three to two. It costs a substantial amount of money. They finally lifted martial law. I rubbed my ankle to relieve a pain.

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### The rumor of the first ladies

2008,7,15



The G 8 summit finished and now it's time for many magazines to write comments about the eight politicians and their wives. Today I read an article about the wives' fashion sense and their personalities. At first our first lady, Mrs. Fukuda, was a suitable lady as the hostess. She was always smiling and modest. What's more she is good at speaking English and tall compared with the ordinary Japanese women. She was supposed to become a flight attendant and visited old Prime Minister Fukuda, the father of the present Prime Minister, to ask for his support for getting a job for the airlines. As soon as his wife saw her she liked her and asked her to become her son's wife. The young Mrs. Fukuda decided to get married instead of being a flight attendant. After a long time she became the first lady of Japan. They say Mrs. Bush was magnificent and overpowered the other first ladies. The only one bad thing was her scarf. It looked like high school girls' fashion but actually she was too old to wear such a scarf. The Russian wife wore a gorgeous dress but it was kind of oldish with a sense of nouveau rich. When we saw her clothing, we couldn't help recognizing that Russia was not yet a developed country. The reputation of the famous French singer was the worst. She suddenly canceled her visit to Japan due to preparing for her new CD. This is kind of gossip but more interesting than political commentary.

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### About charity

2008,7,14



Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime. I think this is an unerring proverb. In the short term, to donate food, clothes and money to needy people

is effective, whereas in the long term we should educate people to give them the abilities to earn money by themselves. If I subscribe to charities, I prefer to donate money to a local group rather than an international organization, because I can closely check the progress of the activity. Anyway I want to know how my donation will be used to help people so I would like to select a reliable brand organization like the Red Cross.

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✚ 4

2008,7,13



It may not be top quality, but you certainly get a bang for your buck. There are so many cleaning appliances at the supermarket that I can't decide which washing machine I should buy. Paintings which Mr. Kuroki drew represent about two fifths of the total. Do you have a memorable memory? Since I couldn't remember her name, I went through the list. I want to extend my contract with you because I noticed that you are a capable secretary. For whom do you think this message was intended? They are trying to restore order after the war. The president authorized him to run the branch. Everybody received a discount certificate from the new shop. They collected and totaled all feedback forms. The portions are too small in Japan for foreigners to be satisfied. We got complimentary samples. The boss has to measure the employees. He listed many answers in descending order. We have to preserve historic sites for our descendant. They rated the land as worth twenty thousand dollars. We enjoyed a superb view in the mountains.

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✚ 3

2008,7,12



He survived in niche marketing. A plumber repaired a water pipe so it was in working order. We can do nothing without the sanction of my boss. Merger and acquisition are increasing in the industrial world. The possibility of his promotion is remote. The merchandise was damaged in transit. I have to take a contrary position on the proposal. She needs an associate manager for her business because it has been too busy to run by herself. She requires a dynamic individual who will help her. He is a superb, smart worker with computer literacy. This bridge needs some reinforcement. The cell phone has the function of sending e-mail. Money is due to him for his

hard work. We have a lot of customs peculiar to Japan. We had a resounding success in the competition. Her effort contributed to their success. I made my house available to the neighbors who wanted to communicate with each other. I'm inclined to take his advice. This contract is not involved with any third party. The restaurant features French cuisine and wine tasting. Guests are reminded that some services on the premises are extra. .

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2008,7,11



This watch is more accurate than that. She is a really reliable teacher. These documents should be kept in a storage facility. The company is looking for an excellent auditor. We double checked the report in every detail. He opened a new dealership of the popular maker for the first time in this town. She exerted herself to prepare for a party at home. The competent lawyer represented our office in court. ABC Co. has never experienced any delays in delivery. Do you have a scale to weigh a letter? We have to check every component to repair the radio. The applicants will be more numerous than the last time.

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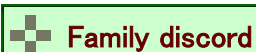


2008,7,9



They sell assemblies for radio sets at the supermarket. This cloth is very cheap because of a small imperfection. These vegetables are produced without fertilizer. She has a prior claim to the prize. It is valid for the one-week period. They say the date of issue of the letter will be two days after tomorrow. Nobody anticipated such a result.

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2008,7,8



Family discord means a battle among relatives, especially siblings. So many family discords are

likely to happen after their parents pass away or get old enough to be cared for. Why do they argue with each other even though they were close and friendly in their childhood? I think elder sisters and brothers have been thinking that they are much stronger and cleverer than their younger siblings and tend to treat them arrogantly after they become adults. Regarding the inheritance their interests are opposed. We say blood is richer than water but we also say that siblings are the first strangers. As the youngest sister I'm fed up with my first sister's pressure, her selfishness and self-satisfaction, even though I appreciate her kindness to our mother.

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#### **Business improvement order**

2008,7,7



The other day the Japanese government issued a business improvement order to some life insurance offices due to nonpayment of insurance. If we have life insurance and get ill, they have to cover all of the objects. I mean, according to the contract, they have to pay everything that the contract includes. If it included travel expenses to the hospital, they should have payed them but actually they didn't. A few years ago that terrible truth was unveiled and many insurance companies have been investigating the past swindles. Of course it's the companies' fault but it's also the consumers' carelessness. They should have checked the articles of the contracts in detail and demanded full payments. Anyway the agreements are too difficult to understand for ordinary people even if they pay pretty much the insurance premium every month.

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#### **From my NOVA lesson**

2008,7,6



Recently I started to practice Yoga. I was proud of my muscular flexibility but I realized that my muscles are no longer supple owing to my age. I need to stretch and I found a reasonable Yoga school near my house.

I'm in the second position in the small local office and every morning I enter my boss's room to report and discuss several things which happened yesterday. I always ask him politely like "Could I enter now? Would you mind if I interrupted your work now?" After a few seconds I open the door and begin to talk to him.

A boy came home at one thirty. The mother: Why did you come home so late? I have been worried about you. Her son: I'm so sorry mom but it's just that I was studying homework in Tom's house and we were working so hard that I forgot the time? M: Didn't you think about calling me if you couldn't come earlier? You should have given me a call. S: Of course I did. I was trying to call you but the phone was busy. M: You could have tried it again. S: I know. You don't have to get angry now because I promise I will never be out until such a late time anymore.

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### Practice sentences

2008,7,5



Please feel free to ask me any questions. I always note critical points so as not to forget them. The building is near completion. We need efficiency to finish this work by the deadline. A lot of skilled craftspeople are working for the construction company. I mended the rip in my son's jacket with a needle and thread. She is a good-natured nanny. She prevents children from being injured. He relies on agriculture for his livelihood. She has been working under his supervision. I was expected to answer the question quickly. My daughter outgrew her dresses. Her painting had been on display at the gallery. I attended the assembly which took place in the large square. She graduated from a kind of exclusive girls' school and is proud of it. They criticized the exclusivity of the company. He declined to help his co-worker. It's the best commentary concerning the book. This is confidential information so please tell nobody. She finally acquired the ability to speak English.

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### Burger King Ad

2008,7,4



It's a famous website advertisement of the American hamburger company. There is a guy wearing a chicken suit on the page. Under the picture of him there is a small space. As soon as users input some words in the space, the funny guy acts the same motion on the website. The enterprising ad-agency created this original advertisement. I've tried it several times. I wrote "sit down", then the strange man sat down on the sofa. I ordered him to dance then he began to hop.

When I put in a Japanese word, he didn't move anymore. It was a pity!

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## Interview with a politician

2008,7,3



I was wondering if you could tell me how you're planning to help poor wives. I mean how to solve the current issue of domestic violence.

I see. I know it's an urgent problem and it's been increasing rapidly recently. Therefore it's one of my most pressing matters. In fact I had a chance to speak with some female activists who were working for a voluntary shelter. I was very impressed with their brave and self-devotional activities. Yes, I'm trying to open several shelters and reeducate violent husbands. It's important to decrease vulgar men. It's an essential solution.

By the way, let me know how you will reeducate them.

Are you asking me about the method of reeducation? It's a difficult question because domestic violence is a kind of personal matter and we can't intrude on people's privacy.

I'm sorry, but there is a paradox in your answer.

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## Work

2008,7,2



When I was young, I really wanted to become a doctor. It seemed to be respectable and challenging. I thought it must have been wonderful to cure ill people. However, now I think it's a kind of awful job. It must be very hard work because during weekends a doctor has to work if an emergency patient visits a hospital. I hear nowadays many doctors are too busy to take enough rest. What's worse, if patients pass away, some of their relatives may possibly sue doctors for damages. A pilot might look cool but he requires another sense of coolness and calmness. He is responsible for a lot of passengers' lives and needs to be decisive, tough and intelligent. A ballet

dancer looks delicate at first sight but it requires physical strength. Concerning my job, I'm working as a manager for local government. I need only patience. I mean I have to be careful about all the staff and make them motivated. If I scold them, they might lose their morale. I know finishing a job by myself is much easier than having staff work in earnest. I'm originally creative but it's not necessary for my present job at all. My job needs only patience and sometimes decisiveness. If I were young, I would like to be a designer of dresses. To create new fashion must be joyful but I know that to be a successful designer needs not only creativeness but also excellent talent.

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✦ 2

2008,7,1



She is an accomplished master needle worker. A plumber visited my house to clean the clogged pipe. All of us appreciate his contribution to our society. We should be kind to an apprentice from a foreign country because he can't understand the language and isn't accustomed to his new circumstances. Please check the new information on the bulletin board. She goes to the hospital periodically to have a health check. He has worked so hard to expand his business that he will open his fifth store today. She has really sleek hair. Her dress is outdated in spite of being sold at an exclusive boutique. He tried to touch base with his clients even when he was abroad. Do you need a new revision of the report? I'm sure I will make it on time. I recommend you this information. At first we passed out materials at the conference. Please feel free to ask me any questions. I always note critical points not to forget them.

**An art event**

2008,8,31



Today I went to central Tokyo to listen to my son's lecture at an annual event concerning arts. Three artists and two groups were invited from abroad to the event to present. My son was the first presenter and explained about his profile, works and American advertising world while showing pictures on the screen. It was interesting even for me; I finally understood how he made efforts to create his works. He always take a note of his ideas which appear in his mind and he sketches over and over again on to the notebook. After my son, a pair of Japanese architects who work in London explained about their collaborations. An American artist, who writes large calligraphy on a wall using laser beam, followed them. He spoke about his works and his partner

who weren't able to make it to Japan. Actually he was supposed to present with his partner but he was arrested in Beijing when his partner and his friend wrote "Free Tibet" on the wall near the Olympic stadium. The partner is free now but he was in prison for several days. While his partner was under the investigation, the presenter got married in Costa Rica. When he showed two contrasting pictures on the screen, over five hundred audiences laughed. I enjoyed their speeches but it was already five o'clock because each presenter spoke for an hour. I decided to leave without auditing the other two speeches. I said good-bye to my son and left the event. My son came back to Japan the day before yesterday and will go back to America tomorrow from a hotel in Tokyo. He is heading back to San Francisco but shortly after, he is going to leave to Austria to attend another conference. I wish him to take care not to be ill and enjoy busy days.



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#### Expressions about weather

2008,8,30



The Olympic is over. The winners of the events seem to depend on races. I mean black people are really good sprinters and they possess superior strength over other races. On the other hand, long distance runners require endurance more than strength and hence Asian and Caucasian can

equally compete with them. About the Olympic Games, three of six Japanese marathon runners injured their legs or/and feet; they weren't able to finish the races. They probably over-trained and injured themselves. Why coaches did not take care of their conditions? It is rumored that the regretful results are their fault. ++They blame the failure on parties concerned the track and field.++

Expression about the weather

The weather has been terrible for over ten days in Japan; flood occurred in the several areas. Actually there was an awful thunderstorm in my town last night. I couldn't sleep well because of howling wind and the roar of thunder. The following is some phrases which express weather: "It's pouring outside. It's raining cats and dogs. It drizzled all day. It's still spitting. The rain is dying down. The wind picked up. I'm soaked due to a heavy rain. She is feeling under the weather. It means that she doesn't feel well. She is ill. He always has his head in the clouds. It has the meaning of "He is always thinking impractical matters or he has a thick head."

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✚ the regrettable results

2008,8,29



The Olympic Games was over. The forte events seem to depend on races. I mean black Africans are really good short distance sprinters and they have special spring power which the other races don't have. On the other hand, long distance runners require staying power more than spring power so Asians and whites can equally fight with them. Regarding this Olympic Games, three of six Japanese marathon runners had troubles on their legs and feet and couldn't finish the races. They must have been training so hard that they finally injured themselves. Why couldn't coaches check their bodies? It is said that the regrettable results are their fault. They blame the failure on parties concerned the track and field.

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✚ Dear Monte,

2008,8,28



Thank you for letting me know about the Burger King's funny advertisement. I already know this

site because my son was working for the advertising agency in Col. that created this advertisement. The company's name is Crispin Porter and Bogusky and he was working there for seven months. Shortly after, he changed his job to the company located in San Francisco since they offered one and a half times more salary than the Crispin Porter and Bogusky. In Japan, Mc. Donald's is quite popular and outnumbers Burger Kings. Burger Kings opened numbers of shops few years ago but they were forced to retreat because they were unpopular. Last year they reinstated their business in Japan however the outcome remained same. I don't know why Japanese people prefer Mc Donald's over Burger King. Is it due to the taste or/and the price? Anyway, thank you for sending me an e-mail. Have a good day.

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#### **Medical insurance**

2008,8,27



Our national health insurance system is facing crisis due to the increase in the number of senior citizen. Senior citizen tend to be more susceptible to illness and need a substantial amount of treatments; hence the budget for health insurance is being overspent. For instance, the general public used to be responsible for ten percent of the cost for medical treatment, however at the moment, we are responsible for thirty percent of the cost. I am a woman who never really had a serious health problem but last summer I injured my ears during scuba diving. I went to see an otolaryngologist and I was charged over five thousand yen! Although the cost included medication, I was quite surprised by the rapid change of our health insurance coverage.

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#### **The terrible experience**

2008,8,24



I visited my son's house in Nagoya and had a good time with my grandsons. We went to a fruit park and it was completely fine. I wanted to arrive at home not so late because my husband and I had to work the next day. We safely got the bullet train at seven twenty-two as we planned. This train is one of the most convenient trains that stops in Odawara for the next station from Nagoya. I noticed there were delays among the trains bound for Osaka due to a heavy rain between Atami and Odawara, but in the opposite direction, trains for Tokyo ran as usual. Little did

I dream we would come home after midnight. The situation suddenly changed at Sizuoka. The announcement said, "There are a lot of trains between Tokyo and Shinagawa that were delayed, so we have to wait here for a while." Then our train began to run slowly and stopped at Mishima again. "Now it is pouring rain near Atami. The Meteorological Agency issued a heavy rain warning just before. I'm sorry but every train is stopping now. We must apologize for the inconvenience." About one hour later the train began to run slowly again and the conductor explained again, "According to the contact, we allow you to stay in trains at Tokyo during this night and every passengers can receive the refunds of the express fee because of a delay. Every passenger can go to Tokyo if you have tickets for Odawara." The train finally arrived at Odawara at twelve thirty and we got off there. We decided to go home by taxi, even if we had to pay much money, but the last local train was waiting for the passengers from the bullet train. By the way, a group of four Italian tourists were sitting across the aisle from me. I realized that they were Italians because one of them said "Grazie!" to his company. They looked cheerful at first but became very anxious gradually. I found the courage to explain the situation to them in English and they really appreciated my explanation. I told them when I got out of the train, "Take care and please have a good night ... No, tonight is terrible. Have good days in Japan."

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## a dancing festival

2008,8,23



The other day there were terrible lightning and thunderstorm. After that it has been quite cool. I was complaining about hot temperatures, but today I miss such humid days. Yesterday I practiced Japanese folk dancing with my coworkers after work. The dancing festival in our small town, where my office is located, will take place on the thirteenth of September. On that day we are going to make a parade while dancing with drum and flute sounds. Actually, the women members have to wear kimono for summer, caps made of straw and Geta, Japanese style wooden sandals. Geta is a pair of rectangular flat boards with two heels and clog thongs. I have never worn them since I was twenty-five years old. It's very hard work to dance wearing such tight stuff. I had to walk on tiptoes. What's more, I had to always extend my arms and swing them. I feel a pain on my calves and arms today.



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### ✚ My sleeping habit

2008,8,22



It is said that many people, especially women, are suffering from insomnia. Luckily I haven't experienced such a condition. I usually go to bed between eleven and twelve, and get up at five fifty. It means I sleep less than seven hours. These days I sometimes awake around three because of the heat. I turn on an air conditioner, then after five minutes I turn it off while feeling drowsy and fall asleep again. I awake again at my regular time without an alarm clock. My body clock is very exact. I hear western people count sheep when they can't sleep. When I was a little kid and couldn't fall asleep, my mom advised me to count numbers. There are several tips on how to get a good night's sleep. One of them is to drink vinegar before you go to bed. However, I'm not sure if it's very effective or not.

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### ✚ Strong women

2008,8,21



Women have become very strong compared with old days, as long as we can see in the Olympic Games. Until twenty years ago, we couldn't imagine that they could run a marathon, wrestling with each other, do weight lifting and pole vault. They are kind of minor sports, except the Marathon. Japanese women marathon runners were very strong. They got gold medals twice in a row, but they couldn't receive medals in this Olympic Games. Our top runner gave up, not taking part in the race due to a terrible pulled muscle, and our second expected runner pulled out of the race because of a foot pain. Regarding wrestlers and weight lifters, their fathers used to be athletes in the same sports, and they began to train them under fathers' guidance.

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## Sushi

2008,8,20



Sushi was originally a very expensive food because it needs fresh and rare raw fish. I have even read an article in a newspaper which one of famous sushi chefs wrote. He wrote, "Sushi became popular and international losing its tradition and originality. I think it's OK that people enjoy Sushi cheaply at a turning comber restaurant but people who want to taste real Sushi should visit my restaurant." I found strange packed Sushi at a peculiar Japanese style restaurant near Piccadilly Circus in London and at a supermarket in Barcelona. The picture on the right side is actually the packed Sushi in London and on the left is also Sushi in Spain. I ate them and found the flavor and shape were similar to the original, but of course a little bit different. There was a turning table style Sushi restaurant in London. I was astonished at it because there were such strange a pile of ingredients, like colorful paprika, by the cooking space. British people were eating Sushi well with chopsticks, but I couldn't try it there even though I was interested in it.

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## TOEIC 2

2008,8,19



I received my results by e-mail a little bit earlier than ordinary examinees because I registered for the test through the Internet. I restarted to study English in my fifties and took the test for the first time. I'm so happy to find my score better than I expected it. It's not too late to start anything, even though we are not so young. Studying English is just my hobby but I realize that I

need more ability than I have now in order to travel abroad. I have to catch announcements at an airport or train station. I would also enjoy it more if I could read an explanation easier at a museum or sightseeing area. It's sad for me that I got tired and lost my spirit to complete all questions on the reading examination. I would like to read more English and build up my physical strength every day to get more than 850 points for the next time.



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## + The result of the TOEIC

2008,8,18



試験回数 試験日 LISTENING READING TOTAL  
第 140 回 2008/07/27 430 390 820

Today I received the result of my TOEIC test. I got 430 points for the listening part and 390 points for the reading part. The total score was actually 820. I think it's a kind of good score for my first attempt. Thinking about my age and my period of studying English, it might be an incredible score. In retrospect, I first bought an official workbook of the test in April in last year. I was broken at all because of the many questions of the test. I thought I didn't have enough energy to solve so many questions in two hours. I was also surprised that it needs about five thousand yen to take the test. I decided that I would take the test after I prepared more. It requires a kind of special study for the test. Anyway, I had to get used to the style of the test. After one year of studying in earnest, I took the test and the result was actually much better than I expected. To tell the truth, I wanted to get over at least 750, but my score was much better than that. Good job! I would like to congratulate myself. They say we can say that I'm excellent in English if we get more than 850 points. Of course my next aim is to get 850 points.

✚ **Dear Monte,**

2008,8,17



Thank you very much for your e-mail and please say Happy Birthday to Judy. Take care not to get sunstroke when you work outside. It has been too humid here in Japan to work outside. Don't you watch Beijing Olympic Games on TV? I watched the opening ceremony and I was really impressed by their stage effects. However, it is said that some of them were fakes. For example, the cute girl seemed to sing a song but actually she just moved her mouth. Moreover, huge fireworks were created by computer. Anyway, I'm fine and I'm looking forward to speaking with you someday soon.

✚ **The price of oil**

2008,8,16



Why is the price of oil so high? According to some articles the first reason is the unstable political situation in the Middle East, which is a rich oil producing area. Then the economy in countries with big populations like China and India are rapidly developing. Their oil consumption is rising sharply. Actually, China used to be famous for its bicycle riders ten years ago, but nowadays people changed their styles to driving cars which need a lot of gasoline compared to environmental bikes. In addition to these facts, deterioration of the American economy hit the situation hard. Investors tend to put their big money into oil instead of American stocks. Reading economic article is difficult for me, and explaining it by myself is much harder work for me.

✚ **My days off**

2008,8,15



It's a time of summer holiday. In Japan we usually call summer holiday Obon days off. Obon is a period in the mid summer when the spirits of our late ancestors visit their descendant houses

according to Buddhism. Obon is our big holiday period as well as New Year days. I'm working as a civil servant and we don't have Obon holiday because Obon is not our national holiday. However we can take five special paid days off as summer holiday besides twenty paid leaves. Usually they give the employees twenty days off a year and if we can't take all twenty days off, we can carry out the rest to the next year. I mean, when I take nine days off this year, I can take thirty-one days off next year. Now I have forty days off every year. Actually, the limit of days off in one year is forty. In fact it's hard to take forty days off in a year because nobody takes over my responsibility at my office during my absence.

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## the Olympic Games

2008,8,14



We expected Noguchi, a woman marathon athlete, to get a gold medal again following the last Olympic Games, but she decided to abstain from the race because of a torn muscle in her hip. She had been training very hard since she won the race in Athens, and must be very disappointed now. Nobody has gotten the gold medal twice in a row in the Olympic women's marathon race, and she was supposed to try it in Beijing. In my opinion, her injury is the responsibility of her coach and trainer. They should have taken better care of her because all she could do was run every day. Today Kitajima got the second gold medal in the one-hundred-meter breaststroke race. Actually it was the fourth gold medal for him including the Athens Olympic Games. Japanese women judo athletes are very strong. On the other hand men athletes are woeful. Almost every athlete was beaten in the trial matches. Anyway, there are so many impressive stories and tragedies in the Olympics. We suddenly became patriots in front of the TV during Olympic Games and we are really impressed by the Rising Sun flag atop the pole.

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## DVD

2008,8,13



I have a lot of movie videos on my shelf and they occupy a large space. I bought some of them, including my favorite movies starring Robert Redford, but almost everything is a tape which I recorded from TV programs. I'm sure I will never watch many of them in the future but I can't

throw them away. Compared to video tape DVDs are much thinner and I have a DVD record player but I still hesitate to record many movies onto DVDs. Now I rent a DVD when I want to watch movies. I don't want to own many things which will be garbage several years later. The simple life is better for the present for me.

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### i Pod

2008,8,12



Over five years ago I noticed that my second son had a strange white rectangle like part of a large bar of soap. I asked him what it was. He answered that it was new type of music player on which he could download music from a PC. I couldn't understand what it meant and how to use it. He didn't allow me to use the gadget but let me listen to music from it. After that the iPod became popular among young people and I realized that the iPod was a big invention of Apple and made huge profits. About four years ago my first son presented me an MP3 player made in China but it was not an iPod. I mastered how to use it right away and found it very convenient to improve my listening skills in English. I downloaded the BBC news and VOA from the websites but after two years from that time it was unfortunately partly broken. Then I bought a new cell phone which had a function as an MP3 player named LISMO. I could install several CDs on my cell phone and listen to it very clearly. It's very convenient. However it is not easy to download sound from websites. I have to use special software to download sound from the the Internet and it takes quite a long time to do it. Last Sunday I finally decided to buy a new MP3 player and went to a huge electric store with my husband. Actually the iPod was more expensive than other MP3 players but my husband recommended me to buy it. iPod is most popular and it means it's the best. It was his opinion. Now I'm happy that I finally became a user of the famous iPod.

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### Athletes after the Olympic Games

2008,8,11



In Japan many athletes belong to companies which support them because athletes can be walking advertisements. Some athletes work at offices or factories in the morning and after that they train. Almost every Olympic athlete is engaged in only training. After retirement what are their

fates? Many of them become coaches by making use of their experiences as athletes. Some of them became politicians and TV personalities. Why do they become politicians? Famous and strong athletes are popular among many people and political parties want to take advantage of their popularity. The parties, especially the Liberal Democratic Party, want them to be candidates for members of Congress. If they have any talent as politicians, they can be active in political society.

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### To my teacher

2008,8,10



I have one request to you. During the last lesson you told me to answer only “agree or disagree” when I tried to explain my opinion. The reason why I take your lesson is actually to improve my conversation skills. As I told you several times, I can improve my reading skills by myself by using my dictionary and textbooks written in both English and Japanese. I also happened to find the website of your materials, Breaking News English. Com. There are answers to the questions on the website. It means I can study these materials by myself. However I can’t study conversation by myself. From today please teach me about quick debates and expressing opinions in class. I prefer the lesson style where we exchange our opinions after reading a short article or looking at pictures. Anyway I don’t want to answer synonym matchups and phrase matchups. Sorry but would you mind changing my lesson style and materials?

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### The world trend

2008,8,9



The birth rate in developed countries is decreasing and it might be a big problem for those countries. Less young people cause the economy to decline with no one to take care of elderly people. On the other hand the population is growing in the developing countries and it draws short of food. I think the population all over the world will be balanced if developed countries accept a lot of immigrants. However new domestic problems between the people and the immigrants may arise soon. The Japanese government decided to accept some Indonesian nurses to work in hospitals and care institutions in Japan. I think it’s a good idea but I’m concerned that mastering

Japanese might be hard work for them. If they can't speak Japanese well, it's impossible for them to understand Japanese old people's minds and many elderly people will not be satisfied with the foreigners' care.

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## The Beijing Olympic Games

2008,8,8



The Beijing Olympic Games finally opened with the famous passage from Confucius. I had a friend who came to my house and it was a pleasure to watch it. I watched the opening ceremony on TV. I noticed that their athletes took pictures or videos while marching. A lot of athletes were walking with digital cameras in their hands. It was said that Japanese love taking pictures. If there is a guy who is wearing eyeglasses with a camera around his neck, he is definitely Japanese. However nowadays a lot of foreigners seem to love cameras. I think it's because nowadays we don't need film when we take pictures with digital cameras. There are some problems about China but every athlete looked happy on the opening ceremony.

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## Karoshi

2008,8,7



A Japanese word Karoshi means death due to hard work. It is said that the word is well known all over the world and became an international word. Foreign people guess Karoushi means sudden death while working at the office or factory but it reminds me of committing suicide due to depression. I'm not sure how many people are working for our local government but I'm sure at least two employees kill themselves a year from mental disease. It's difficult to pinpoint the cause of death. Stress from the job leads to heart disease and depression. Several native factors might be the cause of the illness. Anyway, all work and no play makes the workers short lived men.

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## Nadeshiko Japan

2008,8,6



Yesterday we locally had heavy rain in Tokyo and five workers who were fixing the sewer wall were washed away in the drain. At first the water was under their knees but heavy rains suddenly raised the water level and a flash flood took them away. The Beijing Olympic Games are going to take place two days from today but the women's football elimination between New Zealand and Japan finished yesterday. The game was drawn at two all. We call the Japanese women team Nadeshiko Japan. Nadeshiko means a pink, very cute flower and it's a symbol of Japanese women from ancient days.

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## Muggy days

2008,8,5



Japan is a country which is long from the north to the south. It means the climate in every prefecture is quite different. Hokkaido, the most northern island prefecture, is comfortable in the summer compared to the other prefectures. Every big city on the main island, including Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, suffers from very humid temperatures now. As I used to spend my younger days in Osaka and my son is living in Nagoya, I know they are much hotter than Tokyo. My town is near the beach so it might be a little bit more comfortable. They say the weather in Kyoto is terrible because it is located in a basin. The climate is affected by not only the latitude but also the physiognomy. Anyway I'm complaining about muggy days but I think I'm lucky because we have four seasons in Japan. Just imagine you are living in a Southeast Asian country like Thailand. They can't enjoy the beauty of snowscapes and colored leaves.

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## beat about the bush

2008,8,4



I invited two guests to my home and spent two hours preparing the dinner but they didn't want to eat it because of the terrible taste of my meal. They tried to beat about the bush so that they wouldn't upset me.

Help yourself to everything except the wine. I forgot to buy wine but luckily I found two bottles of wine in the basement just before and kept them in the fridge. They look delicious, don't they? I checked several recipes and cooked them for the first time.

Don't get it wrong but I can't eat meat, egg and chicken. As you know, I have to loose weight so I became a vegetarian.

What? You can't eat my big dinner, can you? Oh my Gosh!

Sorry, I don't want to say so but me too. I have allergies to meatt, butter and eggs. These dishes look like containing a lot of such ingredients. I can't eat them.

I see, but who will have eaten so much food? My refrigerator is too small to keep it all.

Don't worry. Could you give me a doggy bag? My husband must like them.

I would like to take them to my home too. My kids are always hungry. They will have eaten until tomorrow morning.

Ok. Let's enjoy chatting while drinking cool tasty wine with rice crackers and fruit. Now they have become cooler. It's just a good time to start a party.

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## a Grimms fairy tale

2008,8,3



I read a short story written by the Brothers Grimm. It's a kind of success story of an uneducated lucky person. A poor peasant was told how to be a doctor by a real doctor. He sold his two oxen, bought a book with a cock on the frontspiece, good clothes for himself and nailed up the sign with the words: "I am Doctor Knowall." from the doctor's advice. After a little while he was invited to a lord's house, who had had money stolen but served a gorgeous dinner. Actually the five servants working there were the thieves. The false doctor knew nothing about the truth but his words unexpectedly made the thieves misunderstand that he knew everything about their bad act. They confessed the hidden place of the money to him and finally he got a lot of money from

both the lord and his servants, the thieves. I know many fairy tales contain morals but I can't understand what kind of morals this tale teaches us. Does it mean looking for fortune which happens to occur to us? Telling a lie sometimes makes us very lucky, right?

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### Tony Blair

2008,8,2



The following is the quote from the BBC news approximately one year ago when Tony Blair resigned as British Prime Minister. He finally leaves number 10. What's the meaning of ten? Was he the tenth Prime Minister in the U.K.? I'm convinced it's false. Britain has quite a long democratic history so why was he the theth Prime Minister? It's definitely no. I'm sure it means the official residence of the British Prime Minister, which is located at number Ten Downing Street. I'm a Japanese woman of meager culture but I believe it's common sense in the world. If our Prime Minister resigned tonight, I would not be surprised about it and I'm sure it wpuldn't affect me at all. By the way I'm not familiar with Tony Blair's politics but its true it was kind of fun when he assumed the position because he was young and handsome. Anyway they say the present British leader is not so popular among British people. In conclusion, to be a charismatic political leader is really rare.

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### Practice sentences

2008,8,1



Farmers run multiple types of agriculture to make a lot of money. Spending money to educate children adds up to saving money, because children will be good workers. A shopping center has loads of exclusive restaurants. Who eats so much expensive cuisine in this middle-class town? I received a notification one week ago which said I passed the test. She is so capable that every firm is eager to hire her. My mom is worried about her daughter just the same because she went abroad, even though she couldn't understand the language. I would like to sit in a smoke-free coach. The hotel was so low-priced that the building was not airtight. Her arrogance exposed her to many criticisms. Rouse yourself when you take an examination to be promoted. There is still disagreement as to where banning smoking in public is lawful. Nonetheless, a mayer is trying to

bring in regulation against smoking. They designate the points by red letters. Please reverse the paper after you fill out your name. One thing I recommend to you is to rely on your colleagues.

**Dear Yukie,**

2008,9,30



Yesterday, I came back from my mother's house in Osaka. I arrived at Odawara about noon, then went to my office and worked overtime. How were your days in L.V. after I left there on Monday? What movies did you watch and how about the other lessons? Could you improve your English? When will you greet the trainees in your corporation? By the way, as I promised you, I attached pictures to this e-mail. I'm sorry but some pictures are not so sharp. I might have forgotten to set the flash. Now, I'm thinking that I will visit L.V. at least once a year. It's easier, cheaper and more effective to study there than studying abroad. Take care and have a good night. See you someday, again.

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**Long time no see!!**

2008,9,29



A lot of things have happened these four days. I went to Osaka via Nagoya, met a lot of people, and heard a lot of new news. Just before this, I came home from my office. I mean I left my mom's house at nine this morning, arrived at my office at one p.m. and worked overtime until eight fifteen. I'm too tired to continue writing my diary in English. I think I had better take a bath and go to bed now.

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**To my young friend whom I met in L.V.**

2008,9,26



Thank you for your pictures. I'm glad you had a good time in Language Village. Now, I'm staying at my son's home in Nagoya. I came here after work tonight and will go to Osaka to take care of my mother tomorrow morning. I'm sure I will send you pictures after I go home in Fujisawa. Keep in touch!!

✚ **To my previous American teacher**

2008,9,24



Thanks for chatting with me through Skype. By the way, I checked the schedule of the Sumo tournaments. They hold their match six times a year and every tournament goes on for fifteen days. This autumn, Sumo is going to take place from November 9th to 25th in Fukuoka, southern Japan. I'm sorry, but it's too far from Tokyo. I checked my schedule now and I found that I will be busy from November 1st to the 3rd. The other weekends in October and November would be better. If you want to enjoy the beautiful colored leaves, late November is better. Anyway, please let me know your schedule in Japan.

✚ **The advice to me from the American teacher**

2008,9,23



Even though there are a few mistakes in your English, don't worry about them. They are cosmetic mistakes. Also don't worry about your pronunciation. I can easily understand your English. I recommend that you read a lot of books written in simple English. You unconsciously memorize the phrases, and then you can speak them naturally. You should try one minute speaking sessions while waiting at stoplights and sing English songs. They are good for practicing.

✚ **the third day 50 First Love**

2008,9,22



To the new friend whom I met in the English training hotel:  
I'm already at home. Thanks for your support in Language Village. I hope you study hard and enjoy your other days. Please say thank you to the teachers and the students for me.  
In English Village the students can watch movies from eight o'clock every night.  
Last night, we watched the movie titled "50 First Love" with an English subtitle. It was a kind of romantic comedy but a really heartwarming movie located in Hawaii. A guy who is working in an

aquarium as a veterinarian fell in love with a little bit of a strange girl. They became good friends with each other, but she didn't seem to remember him the next day. He couldn't understand what happened with her, but he waited for her and rushed her again and again. Finally, acquaintances explained to him that she was suffering from defects of memory due to a car accident that had happened one year before. Oh my Gosh! She had forgotten everything that happened in the previous day. Actually, after making love, she screamed and attacked him when she found him sleeping next to her on the bed next morning. In spite of the difficult situation, they finally got married and had a baby. Every morning when she gets up, she finds a video tape and a memo where he writes that she should watch the video before she go downstairs. After watching the video and realizing her present life, she meets her family. Every morning she falls in love with her husband and meets her kid for the first time. This movie means that love is really stronger than the obstacle. To tell you the truth, I believed that this movie was "The Devil Wears Prada" because the teacher told us that it would be the evening movie during the dinner time. I was wondering if she was wearing Prada even though she was always wearing casual T-shirts. I'm such an idiot sometimes.



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## ✚ the second day

2008,9,21



There are three American and two Filipino teachers here, and they offer six interesting lessons a day. Each student from many regions has a reason why they came here. Even though there are differences among the fluency of our English, we all tried to communicate with each other in

English, except one elderly woman. Unfortunately, I had to spend two nights with her in the same room. Despite the rule which prohibited us from speaking Japanese, she always asked me many things in Japanese. I pretended to be a kind woman and answered her in easy English, sometimes in Japanese while thinking that she shouldn't have come here if she couldn't understand basic English. She really annoyed me and I finally advised her to study English from the basic grammar. She boasted about her experiences of going abroad several times and always excused herself being unable to speak English well. Fortunately, they offered me the different class from her so she bothered me only one hour a day but she was the only bad memory in this school.

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#### the first day in Language Village

2008,9,20



Today was my first day here, in Language Village: the training-camp style English school. I arrived at Fuji Station and I was a little bit surprised because there were few people and cars around the station. They informed me that they could pick me up in front of the station at eleven fifty-five so I was supposed to spend forty minutes at a coffee shop like Starbucks. However, there were no coffee shops and also no convenience stores even though I saw several big factories along the railroad. Fuji is famous for its paper manufacturing industry. I bought a canned coffee from a vending machine and was waiting for the car while sitting on the edge of the sidewalk. Forty minutes later, the big bus appeared and took me to the school, which is located on the hillside of Mt.Fuji. There are over twenty English learning students and also several Chinese learning students here. Everybody, not only the teachers but also the students, seems to be friendly. It will have to be a good experience for me to stay here. Now, I'm going to enjoy watching a movie titled, "Breakfast at Tiffany's", with the other students. Regarding the movie, I probably watched it quite a long ago and also read reviews in magazines several times. Honestly, I couldn't understand the meaning of the movie. Does it give us the opportunity to think about the true love? Anyway, I realized again that the actress was very beautiful and attractive.

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#### Discussing justice

2008,9,19



According to the weather forecast, a big typhoon is coming to our area now. They say we will have a lot of rain and a gale tomorrow morning. I'm unlucky because I have a plan to travel near Mt.Fuji. I hope the typhoon will have gone in the night.

The three strikes and you are out law is a kind of controversial law which punishes a criminal who commits severe crimes three times. If an offender shoplifts small things three times, he or she has to be in a prison for at least twenty-five years in CA. I think it's too strict. I hear that chronic shoplifting is a kind of mental disease. Such people should be hospitalized to cure their illness instead of being punished. In Japan, we don't have such kind of penalty according to our penal laws. However, a judge certainly considers how many times the criminal committed crimes.

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#### An English school

2008,9,18



I traveled abroad by myself during summer holidays last year and two years ago, but this year I visited London and Spain in June. Even though I still have a lot of days off, (\*\*)I hesitate to take a long holidays to go overseas again. Besides, the surcharge of an airplane is pretty high these days. However, I want to place myself in a different circumstance from my daily life. For such reasons, I decided to spend three days in an English school near Mt.Fuji. They say there are several native English speaking teachers in a school building like a hotel and students can study English with them from morning to night. I don't know how many students are staying there now, but they say the number of students in one class is at largest eight. Of course, it's much cheaper than studying abroad at an English school with a lot of Japanese. I think it's worth a try. I applied to enter the school for three days by sending an e-mail and answered the following questions written in English.

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#### Personal questions

2008,9,17



Do you have any allergies or illnesses?

I have nothing at all.

Do you have any special needs?

No, I don't.

Have you done a course that is taught only in English before?

Yes, I have taken a lot of lessons at NOVA and personal lessons through Skype almost every day.

Have you ever traveled overseas to an English speaking country? Where?

I've traveled to several English speaking countries such as America, England, New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, and so on.

Why do you want to learn English? What are your goals?

I decided to re-study English in 2004 when my son moved to L.A., and I wanted to visit him by myself. I wanted to speak with his professors and friends at the commencement. Now, studying English is my favorite hobby. I want to travel abroad by myself and also study English in an English speaking country after retirement.

What areas of English are you good at?

I think probably I'm good at speaking because I usually take English conversation lessons. In addition, I write my dairy in English almost every day and I ask my native English speaking teachers to correct it.

What areas of English do you feel you need to improve on?

I really want to improve my poor pronunciation.

What topics would you be interested in learning about?

I would like to learn how to speak naturally.

What are your expectations of us while you are staying with us?

The reason why I decided to participate in your school is actually I want to speak English with native English speakers in person. I usually speak English through a microphone. I sometimes want to speak face-to-face with someone.

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### **The trouble concerning a correction system**

2008,9,16



As you know, I make it my everyday custom to write an essay or my diary in English. I also ask a native English speaker to correct my English sentences through the very convenient system. I

mean, after I write some passages by using Word on my computer, I copy and paste them on the special website and then the teacher corrects them on the same website. I also receive an e-mail when the teacher finishes his or her work. An English man named Peter who is living in Thailand was my teacher. I think he was a good corrector who always sent me a response within one day. I was always looking forward to receiving the correction from him. However, his answers suddenly began to delay. I was worried about the unusual situation. I wondered what had happened with him. Three days after I posted my essays on the website, he returned the correction and the Japanese staff informed me that Peter was traveling in the rural area where he couldn't use the Internet easily. After that, there was no information about Peter or the delay in the corrections. Almost one week later from the last contact, the Japanese staff finally gave us the information that because of the commotion in Thailand, he couldn't contact Peter. I was worried about Peter and this very useful system. What should I do if this system were broken? Now, fortunately, four teachers are correcting our English through the same website, again. The Japanese staff managed to look for new teachers and they were trying to finish the tie-up jobs. Actually, the four teachers from America and Canada corrected my English. Each teacher has their own styles how to correct my English. I think all of them are good teachers. One of them really praised my English and encouraged me. The other teacher explained very exactly how to use a comma and some examples. Another teacher seemed to be a little bit severe and completely corrected my English. It was also very useful for me. I'm satisfied with the new correctors but I still miss Peter. Where is he, and what is he doing now? Can I let him read my English again?

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 **TOEIC 2**

2008,9,15



A policeman inspected the accident that happened yesterday afternoon. The wife probed the mud to look for her marriage ring. The president scrutinized the document closely to the cheat ?. You should pay the fee beforehand when you get a bus in this area. We usually set a clock five minutes ahead so we are not late. All employees are diligent in their work. She is very studious student who always gets the best grade. People are eligible to vote at the age of twenty.

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I'm exhausted now because yesterday I participated in a local festival. I was doing the traditional Japanese Awaodori dance for over three hours. In addition, today I drove to northern Kanagawa to dig sweet-potatoes and collect chestnuts with my grandsons. As soon as I came home I roasted the potatoes and steamed the chestnuts. I had a good time and enjoyed a lot, but honestly, I feel tired when I play with little kids. I envy their tireless vigor.



My teacher's father passed away last Saturday in New Zealand. I take English lessons from him through Skype. While his father was in the hospital, he couldn't give me the lesson, but today I received an e-mail from him. It said his father had died and he wanted to restart my lesson from the next Wednesday. The following is my response to him. It's difficult to write a message in this situation because I've never written a letter of condolence in English.

"I would like to share your pain. I'm so sad to hear that your father passed away. How old was

he? It's OK with me to take the next lesson at nine p.m. Japan time on Wednesday, 24th. Take care. I also pray for your father's soul."

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✚ TOEIC

2008,9,12



They say it's important to memorize synonyms to get a higher score of the TOEIC test. The followings are examples of synonyms. I will postpone my departure for a week due to an urgent business. Why do you delay going to a hospital? They suspended the rule which was supposed to be valid from today to organize the details. We are going to adjourn the meeting until tomorrow at ten a.m. He asked the store to defer paying a bill for a week. Please fill out the form and then submit it to me by September He sent in his application to the officer. Toyota presented a new car to the public. She declined his offer politely. She flatly refused his offer of help. She rejected my plan immediately. I don't reject your opinion, but I don't agree with it either. He dismissed my suggestion as impossible.

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✚ Ars Electronica

2008,9,11



Ars Electronica is an annual world-famous art festival concerning Media arts which takes place in Austria. My son put on an exhibition there this year for his company. The title of his work is 'Ten Thousand Cents' and it's in collaboration with his American friend. It looks like real one-hundred-dollar bill but it's their meaningful art created by using a computer. They asked ten thousand strangers to draw a small piece of art through the Internet and finally created a bill that included all of them. Actually, all ten thousand people didn't know the final aim and what they were doing. They say it represents the idea that in contemporary society people usually work without understanding the purpose of their work. To tell you the truth, nobody in our family, including my husband and I understood the meaning of this profound art before we were explained about it by the artist.



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### ✚ A shocking incident

2008,9,10



Early yesterday morning a woman around the same age as me committed suicide. Actually, she hanged herself from the rail of the forty-third floor room where she was living with her mother. The mother found her body hanging outside of the veranda. How shocking it was! Guessing from her age, the mother must be around eighty years old. She is a widow of a famous critics who passed away about five years ago and had been spending happy days with her family. Now she must be really shocked and disappointed in her later life. I deeply sympathize with her. I know some middle aged single women who are living with their elderly mothers. They say that they can't pass away before their mothers and their mothers also say that they want to live as long as possible because they don't want to leave their daughters alone. Why did she kill herself without considering her mother?

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Expressions which I should memorize

These expressions appear frequently in the TOEIC test. Therefore I want to make sentences using them in order to better memorize and understand how to use them.

She is clever and also studies very hard. Accordingly, she will pass an examination to get a qualification easily. The company canceled the contract without a notice. Hence, our president became very angry. I had been a lavish spender. Thus, I soon went bankrupt. She always tried to save money and consequently (?) became rich. We were discussing the problem all night long. As a result, we finally found a good solution. She is beautiful and clever. She is also considerate and generous. In addition to being an excellent scientist, she was also a great mother. She is mean and she is also a liar. The mother vacuumed the room. In addition, her daughter wiped the floor. He got two gold medals four years ago and, furthermore, received another gold medal this year. I was glad to see him again, but I was nevertheless unable to speak with him. I wanted him to agree with my opinion. On the contrary, he criticized my plan. I was so shocked.

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## Speaking appropriately on the phone

2008,9,7



Good morning. Masaho of A Cooperation is speaking.

Would it be possible to speak with Mr. Yamada?

May I ask who's calling?

Sorry, this is Tanaka of B branch.

Please hold on. I'll connect you. I'm sorry he is away now. Could I take a message?

Thanks, but I'm going to call him again.

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## About families

2008,9,6



look like my sister. Probably both of us have got our mothers eyes and nose. However, our personalities are quite different. She and I act nothing like each other. We can't get together. Many relatives say I take after my father. It means we are moderate, humble, and hard workers. There are so many famous families in the world. Ms. Palin's family suddenly became famous recently, after she became the candidate of the Vice President of the Republican Party. Now a lot of people even in Japan know that her seventeen-year-old daughter is pregnant. During the Olympic Games, we could also see a lot of families on TV. One of them were the Icho sisters, the women wrestling medalists. They are very friendly with each other and when the silver medalist elder sister declared her retirement, the gold medalist younger sister also announced her retirement. "I can't continue to be a wrestler alone without my sister."

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## How to decline politely

2008,9,5



When I was stuck in a bullet train due to heavy rain, a woman sitting next to me offered me a very kind but a little bit peculiar thing. She looked in her fifties wearing a black suit and spoke very calmly and politely.

Excuse me, but where are you living? How will you come home tonight?

The local train must stop at such a late time. We have to go home by taxi because we have to work tomorrow.

Could you stay my office? There is a large room with tatami mats. It's near the station and you can go home early tomorrow morning easily.

Thank you. That's very kind of you, but we would like to go home sooner. We have to change our clothes and are worried about our house now.

I guessed she was working for a funeral hall from her conversation and appearance. My husband was convinced that she wanted to share the taxi fee with us. Can you imagine how we would have felt if we had accepted her offer?

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## Who will be our head?

2008,9,4



Four days have passed since our Prime Minister suddenly announced his resignation. Now his kind of aggressive response against a local newspaper journalist's question in the end of the press conference is the talk of the people. "Many nations said your speech sounded that you were talking about strangers." "You just said I made the speech concerning the other people instead of me, but I can observe myself objectively. I'm absolutely different from you." Anyway, it's the time that they have to decide the next Prime Minister. I'm sorry in Japan the ordinary nation can't vote candidates of the Prime Minister. The politicians who belong to the Liberal Democratic Party choose their boss in the secret ways which we can't understand. I have my doubts about Aso as the Prime Minister because I don't like his background and behavior. I'm apprehensive about having Ishihara as our leader because I don't like his father. I have faith in Koike because she is a decisive woman. I have reservations about Yosano because I don't know

him well enough.

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## My comment in newspaper

2008,9,3



The Japan Interpreter Association carries out four types of examinations concerning interpretation and issues a newspaper to inform the result of the tests twice a year. I passed the easiest test which took place last June with quite a good grade. Soon after, they asked me to write a comment about how I had been studying English to pass the test, to carry in their newspaper and on their website. Today they sent me the up-to-date newspaper inserting my comment and informed me that they had also uploaded my comment with my picture on their website. I checked them as soon as I came home and unsealed the envelope. I'm a little bit proud of myself because the other commentators of the same test as me are much younger than me and many of them are the students of famous universities or workers who use English at office every day. I'm the one and only person who restarted to study English in one's fifties. Even though I regret that I didn't ask them not to make my age and my picture public, I'm glad that my experience might encourage middle aged people who want to restudy English after they read my comment.

### ④実践している通訳(英語)学習法

毎日英語で日記、エッセー、覚えたい単語やイディオムを使った文章等を書き、Eメールを利用してネイティブに添削してもらう。Skype等を使った手軽で廉価な英会話レッスンを出来るだけ毎日受ける。通勤途中に、インターネットからダウンロードしたBBCやVOAの英文を読み、MP3プレイヤーで音声を聞く。

### ⑤日頃の学習の中で特に有益と思われる教材、雑誌、新聞、インターネットのサイト等

VOA、BBC Learning English、週刊 ST News、英語伝などインターネットで提供されている音声付英文サイト。

### ⑥合格後雑感(今後の抱負など)

息子の大学院留学を機に「卒業式でお世話になった方々にお礼が言えたら」と、英会話の勉強を始めましたが、4年後の今では、英語学習が一番の趣味です。「退職後はボランティア通訳として、お役にたちたい」という目標に向けて試験を受けましたが、一歩近づき嬉しいです。

## ⑦これから受験しようとおもっている方へアドバイス

高校時代は、英語は苦手科目でした。やり直し英語の今回は、海外一人旅やホームステイ等、英語を使う機会を作ったことで、学習へのモチベーションが高まり、合格に結びつきました。通じた喜びを経験することが継続の鍵だと思います。



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When I was surfing the Internet, I happened to find big news that said the Prime Minister, Fukuda had announced his resignation. He assumed the position about one year ago after the sudden resignation of the former Prime Minister, Abe. The sudden and irresponsible resignation of our two Prime Ministers happened in a row. Did the Prime Minister throw out the political power again? In my opinion, his decision doesn't domestically cause chaos because we think our country will not change so much anymore, whoever becomes the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, I'm worried about the reaction of foreign countries. What do they think about Japanese politics

and the politicians? Do they think that Japan is an irresponsible country in which unstable politicians govern? Honestly, I prefer Mr. Fukuda compared to the other politicians. He seems to be cool, reserved, and clean which is probably the reason why he is unpopular among the nation. Many people think he is stale. The next Prime Minister must be Mr. Aso who ran as the opposite candidate to Fukuda last September. Is there any secret promise between them which meant Fukuda became first, would resign after one year and then transfer the post to Aso? Anyway, I'm so disgusted at the politicians' irresponsible attitude.

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#### **How to save costs**

2008,9,1



This is a picture of messy desk. There is a lot of paper which overflows from a cardboard box onto a desk. Actually our office is using a lot of paper; how can we solve this situation? A quick solution will be to hire a part time worker to file documents. We can consider alternative solutions afterward. Perhaps we can take a statistic of how many documents are copied everyday in each department. Once we figure out which sector consumes the paper most, we can order the manager to limit the paper usage. Another possibility might be to ban printing or copying since we can share files through computers. How about sending e-mails to all the employees instead of circulating memorandums? The bottom line is that we should change our customs and adapt paperless society by using computers. By doing so, we can also save expensive ink. Did you know that ink for ink-jet printer is quite expensive?

#### **the best pair**

2008,10,31



I'm not good at directions like ordinary women. He has a good sense of direction but he can't read Japanese. I pointed at marks on a map and told him that we were there and we were going to this building. As soon as he realized the present position, he guided me to the correct place. "What's that building?" "It's a museum and we are going here." "OK. Let's go down and turn to the right." We never lost the way.

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The American guy's mom gave me two bottles of cosmetic oil and lotion as a souvenir from America. They smell very wonderful. At first I didn't know how to use them. Then, I tried to read the explanations written in difficult English. Finally, I found it was not so different from Japanese stuff to use them. Anyway, please say thanks to your mother.



We had a really great and enjoyable tour when we visited the Kansai area. There were so many funny things that happened during our trip. I experienced a lot of things that I would never have been able to enjoy if I didn't travel with a foreigner, a Gaijin. I know that Gaijin is a kind of segregate of Japanese, but in this case I take leave to use the word of Gaijin. Because he called himself a Gaijin to emphasize that he is a real American in Japan. There was no ashamed matters during the tour with a Gaijin. I mean, I could eat Kushiage, a deep-fried skewer of beef and vegetables, and Takoyaki, round octopus flitters, at the street vendor shops. He tried to charge the battery of his camera at a free waiting room and the Japanese staff didn't complain to him. However, as soon as she saw me speaking with him, she asked me to make him stop doing it. After that we decided that I should have pretended to be his Asian American mother. We could unexpectedly see a real wedding ceremony at a shrine in Uji and also a real funeral at a temple in Osaka. It was so interesting for him and he was really impressed with them. He was a little bit unlucky due to the present yen's appreciation. He is not so rich now and avoided paying admission fees to enter famous shrines and temples except the huge Buddha in Nara and several other famous sites. He said that The Great Buddha was the only one and the most important site to enter for a Gaijin. He shouldn't have passed it. Walking around a town and appreciating temples from the entrances was enough for him. My ninety-year-old mom was also glad to eat dinner with a Gaijin. It was her first experience in her so long life. She told him to sit down in English. He, my sister, and I were so surprised to hear her English. "Why do you know this English phrase?" She answered in Osaka dialect that it was a common sense. I interpreted her answer to him and we laughed a lot.



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### ✚ Nintoku ancient tomb

2008,10,23



You can see a greenery hill from the windows. It's the biggest ancient tomb created in the fifth Century. We call it the Nintoku Emperors tomb. Nintoku was one of the most powerful Emperors who unified and governed Japan in the fifth Century, according to our history. However, there are some arguments about the real person who was buried among historians. Anyway, it's true that this area was the center of over one thousand and five hundred years ago. We are proud of our long history and feel happy to live here.

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### ✚ Osaka

2008,10,22



I bought tickets of bullet train in advance tonight. I could purchase reserved seats from Nagoya to Osaka but the reserved seats between Odawara and Nagoya had been already sold out. I'm not

sure if we can find vacant unreserved seats or not, but it takes about one hour. Let's stand all the way! We are supposed to change the train at the Nagoya station. Don't worry about your expense except fares, admission tickets, and food bills at restaurants. It's my sister and my pleasure to let you stay and entertain you at her home. I will memorize all expenses so please pay me back at the end of our trip. We are going to arrive in Osaka around eight and then go to Dotonbori, the most famous, busy and surprising shopping mall in Osaka, to eat dinner. The neon signs are so showy and funny. We say Osaka is the city where the residents are poor due to spending much money to eat delicious foods and drink. Let's enjoy eating cheap and tasty foods.

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✚ Nara

2008,10,21



There are several world heritage sites in Nara but I'm sure the most popular site is the huge statue of Buddha in the Todaiji temple. According to a guidebook, the site is always crowded, but it's not so busy from the opening time, seven thirty, to ten o'clock. We had better visit this site first. It's about one and a half-kilometer-distance from the Kintetsu Station to Todaiji. Then, we will visit Mt. Wakakusa, which is the gradual mountain covered with green grass. After that, we should also visit Kasuga Shrine, the beautiful red, old, big shrine. We are also interested in the old streets of Naramachi, where we can buy our souvenirs at the long standing shops. One more site we shouldn't forget is Kofukuji, which is famous for its magnificent five-story pagoda. There is the Sarusawa pond near the pagoda. Nara is a large park where many old national treasures are located and where we can see many deer everywhere in the park. They believed that the deer were messengers of the God of Kasuga Shrine. We shouldn't persecute the deer in Nara. There is a National Museum where we can appreciate many invaluable images of Buddha but probably we will not have enough time to enjoy it. Nara was the capital of Japan in the eighth century, so almost every old building was built around that period.

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✚ to my teacher

2008,10,20



Could you cancel my lesson on 22nd? My husband is going to be hospitalized to check his health

condition for three days and I have to visit him on the Wednesday. I'm also busy during this week and I can't take the alternative lesson. I'm sorry but I want to skip the lesson this week. I'm sure I will be able to take your lesson on next Wednesday, 29th, at nine p.m. Did you find a new house? If you are busy, also, please don't hesitate to let me know your convenient time. Take care.

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### a ture in Kansai

2008,10,19



I'm planning the itinerary of our trip in Kansai. We are going to Osaka on Friday after my work from Odawara by bullet train. Our rendezvous meeting place is the ticket gate under the huge Japanese lantern which is the symbol of the station. Don't be late. We shouldn't miss the only train which arrives in Osaka early. After arriving there, we will eat dinner at some restaurant on the famous busy street named Dotonbori. He must be surprised at the showy signs there. The next day, we will go to the world heritage, Uji Byoudoin. The buildings were completed in 1052, the Heian Era, which was the period of the noblemen. The most powerful nobleman, Yorimichi Fujiwara, built them for his late father and it is said that they showed the Paradise. The second day I'm planning to show him real Osaka. Now, Osaka is famous for its commonalty and funny comedians. We are going to a vaudeville theater. Even though he can't understand Japanese, it must be interesting to see gaudy, noisy, and slapstick comedies. We will also visit some busy shopping malls and go up Tutenkaku which is an observation tower and one of the symbols in Osaka. The last day we are going to spend one day in our old capital, Nara.

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### a tour with an American guy

2008,10,18



The other day, one of my previous American teachers who is living in New York State, sent me a message through skype, that he was going to Japan. He also asked me to guide him around Osaka and Nara. I asked my sister to let us stay in her house in Osaka and managed to take a day off next Monday. Now, I'm planning our tour in the Kansai area. We can easily go to Osaka, Nara, and Kobe from my sister's house but there are so many places to visit. Which is the best place for a

foreign tourist to enjoy? To tell the truth, I don't know exactly about Osaka, even though I was born there, had been living there until I graduated from Univ., and recently visited there several times a year. Because the city is changing and changing and I always stay at my mother's house during staying in Osaka, I don't know much anymore. I think it's a good opportunity for me, because I can rediscover Osaka as well as I can improve my English. I want to make use of this chance to study how to explain Japanese history and sightseeing places.

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#### self introduction

2008,10,17



Last night, I attended a meeting held at a luxurious restaurant for business. Every participant introduced themselves at the beginning. The following was my introduction. "Nice to meet you, everybody. My name is Masaho, I'm working for A office. Just before, the chief commented that there were no women members here last year, but tonight I'm so glad that I'm here as a woman representative. At first, I would like to tell you that about fifteen women are working vigorously for our offices in this area. As all of you have already noticed from my accent, I'm from Osaka and came to Kanagawa to work. A long time has passed since I began to work but I had never transferred in this area. From the time I started last April, I've been enjoying working here. I look to you for guidance".

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#### The changes of marriage style

2008,10,16



In my parents' generation, arranged marriage was quite common. I would rather say, almost every couple got married by an arranged marriage. Parents asked their relatives to look for good candidates for their kids. As women didn't have economic power, marriage was really the means to live. It depended on their husbands if wives could live wealthily or not. Even if husbands have lovers, wives couldn't get a divorce. In my generation, arranged marriage accounted for a third. I have a friend who got married with a rich guy by an arranged marriage but she decided to get a divorce after she gave birth to two girls. She began to work after that and now she is spending

happy days with her mother and daughters. She joked, “All my family members are female. Moreover, our cute dogs are also female.” In my son’s generation, there hardly is an arranged marriage. However it’s still rare that women can get as much salary as men.

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### **My cell phone**

2008,10,15



This morning, I overslept because my alarm clock didn’t work. Strictly speaking, it’s not an alarm clock. I usually use my cell phone as an alarm clock. My cell phone has multiple functions like e-mail, an alarm clock, a camera, and a recorder. The display was black and a red light, which is usually bright during its charge, was blinking. I pushed the button several times but it didn’t work at all. It seemed to be broken. I can’t spend a day without my cell phone. I record a lot of things, such as my schedule, not to mention a lot of phone numbers and e-mail addresses. I almost began to cry and didn’t have enough time to check it carefully. I left my home with the broken cell phone and an instruction manual. I read the manual on the train but I couldn’t find the cause of the trouble. I was confused and also disappointed. I opened the cover and replaced the battery while sighing. Suddenly, it began to work. I was so glad and surprised. I still can’t understand why it was broken and also why it was repaired so easily.

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### **renovation**

2008,10,14



Our condo, which was completed about 23 years ago, is under construction now. As they put up scaffolding around our building and covered it with a white large veil, I can’t open the windows and always draw the curtains while I am away. I don’t want strangers to look into my rooms. They will finish painting the exterior wall by the end of this year. I know that regular renovation is important to increase the value of real estate, but it’s troublesome to live under renovation.

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Have you ever watched the movie titled “Romeo and Juliet” released in 1968? It was one of my unforgettable movies which I was impressed by in my high school days. I still remember the name of Leonard Whiting who played Romeo at the age of 17. Actually, he suddenly became an idol of the teenagers all over the world at that time. I’m sorry, but after that film, he seemed not to have good movies and faded away from a lot of fans. Yesterday, I happened to find his fan’s website, knew what he is doing now, and also saw his current pictures. There was a little-bit fat, middle aged guy smiling, surrounded by some middle aged women in it. Is he that real cute Romeo? I was so surprised that there are still so many fans of the young handsome Romeo and he invited them to a tour to Italy where the movie had been shot with him. Now, I don’t think that I want to join the tour and meet him, even though I’m glad that he looks fine and happy. Anyway, thanks to the Internet and my English study, I enjoyed a lot and was a little bit disappointed while reading the website written in English.



When I took the English lesson last night, my foreign teacher asked me, “The time has already past, but I have one more question. Has Mr. Miura already died? He committed suicide in L.A.,right?” “ He did what? You mean that Miura who was arrested in Saipan, right? Did he kill himself? I don’t know that news. You’ve already checked the news in your country? Thanks. I’ll turn on TV after this lesson.” Mr. Miura was a suspect of a series of murder cases that happened in L.A. during the end of the seventies and the beginning of eighties. His acquaintance and wife

were killed there and he received a lot of insurance money. He was arrested by the Japanese police but the Japanese Supreme Court ruled he was innocent in 2003. For over twenty years, he had been quite notorious among the Japanese mass media. Five years later, L.A. Police Department arrested him at Saipan airport, this February. They said even though he was ruled innocent of the murders by Japanese justice, they are still convinced he was guilty with conspiracy. Just after he was taken to L.A., he hung himself in the jail. He is here no more and who knows the truth?

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### The result of today's golf

2008,10,11



I came home at four fifty from the golf course. Now, I'm satisfied with today's golf even though my score was much worse than five years ago when I got into golf. In the morning, it was spiting according to the forecast, then it began to improve around eleven. My hit was getting better and better as the weather became better. I also got a new friend who is working as a tax accountant and was today's partner.

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### a kind of hard work

2008,10,10



It's drizzling outside and I'm worried about tomorrow's weather because I have a plan to play golf. Playing golf used to be my favorite hobby but now, I prefer studying English. Actually, I haven't played golf since last January. Until last Sunday, I hadn't even practiced at a driving range since last February. The other day, my friend asked me to go to a golf course with her. I couldn't decline her offer because it was me who suggested that she should have started to play golf. Now, I don't have confidence that I can hit a ball straightly. What's worse, I have been busy at the office and I have the sniffles and stiff shoulders. In Japan, golf fee is quite expensive compared to America. We have to go to the golf course even if it's raining. It's a Japanese style strict golf rule. As my friends are going to pick me up at five fifty, I had better go to bed earlier tonight than usual.



## A Japanese nationality

2008,10,9



Yesterday I wrote that a brain drain was a kind of shame to Japan. Now, I have a complex thought about my second son. Actually, he graduated from a Japanese university and after that entered the graduate school of UCLA with a scholarship from the Japanese government. After two years of study, he received the master's degree and found a job in the U.S. I expected him to come back to Japan after he received the degree, but he decided to work in the U.S. Every mother wants her kid to be an international person so I didn't disagree with his decision. However, I told him not to forget that he is a Japanese person, to keep in contact with Japanese society, and to come back to Japan some day. Now, he is improving his ability and enjoying his life in America. If he got a job in Japan, he might be annoyed by the Japanese style of hard work. He might not be able to have free time to spend doing his own activities. One of the Nobel winners this year got American nationality in the seventies. Strictly speaking, he is not Japanese, but American, even though he was born Japanese. According to the Japanese law, we shouldn't be allowed to have a dual citizenship. Now, globalization is running and people don't seem to consider their citizenship's. What's a motherland? Living in a foreign country must be exciting but don't forget that you can't be a born and bred American.



## Nobel Prizes

2008,10,8



Yesterday's big news was that three Japanese people were chosen to receive Nobel Prizes in Physics. It was a splendid achievement and there were so many pictures of the three physicists in the newspapers. Just before, I found a great article on the Internet that said Japan was going to get a Nobel Prize in Chemistry, too. It's the first time in Japan that four people have won the prizes in the same year. Two of them are in their eighties and are living in the U.S. They are typical example of the brain drain. It was so hard for researchers to continue their study in Japan in the fifties and sixties that many of them moved to America. That was a shame.

### ✚ Difficult interrogative sentences

2008,10,7



Do you know who I am? Yes, I know. Who do you think I am? I think you are Masaho. Do you know what that flower is? No, I don't. What do you think that flower is? I think it's a rose. Do you want to know who I met yesterday? Yes, I want to know. Who do you suppose I met yesterday? I suppose you met Ken. Do you have any idea what I really want to buy? No, I have no idea what you want to buy. Who I kissed last week is a secret. The secret is actually how I took out Mary. Which pen do you guess will be bought most? I guess that red pen will be. Can you guess which dress she will buy? Yes, I can. She will choose that one. Which do you suppose is the better book? I suppose this is the better book. Which do you suppose is the best food? I suppose every food is delicious.

### ✚ The difficulty to explain Japanese system

2008,10,6



I sometimes take English conversation lesson through Skype. He sends me an article and he asked me about several things concerning the article. It's a good lesson because I can improve both reading skill and speaking skill through this lesson. However, I'm sometimes impatient because I can't explain well about my opinions and also he can't understand the Japanese special system. Of course, it's due to the lack of my English ability. I think another reason might be the difference between our backgrounds, cultures, and social systems. For example, today's article of my Skype lesson was about "freedom of expression in Morocco" from BBC news. To sum up it: In Morocco a criminal who criticized the King was released after he received a royal pardon. "Do you have an Emperor pardon in Japan?" "We have a pardon system, but strictly speaking, it's not an Emperor pardon because our government decides a pardon." "He is a kind of king, isn't he?" "No, he is only a symbol of Japan after World War Two. Our Emperor used to God, but now, he is a symbol of our country." "Huh?" "It's hard for him to understand what I'm saying without a deep understanding of Japanese history."



One of landmarks in Kanagawa is the tallest building in Japan named Landmark Tower. It was completed about fifteen years ago in the reclaimed ground called Minato Mirai 21. I'm not exactly sure who designed it. There is a huge shopping area on the lower floors and basement, a lot of offices on the middle floors, and also a high class hotel including banqueting halls and restaurants in the building. It was scary to look down on the town from the top of the building. Another famous landmark is the huge statue of Buddha in Kamakura. Kamakura was one of the old capitals in Japan like Kyoto and Nara. We have no idea by whom and when it was built but it is said that it was completed in the fourteenth century. It is near the beach and it is located outside. It used to be inside but the big Tsunami hit the building and carried it away. It was also famous for its handsome face. The inside of the statue is hollow and people can enter it if we buy the admission tickets.

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I'm going to send you some pictures of our folk dance festival. Do you know who I am? I'm a woman wearing eye-glasses. It was really hard work to dance wearing a Kimono and Getta, Japanese style wooden sandals. It took about 30 minutes to put on the Kimono. Of course I couldn't put it on by myself. A volunteer elderly women living near our office helped us to put on our Kimono. Every summer, many towns hold their folk dance festivals everywhere in Japan. The very small town named Kaisei, where my office is located, holds their festival in the middle of September. I had not danced in a summer festival since my sons were elementary school kids. The civil servants who work in the local branch make a team and participated in this festival. At first, I was hesitating to participate in the team but it was really fun to dance wearing Kimono. This is one of best memories of mine during this summer. Let's speak again soon!



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#### ✚ An interview

2008,10,3



Our personnel transfer is in the beginning of April, but now it's a period of assessment and I have to hold interviews with my staff. From morning to closing time I had been talking with many employees. I realized every staff member had their own opinion and desire. Some of them are really ambitious; they want to be promoted. The others are modest; I would say they are too easygoing. One guy suddenly began to cry while saying that he didn't have any confidence in his ability. Oh, my... I sometimes got angry in my heart. Why are you so dull? To make staff become motivated is difficult. To boost the morale of staff is my responsibility. To comfort, to encourage, and to flatter are my strategies. Sometimes, I tell of my experiences and on other occasions, I refer some good examples. Anyway, it takes a lot of knowledge to treat a good staff well.

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#### ✚ An eighty-eight-year-old woman

2008,10,2



On my way to Odawara from Osaka, I happened to sit down next to an elderly woman. She looked elegant and friendly. We nodded with each other and she began to talk to me. "I'm going to Tokyo by myself. Where are you going?" "I'm going home to Kanagawa. I guess you are living in Osaka from your Osaka dialect." "Why did you come to Osaka?" "Actually, my mother is living here and I sometimes come to Osaka to take care of her." "How old is she? I'm eighty-eight years old." "Oh, my! You look so young. I can't believe it. Do you often travel alone?" "I live alone in Osaka but one of my sisters is living in Tokyo. My niece is waiting for me at the platform. I haven't seen my sister in Tokyo for three years and I'm looking forward to seeing her again. There are so many kind people in my neighborhood. One of them took me to the station. She was going to an art gallery near the station and took me here. I have no children and my husband passed away over ten years ago. I have been living alone since that time. I'm always bracing myself so as not to bother my relatives and neighbors. I'm so happy because I can still travel and eat anything well." She was really talkative. Her chatting seemed to continue forever. Finally, we had been talking for two and a half hours. I heard her entire biography from her. She was born as the first daughter of five sisters in a rich family but her parents passed away a few years after she married her husband. She had to arrange her sisters' marriages. Two of her younger sisters have already passed away. When one of them was seriously sick in Hiroshima, she moved there to take care of her. After her death, she came back to Osaka and bought a condo where she is living now near the other sister's house. I went to the toilet and showed her how to flush the toilet and threw her lunch box away into the garbage can. She waved her hand to me through the window when I got off the train at Odawara Station. I was a little bit tired, but it gave me a great satisfaction.

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**Dear Monte,**

2008,10,1



Thank you for your e-mail. I'm glad that you had a good time with Chris while eating delicious meals. How is the weather at Mt.Morris? We had a terribly muggy summer but it became cool a few days ago. Today was my mother's 90th birthday. I'm impressed with her positive life-style. Every morning, she gets up at six and exercises by herself while watching a TV gymnastic program. I visited her in Osaka to celebrate her birthday last weekend. Have you ever eaten yakiniku? I think you ate Yakiniku in Shimane with Chris and his friends. I saw your pictures of which you were eating Yakiniku at the restaurant. We grill several pieces of seasoned meat and vegetables on a table by ourselves and eat them. I think Yakiniku is originally Korean food but it's

quite popular in Japan, especially among young people. My mother wanted to eat it again so my sister and I took her to a yakiniku restaurant by car. Now, she is spending peaceful days watching TV, doing crossword puzzles, handcrafting, and reading books. By the way, I'm worried about our business recession due to America's unstable economy. I hope everything will go well. Take care and have a good day.

**TOEIC**

2008,11,30



As today was very fine, I should have rather enjoyed hiking than taking the TOEIC. TOEIC score is not necessary for my job at all but I wanted to know my English level. I finally decided to take the test last July and my score was much better than I expected. I was flying high, but I realized that I should have improved my reading skill because my reading score was worse than my listening score. Today, I couldn't complete the reading parts again although I had been studying workbooks every day. The test requires my concentration power and stamina as well as English ability. After finishing the test, I got eyestrain and I was completely exhausted, even though I drank an expensive fortifier before the test. My score might be worse than before.

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 **the difference between a temple and a shrine**

2008,11,29



Do you know the difference between a temple and a shrine? A temple is a building where a Buddhist monk lives and an image of Buddha is enshrined. Usually there is a cemetery beside a temple. On the other hand, a shrine is a premise where a Shinto God is said to live. Shinto is a Japanese proper religion and Gods are usually legends who were said to be one of the Emperor's ancestors, mountains, stones, old mirrors and so on. There is a Torii, like a tall gate, in front of a shrine. There are so many sects concerning Buddhism and Shinto that even I can't understand exactly. As we pronounce a temple as Tera or Ji in Japanese, if you find the name using Tera or Ji at the last, for example Enkakuji, Hasedera, they are temples. We say Jinjya or Gu about a shrine, so names of Kamakuragu and Tsurugaokahachimangu mean Shrines. During our long history, temples and shrines had been combined with each other so sometimes you can find a temple with a Torii. Regarding Christianity, it was first introduced in Japan in 1549 but soon the Edo Bakufu prohibited people to believe in it. In spite of the ban, some people still believed in

Christianity and they tried to camouflage Christianity to Buddhism. Now, we are insured freedom of religion under our constitution and there are many churches, temples, shrines, what's more new religion buildings all over Japan.

I don't think I'm a religious woman but I usually pray for my family's happiness in front of main buildings of temples and shrines and throw small coins into donation boxes. I got married in Shinto style and held my father's funeral in Buddhist style. Besides, I celebrate Christmas and my son got married in Christian style. It seems to be strange for foreigners but I'm sure it's very common among Japanese people.

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### the itinerary of our trip

2008,11,28



I would like to tell you our rough itinerary. Please let me know the exact time of the train arrival at Kitakamakura, the station before Kamakura after you check it with the Hyperdia .

12:00 Meet at the Kitakamakura station. Usually there is one ticket gate but there might be a temporary gate at the back of the station. If there are two exits, I will wait for you at the exit near Ofuna. I'm a middle aged woman, and I'll be wearing eyeglasses and spreading a handkerchief with a red leaf pattern in front of my chest. If you can't find me, please call my cell. We will go to Tsurugaokahachimangu shrine to see a bright yellow big ginkgo while visiting some famous temples including Enkakuji and Kencyouji.

13:00 Start to Shishimai, a good hidden place to appreciate colored leaves in a hiking course (Recently it became quite popular thanks to magazines and websites.) while visiting several temples and shrines such as Kamakuragu and Zuisenji along the way.

14:30 Arrive at Shishimai and take a rest for a while and go back to the Kamakura station (If you are tired, you can get a bus.)

15:15 Arrive at the Kamakura station and go to Hase by Enoden (Enjoy shopping at Kimachidori, if you want)

15:30 Visit Daibutsu and then walk to Hasedera to watch illuminated leaves from 17:00 (If we have

time, we can take a walk at the Yuigahama beach.)

18:00 Go to Fujisawa by Enoden and eat dinner and then, go back to the Tokyo without a change by Tokaido line (I live near Tsujido, the next station from Fujisawa )

One more notice! Don't forget to watch the right side from a window when your train is approaching the Ofuna station, between Totsuka and Kitakamakura. You can see a big white Kannon statue on the hill near Ofuna. On the way back to Tokyo in the evening, you can also see the illuminated stuff from the left side window.

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### An incomprehensible murder case

2008,11,27



An incomprehensible murder case happened recently. A couple and a wife were stabbed at the entrances of their houses by a false deliverer.

Both the husband of the injured wife and the killed husband used to be high-ranking officials who were involved with the national pension plan, currently a very controversial issue. The police and mass media believed it was terrorism concerning the pension. They thought a group must have killed them because they were angry with the system. However, last Saturday night a forty-six year old guy surrendered to the Metropolitan Police Department. According to his confession, he revenged his dog's death on them. He said that a local health center had caught his dog about thirty-four years ago so he had been living to revenge it under investigation. Actually, there is no relationship between a local health center and Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, and he became speechless when the investigator told him that fact; a health center belongs to a municipal government. What a terrible misunderstanding it was! How miserable the victims and their families are!

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### the Kamakura period

2008,11,26



Japan has a long history and the capital moved several times along with the changes of powerful lords. They say the ancestors of our emperor first governed the country in the fifth Century. There are many big tombs which are said to be old emperors' graves in the Osaka area. In 710 a beautiful capital was built in the present Nara but in 794 they moved the capital to the present Kyoto. The noble culture like poems, and gorgeous twelve layered Kimono flourished there. The tale of Genji and Byodouin which I visited with the American in October typified this era. Nobles owned large possessions and hired warriors to protect them. The warriors gradually became stronger and stronger and one of them, Minamoto, finally governed Japan and established his Bakufu in Kamakura in 1192. However his Bakufu couldn't last so long after his death. His wife's family took over the power and after the disturbance, Ashikaga built his Bakufu in Kyoto in 1336. After two hundred years from that time, Samurai began to fight again and after Ieyasu won in Sekigahara, he moved the capital to Edo, the present Tokyo. Please understand the outline of our history and enjoy the sightseeing in Kamakura. Now, I think you can understand that many temples and shrines there were originally completed during the 12th Century and the 13th Century.

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### Kamakura 3

2008,11,25



I can understand your situation and I will try not to waste your money and time. Daibutsu is near Hasedera where we can enjoy the illuminated leaves and the sunset shining red Mt. Fuji, if we are lucky. After that, let's go to Fujisawa by Enoden, a small tram. We can eat dinner there. Probably restraints are less crowded and cheaper than Kamakura. Anyway, let's meet at Kita Kamakura station around noon on the 7th.

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### Sekigahara

2008,11,23



I visited Sekigahara, which is one of the historic battlefields, with my son's family. I believe almost every Japanese person knows the name of this battle between Ieyasu and Mitsunari in 1600. (sixteen hundred \*that's how it's pronounced\*) At the end of the 16th Century, there were

many Samurai generals who governed their own regions. They were fighting with each other to unify all of Japan. Among them, Nobunaga became the strongest, but he was killed by his liege, because it is said Nobunaga was too decisive and cruel. Then Hideyoshi, who built the Osaka Castle, nearly modified Japan but he died of disease. After his death, all generals were split into two armies, their Super commanders were Ieyasu and Mitsunari, and they were fighting in Sekigahara. At first, Mitsunari seemed to be much stronger but due to some treacherous acts he was beaten. After this big battle, Ieyasu opened Edo Bakufu and it had lasted for approximately two hundred fifty years until the Meiji Restoration. Sekigahara is also said it's the border of Western and Eastern Japan. I was greatly touched at the turning spot of the history where many soldiers passed away.

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## Kamakura 2

2008,11,22



About our one-day trip in Kamakura, the rendezvous time at the Kita Kamakura Station would depend on you. I live near Kamakura so anytime is OK with me. We have convenient transportation websites on which we can check the train schedule but I don't know if there is English version or not? If you tell me your convenient start time and your station, I will check it instead of you and tell you. From five to six o'clock we can enjoy illuminated colored leaves at Hasedera for free so I think it might be worthy to visit. I'm a little bit afraid it will be too crowded to enter the temple. From the temple to the Tokyo station, it takes about one and a half hours. By what time do you want to come home? Regarding a vegetarian, don't worry about it. There are many menus without meat like Soba. Needless to say, monks there are vegetarians. Actually, there is a famous vegetarian diet restaurant but it's a little bit expensive and we have to make a reservation. Please refer to this site.

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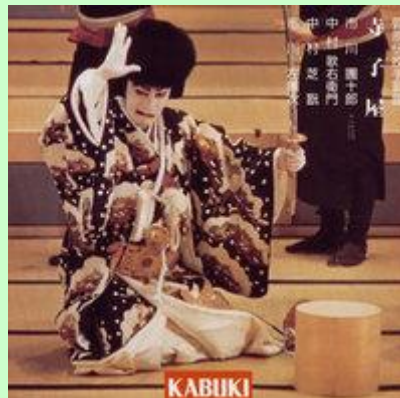
## Teragoya

2008,11,21



The summary of the play is like the following. Several kids are studying in a small school and among them a prince is sheltered. The teacher couple noticed that their enemy would visit them

to kill the prince. One day a good-looking mother took her clever son to the school and the teacher decided to kill him instead of the prince. When the enemy's two subjects came to the school and checked every kid, the teacher offered the head of the prince. To be accurate, it was not the prince's head but the clever boy's head. The subjects satisfactorily received the head and went back but the one of them seemed to be a little bit upset. After that the mother of the late boy came to the school and told the teacher the true story. Her husband was actually one of the subjects and they took leave to take their son to the school to save the prince's life. The father pretended the enemy but he was a sincere servant of the prince's father. He belonged to the opponent group to save the prince. The parents were very proud of their son when the teacher told them the clever son had been willing for the prince to offer his life. At last, everybody including the prince's mother held the funeral and prayed for his spirit. The climax scene of this play was actually the father's emotional performance so that famous actors always perform this role. During Samurai era, the most important and respectable thing was a loyalty to their superiors. This script, which is titled Teragoya (a small school usually ran at a local temple) was first played in 1746 and it's still one of the most famous Kabuki plays. It gave the impression to the American woman even though she couldn't understand the lines.



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Thank you so much for your message to my cell phone and how is your cold? Are you OK now? It's OK with me to receive a correction later. Don't worry about the delay. To tell you the truth, I felt a little bit strange when I read your comment because there was no mention about Kamakura. I was wondering if you had not decided the day or I was too pushy. Now, I can

understand the reason. It was your boyfriend's comment. That makes sense. So, let's go to Kamakura on the seventh. I'm ninety percent sure that it will be fine because we have many fine days during this period. We call these warm days as Koharubiyori which means the warm days, like spring days, during early winter. I think you say Indian summer in English. Anyway, when you decide the time, please let me know. I'm sorry but the thirtieth doesn't work for me because I have to take the TOEIC test, the most authoritative English skill test in Japan.

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 **Kabuki**

2008,11,19



Today, I went to Tokyo on business and my job had completely finished by three o'clock. I couldn't get back to my office until our closing time so I became free in the center of Tokyo after that. I decided to take advantage of this good chance. I strolled in Ginza, the most famous and high-class shopping mall in Japan, and then enjoyed Kabuki. Actually, I was checking about Makumi show, the way to appreciate one act cheaply, through the Internet because an American asked me to take him to Kabukiza. Even though he canceled the schedule suddenly, I wanted to watch it by myself. When I arrived at the theater, there was an American middle aged couple in front of the ticket box. We had to wait there while sitting on the seat for over three minutes because we could buy tickets in order of arrival. As soon as the wife realized that I could speak English a little, she began to ask me a lot of things such as today's show's title, why many people were standing in a line, why some of them are receiving white paper bags, etc. While the play was performing, she whispered several things to me. "The string players are telling the story, right? Who are they?" I also explained the scenes in a small voice. After the play, I told her that it had been a very difficult story to understand for even present Japanese. "It might have been boring for you." "No, I could understand it. It's a story of sacrificing. I'm very much moved. Very wonderful." I was very surprised that the American understood the old Japanese feelings. She gave me her business card and told me to visit her in New York someday. I don't know if I will be able to see her again or not, but it was also a good experience for me. I will write the summary of the story next time.

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I'm not so comfortable with my ability to explain Kamakura well in English, but I would like to guide all of you around Kamakura. It would be my pleasure and also a very good and exciting experience for me. If it's OK with you and your friends, I'm glad to show you some good unknown spots in Kamakura. According to the Internet information, I think the best day to enjoy colored leaves there might be on the 6th or 7th of December. Of course, we should consider the weather conditions. I'm sure that you are fed up with wet Kamakura, so we should decide after checking the weather forecast. If it is fine on 6th, let's go there on that day. If it will rain, we will put off until the next day, the 7th or 13th. There are several good hiking courses to appreciate beautiful red and yellow leaves. Can you walk for two or three miles? Please don't wear high heels. You should wear sneakers. Did you visit Enkakuji temple near the Kita Kamakura Station the other day? If you didn't visit there, let's meet at the Kita Kamakura station, the small station before the Kamakura station. There is only one ticket gate so I can easily find you, and it's located in just front of the temple. Anyway, we still have a plenty of time, so please let me know your convenient day and time, and good way to contact you easily; like your cell phone number or text address. The convenient way to contact me is to send me a text message to my cell.



This morning I went to a hospital to have a physical checkup and drank barium to get my stomach X-rayed. After that, I ate lunch at a restaurant and enjoy shopping at a department store. I was starving because I couldn't eat anything after eating supper last night. I was supposed to send a gift to my relatives at the store but I happened to find a nice bag which I really wanted to purchase. I couldn't help buying it. I had a ten-percent discount ticket for the store but I didn't have enough cash to buy it. To use the ticket, we have to pay with cash. A clerk inspired me to go to a bank near the store. Actually, there was a bank just across a street. I was so glad to get my favorite bag and finally purchased two pairs of shoes, three pairs of slippers, good designed trash box, and a little bit of expensive food. I don't know why, I suddenly bought them on impulse. Probably, I was feeling some freedom. After taking two NOVA lessons through the Internet, I realized I was exhausted. I'm suffering from severe eye pain. It's better for me to go to bed soon.

✚ a beautiful picture

2008,11,16



This is a picture of a beautiful view from the top of a mountain in Kanagawa. One of my friends, who climbed the mountain last Sunday, sent it to me. He wrote, "Unfortunately, the best season of the colored beech leaves had already passed." However, how beautiful misty mountains between a few red leaves are! It shows a deepening autumn beauty. I would like to climb the mountain the beginning of next November.



✚ How to enjoy hot spring

2008,11,15



I usually go to a one-day hot spring during the weekend to relax. There are several public bathes near my house. Today I took an American there. Before we enter each bath area, for men and for women, I explained to him how to take a bath. At first, don't be shy if you are naked among strangers. It's common here. Please take your clothes off in front of a locker and put your clothes inside. Put a one hundred-yen coin in before you lock the locker. It's refundable money so doesn't forget to get it when you open the lock. You should take a shower before you begin to soak in the bath. About faucets: a blue mark means cold water and a red mark means hot water. Be careful not to get burned. You can adjust the temperature by turning a red marked tap. They say bath tabs in open areas are filled from natural hot springs but hot water in inside baths are only warm water. You can't use your towel nor wash your body in a bath. It's prohibited to keep the hot water clean. You should wash your hair, body and face at a row of faucets along a wall. Anyway, please enjoy Japanese style bathing. Please wait for me there at noon.

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## Kamakura

2008,11,14



I was worried about your first visit in Kamakura, because it was absolutely overcast and cold last Sunday. The best season to enjoy colored leaves in Kamakura is from the end of November to the middle of December. There are so many old and famous shrines and temples including the Huge Buddha where you can appreciate beautiful autumn leaves. If you want me to guide you Kamakura, please feel free to let me know your convenient day and time. Also, let me know what kinds of places you want to visit and what kind of food you prefer. I'll arrange your trip. However, I'm working as a civil servant during weekdays and I have a plan to take the TOEIC test on the thirtieth. So, for me, one day among the sixth, seventh, thirteenth, or fourteenth of December is good. I can arrive at the Kamakura Station in thirty minutes from my door and I like to stroll in Kamakura very much. I'm sure you've already known that I really like to speak English so don't hesitate to ask me. You should understand that there are so many visitors in Kamakura during this season. It might be like busy shopping malls. I can understand that as a Gaijin you must want to visit the typical landmarks like my ex-American teacher did. However, personally, I recommend that you shouldn't visit so famous temples and shrines like Turugaoka Hachimangu and Hasedera with the Great Buddha because these sites must be very crowded. Actually, there are several good unknown places that we can enjoy beautiful scenery. Anyway, as Kamakura is not so large area and there are good transportation, let's play it by ear.

## How was your day?

2008,11,13



How was my day? Something was good, something was bad. For example, my back cavity filling came off when I was eating lunch. I have to go to a dentist's office to have my teeth fixed. It's so tiresome. A postman delivered the second-hand dictionary that my son bid for at the Internet auction instead of me, to my house in the evening. It didn't seem to be so new, but it was well packed. I was satisfied with the stuff but I found that the ex-owner had set a password with it as soon as I tried to use it. There was no note of the password in the package so I was disappointed and got angry. Is he a fraud? I called him immediately but there was an answering machine. Fortunately, I still had my own manual book. There was an explanation that said, "Should you forget your password, please call our maintenance office for help." I was a little bit relieved and decided to wait for an answer from the former owner. I also called my son to give him this information. My son scolded me because when I called directly to the trading partner it was against the rules. I apologised for calling the partner while saying that I was not familiar with the auction proceedings. This lunch break I called the maintenance branch and got the information that it had taken over 2500 yen to delete the forgotten password. It also made me irritated. Just now, after coming back home, my son gave me the password which he got from the ex-owner. Now I can easily use the dictionary and I'm happy. In this way I'm spending my everyday life. My emotions easily go up and down.

## Kabuki

2008,11,12



Kabuki is the Japanese traditional musical created about five hundred years ago. Costumes are very colorful and actions are very exaggerated. Kabuki has many plays, old and also modern. Writers are still writing new scripts and Kabuki has huge fans, including foreigners. One play has usually three acts and lasts about four and a half hours containing break times. To appreciate Kabuki at a theater audiences need reserved tickets and there are several ranks of seats. The highest seats cost over ten thousand yen and even lowest seats cost about three thousand and five hundred yen. However, there is a way that we can enjoy Kabuki cheaply and conveniently. We

can watch only one act in a play for less than one thousand yen. It also takes about one hour to enjoy one act. I think it's very convenient and worthy system for foreigners and young people who can't spend a lot of money and long time for Kabuki. However, they don't sell tickets in advance so we have to wait in line before the act. Sometimes we can't buy tickets if tickets are sold out. They apply a first come, first-served system.

In a kabuki play, there is no actress: players are all actors, even though they look so beautiful. The actors who perform as women roles are called Oyama. Every Kabuki actor belongs to each Kabuki family such as Narikomaya. Their society is a really limited and small world; Actually, Kabuki is a descendant business. Only boys who were born as sons of kabuki actors can become Kabuki actors, and they usually start their training of Japanese dance when they are infants. Almost every little actor debuts on a stage at the age of three. However, recently Ministry of Culture and their representatives discussed the matters and widely opened the possibility to be Kabuki actors to ordinary men to improve their performance. The Japanese government established the Kabuki training center, but it seems still hard for ordinary boys to be famous and popular Kabuki actors. Their world is very strict, but therefore, Kabuki performance is one of the most wonderful ones in the world.

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#### directions

2008,11,11



The following are directions to my house. My house is a seven-minute walk from the north exit of the station. It used to take five minutes but now it takes two more minutes due to the construction of the square in front of the station. Go up to the north along the main street and after three minutes, you can find a bank. Then, you can see two tall buildings and six five-story buildings on the right side. That is our condo lot. My building number is one and my apartment number is 233. If you lose your way, don't hesitate to call me. My American teacher came to my house easily, but he confessed to me that he was so nervous when he rang the doorbell because he couldn't read my doorplate written in Kanji.

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#### Outer space

2008,11,10



Now, only astronauts can go to outer space but probably in the future ordinary people will be able to travel there. If it's safe, I'm sure I want to go there and see the Earth from the outside. They say that there is no air, oxygen and gravity and the temperature is quite low. Since there is no pressure, if a spacesuit is broken, the astronaut's body will immediately explode. The Earth is a part of the universe and we can live on the Earth because the Earth is covered with layers of air. Thinking about aliens living on another planet is fantastic. From such a view, I want aliens to live somewhere in outer space. Quite long ago, the famous actor Orson Welles, broadcast the radio drama "The War of the World" and many listeners believed it was a running commentary. It is said that some of them committed suicide so as not to be killed by aliens. I guess that thanks to the movie "E.T." nobody is afraid of aliens nowadays but it's still mysterious to think about the universe.

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#### I miss my dictionary!!

2008,11,9



I bought my useful and lovely electronic dictionary just four years ago and I can never do without this dictionary. It contains many functions including English Japanese, Japanese English, contemporary Japanese, and also archaic Japanese. What's more my dictionary speaks. It means it has a function for pronunciation. Thanks to it, I could improve my English and travel abroad alone. Last Friday, just after I chatted with my American friend, I found it was broken. I changed the batteries several times but it wouldn't work at all. I'm really disappointed even though my husband lent me his dictionary and advised me to buy a new one. I really wanted to get the same dictionary because I'm used to using it. I checked the Internet and finally found that it was up for Internet auction. Now I must bid for it at all cost. I asked my son who, I think, is very good at doing it, to knock down the price. At 10 o'clock, my son proudly sent me a message that he successfully bid for it. OK, please let me know the seller's bank account. I'll deposit the money as soon as possible. I'm looking forward to receiving the dictionary.

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#### our pention plan

2008,11,8



One of the most controversial issues now in Japan is our pension system. Every resident, including foreigners, have to enter the Japanese pension system. However, the system was changed several times and recently it was exposed that they lost parts of our records. Since we sometimes changed our family names because of marriage, or turned over our jobs, they couldn't connect our previous records correctly. That's a terrible problem. We had been trusting our government but our social security system was not reliable. The Minister decided that they were sure to send the confirmation letters to all nations to check the records by ourselves. I received four letters, two of them were my sons' and the others were my husbands and mine. My first son's record was correct but why did they send it to my house? He already got married and is living independently. Of course, he registers his address legally according to the law. My second son's record was also correct. Strictly speaking, he is living in America but I'm his representative in Japan so it makes sense that they sent his record to me. However, when my husband and I opened the envelopes and read the documents, we were so surprised to find our records were incorrect. Both of us have been working for the same prefectural office since we graduated from universities. Our local government has several departments including the board of education. When we were working for educational department, we had to belong to the pension system for teachers. There was no record while we were working for it in the letter, even though they announced that they should send full records.

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 a Turk

2008,11,7



Hi! Monte,

I finally spoke to a foreigner whom I see every morning as you recommended me via Skype. Please read the following essay of mine.

Almost every morning, I see a foreigner on the train on my way to office. I found him studying Japanese. The other day I told my American friend about him and my friend recommended to me that I spoke to him. Usually, the train is not so crowded thanks to the location in the suburbs, and especially the seats both sides of him tend to be empty. Probably, Japanese passengers are shy and don't take leave to sit down next to a foreigner. Honestly speaking, his appearance looks a little strange compared to common people. Even though it's not so cold now, he wears a thick coat and a woolen cap. I was sure that he wasn't an American because Americans are strong

against cold and prefer scanty clothing. Yesterday morning, I found the courage to speak to him. "Excuse me, can I sit down here? Are you studying Japanese?" Actually, he was struggling against a Japanese workbook in earnest. Please guess his mother country. Surprisingly, he was from Turkey and working for the famous Japanese electric company, Hitachi. There is a huge factory of Hitachi near the station next to my offices station. It makes sense. He explained to me how difficult to study Japanese, his third language, was. His mother tongue is Turkish and his second language is English. I thought he could speak English almost perfectly. This morning, I found him reading a book alone as usual, but I didn't sit down next to him because I didn't want to bother him.

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#### **Obama won**

2008,11,6



Obama beat McCain at the presidency election and he will be the first African American President in the U.S. It's a really historical event and I think it's great. Honestly, I supported Hillary because I thought it was the time that woman would become the President. However, she was beaten by Obama to be the Democratic Party's candidate. Anyway, both blacks and women have been discriminated for long years. Hillary addressed that there was still a glass ceiling against women and I believe there is still segregation against black people. This is the first step for every human being to develop the new society.

One of my American friends is really disappointed with the result of the presidency election. He is very conservative and a Republican. He believes that the President-elect has an Islamic background. I'm not an American and can't understand real American society and politics. I shouldn't comment about political matters in a foreign country. Please accept my comment as a mere onlookers' opinion.

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#### **The result of the examination**

2008,11,5



The other day my husband had a physical checkup as usual but a doctor pointed out that one numerical value was quite high. He suspected that my husband had cancer and recommended that my husband has a thorough examination at a hospital. He was hospitalized for three days. Yesterday, I went to the hospital to hear the result with him. Of course, we were very nervous but fortunately he was OK. "There were no cancer cells, but I'm still a little bit worried about the high figure. Please visit a clinic every three months to check up. I'll write a letter of introduction."

"Thank you, Doctor. What kind of food should he eat?" "It's a difficult question. I don't think there is an impact of food on the illness. Please keep the healthy diet like eating vegetables a lot in mind." After that we ate lunch at the neat restraint. Anyway, we are feeling relief at the result and decided to enjoy our everyday life.

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#### **A reciprocal gift**

2008,11,4



Thank you for your personal information. I live in Fujisawa, which is next to both Yokohama and Kamakura. Kamakura is also one of Japanese old capitals and there are so many historical sites such as a huge Buddha sitting down outside. If you want to visit there, please feel free to ask me to guide you there.

#### **A reciprocal gift**

When my son attended his friend's wedding party, he took a Baumkuchen and a catalog book as a return gift of a wedding gift. Baumkuhen is a German cake that looks like a stump. They bake a thin paste in piles and the burn pattern similar with an annual ring. They used to present them for attendance on pottery or china, but these days a catalog book from which attendance can chose their preference freely is in favor among many brides and grooms. At not only a wedding ceremony but also any ceremony like a funeral, we receive the return gift in Japan. We believe it's a very polite custom.

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#### **how to save cost**

2008,11,3



Thank you for your proper comment concerning my trip. I don't know where you are living, but if you want to travel with me, please feel free to ask me. It's also my pleasure. He was my teacher at NOVA, and the company prohibited teachers from communicating with students. After he quit Nova over two years ago, he asked another student whom he happened to meet on the street to let me know his e-mail address. I sent him an e-mail while he was living in the U.S., and after that we have sometimes been chatting with each other through Skype.

The following conversation is from my English lesson. "They are thinking about closing a cafeteria to save cost. What is your opinion about the idea?" "It might decline the employees' motivation. We need nutritious food for lunch." "I prefer eating at restaurants. The foods of our cafeteria are terrible." "It's the case of only your company. We should discuss it in general."

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#### a bigger house

2008,11,2



Now, I'm completely exhausted after spending five days with two rascals. I can't believe that I myself brought up two little kids like them. I spent three days with an American while walking around all day long, and then took care of two kids. It's time to take a rest for a while. It sounds strange, but now I think we need a larger house. In order to let my sons family stay at my house, my present house seems to be a little tight. They slept in a six-tatami-mat room together each night among my closets. If an earthquake hit, they would be crushed. Is it stupid to spend a lot of money for uncommon opportunities? Is it better to have them stay at a hotel near my house? However, I really enjoy entertaining them at my home by myself.

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#### an okapi

2008,11,1



My son's family arrived at my home by car at one a.m. on last Wednesday. My son had to go to Tokyo on business on Thursday and also attend his old friends wedding ceremony today. It's the reason why he visited our house with his wife and two kids. Today I went to a zoo in Yokohama with my two grandkids, their mom, and my husband while my son was away. My daughter in law is

four months pregnant now, but she is very active and healthy. She doesn't have morning sickness at all. The feature animal of this zoo is an okapi, a very rare animal that looks like a zebra and a giraffe. It belongs to the giraffe family, but its neck is not as long as a giraffe. It's about two meters tall and the figure is similar to a horse. The hair is chocolate brown as a whole, but the lower parts of the four legs are cream. There are black striped patterns on the forearms and the thighs. The natural habitat is a dense forest in the center of Africa and their existence was first reported in 1900. Today, I saw it for the first time.



**Hokkaido**

2008,12,31



I'm supposed to be traveling in Vietnam during these year-end holidays but canceled due to my husband's backache. I'm studying for the tour guide test while preparing for the New Year. To summarize Japanese geography in English appears to be a good way to study for both English and geography. Please check critically.

The climate of Hokkaido features low-rainfall weather without the influence of the rainy season and typhoons. There is the Tuguru channel between Honshu and Hokkaido and Hokkaido faces Sakhalin through the Soya channel. Siretoko Peninsula was located in the northeast and was

registered on UNESCO' World Natural Heritage Site in 2005. Lake Toya is the caldera lake facing Mt. Usu on the south side and where the G8 Summit took place in July of 2008. The Kushiro Marsh is famous for its Japanese red-crowned crane and became the designated wetland under the Ramsar Convention in 1980 as the first Japanese district. The special products are sugar beets, potatoes, beans, wheat and barley. Dairy farming and fishery are thriving thanks to its large pasture and some good fishing ports. Industries are also developed.

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#### **Japanese location and territory**

2008,12,30



Japanese Archipelago extends on an arched line from the northeast to southwest along the Asian continent. The northernmost is the island of Etorofu in Hokkaido and it is in latitude forty-five degrees thirty-three minutes north. The farthest south is the Okinotori Island in latitude twenty degrees twenty-five minutes north and surprisingly it belongs to Tokyo. The eastern edge is the Minamitorishima island also in Tokyo and the longitude of it is one hundred fifty-three degrees and fifty-nine minutes. The most western territory is the Yonakunijima island in Okinawa and it is located in one hundred and twenty-two degrees fifty-six minutes. The distance from the northernmost point to the southernmost point is three thousand twenty kilometers. It also stands three thousand one hundred and forty-three kilometers from the east edge to the west. The country has an area of three hundred seventy-seven thousand nine hundred and twenty-three square kilometers. The territorial waters are four hundred thirty thousand square kilometers and the exclusive economic zone is four million fifty thousand square kilometers. Japanese Archipelago contains about six thousand eight hundred islands, including Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyusyu. Three quarters of the territory is occupied with mountainous districts and two thirds are covered with forests. The mountain chains run through the middle of the main island, Honshu, and they separate it into the Pacific side and the Sea of Japan side. In the seas near Japan, both warm and cold currents are running. The Black Stream is the warm current running in the Pacific Ocean and it is known as one of the fastest currents in the world. Another warm current is the Tsushima Current and it flows in the Japan Sea. The Oyashio Current is a cold current running from the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia to the south in the Pacific Ocean. It

is abundant of plankton and offers a good fishery in the offing of the Sanriku coast.

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## Kaitenzushi and Mt.Fuji

2008,12,29



### Kaitenzushi

Nowadays, Kaitenzushi, a conveyer belt style Sushi is very popular among many Japanese in their everyday diet. Sushi used to be a representative of expensive foods. People couldn't eat Sushi so often. We ate it for a special celebration and served it to guests. As Kaitenzushi was familiarized all over the country, ordinary Japanese became able to easily eat Sushi. We can eat various kinds of Sushi, as many as possible, without being concerned with the bill. From this point of view, we would say it made our diet rich. On the other hand, I'm worried about this popularity: I'm not satisfied with it and it appears the present Japanese have an easy behavior about the diet.

### Mt. Fuji

My. Fuji is one of Japan's symbols. It's the highest and most beautiful mountain in Japan. Especially in winter, the gradual shaped mountain covered with snow looks so beautiful and dignified. During ancient days, Japanese people admired it and thought God must have been living there. Actually, there is a shrine on the top of the mountain. People also believed Mt. Fuji was a symbol of their happiness so it is said that if we dream about Mt.Fuji on the New Year's Day, it brings luck of the new year to us. When we can see Mt. Fuji from windows of an airplane and the bullet train, almost every passenger gladly looks at it. I think it's the evidence of how Japanese people still love Mt. Fuji very much. Now, many Japanese want Mt. Fuji to be the World Heritage Site of UNESCO and try to clean the mountain.

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## the origin of the word of Japan

2008,12,28



Why do so many Japanese people wear white masks?

Why do so many Japanese people wear white masks?

From February to April, many Japanese people are wearing white masks to protect themselves from pollens. Japanese cedar pollens actually cause hay-fever and many people suffer from it during spring time. There are so many cedar woods in Japan because we planted a lot of cedar trees just after World War Two. During the war, many woods in urban areas were destroyed and a cedar was a suitable tree to gain greens again, because it can grow up very fast. However, now its pollen troubles a lot of people after fifty years.

#### The etymology of Japan

There are several theories of it but the most general one is like the following. In Japanese we call our country Nippon now but we used to pronounce it Jippon in Middle Ages. European people who visited Japan in that period pronounced Zipangu in their way. Then, western people began to call our country Japan. Actually, the Italian traveler named Marco Polo, who wrote about Japan in the thirteenth Century, called our country "Zipangu" and described that it was a fantastic golden paradise where they easily could get plenty of gold. The Chinese character, "Nippon" means the country where the sun raises at first. Japan is located in the east of Asian continent so it's true if we are thinking about it in the Asian viewpoint.

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#### New Year Cards

2008,12,27



It's our tradition to send postcards to our acquaintances on New Year's Day. During several year-end days, post offices are so busy to order many such postcards. To send cards just on the first is their responsibility so they hire a lot of part-time workers to finish the arranging job until the New Year. People also finish writing cards by at latest the twenty-ninth if we want to have the cards reach their destination on the first.

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#### Sigotoosame

2008,12,26



Sigotoosame is the last working day of one year, traditionally it is December twenty-eighth for governmental organizations. This year, since the twenty-eighth is Sunday, Sigotoosame is today,

the twenty-sixth. Running off the subject, as January fourth, on which we start to first work in the New Year, will be Sunday; we are going to have nine holidays during this year-end and New Year holidays. Now that I canceled my trip abroad, I'm going to read some books and watch DVDs while taking care of my injured husband. In my memory, we only cleaned our office and attended the ceremony and after that came home earlier than usual until twenty years ago. These days Sigotoosame is not much different from usual working days. We don't even drink alcohol after work; just go home after closing time.

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## Christmas in Japan

2008,12,25



In general, Christmas is a day when we eat fancy cakes and give presents to kids for ordinary Japanese people except Christians. Many houses having kids decorate Christmas trees and have Christmas parties while eating roast chickens: in Japan chicken is much more popular than turkey. These days Christmas became a special day for young couples: they date at restaurants or amusement parks and exchange presents. It's a day for them to deepen and check their love. What's more, many commercial buildings and stores are decorated with Christmas illuminations and play Christmas music. Christmas is commercially very important in Japan. They usually achieve the biggest sales during the Christmas season combined with the year-end sales battle.

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## Nabemono

2008,12,24



Winter is a season when we can taste various kinds of Nabemono. Nabe in Japanese means a pan so Nabemono is a general name of a food which we can eat while cooking in a pan on a table. People around a table eat Nabemono from one pot. Ingredients for Nabemono are generally meat or fish, several kinds of vegetables, mushroom, tofu and so on. There are two types of Nabemono: one type is seasoned by soy sauce or miso, another is boiled with flat soup and we dip ingredients in a rich soup in a small cup just before we eat. The representative of the former is Sukiyaki and the latter is Chirinabe. Anyway, there are no strict rules about how to cook Nabemono: we can use leftover vegetables and many kinds of soup. As a home manager, I can say that Nabemono is

the best recipe for the winter table. It is convenient, delicious and warms eaters' hearts and body. Sometimes, it's very economical if we use leftovers.

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#### Cancellation of our tour

2008,12,23



Everything about my holidays was suddenly changed. When I came home last night after overtime work, my husband was on his bed and suffering sharp pain on his back. He couldn't move a muscle. He felt a dull pain on his neck in the morning but he could work all day long. However, his pain began to be terrible after coming home. This morning, I took him to a hospital and a surgeon X-rayed his neck bone. Probably, he cricked his neck while sleeping. Anyway, now he can't move at all. We decided to cancel our trip to Vietnam. I sent e-mails to the travel agent and the travel insurance company. I called another travel agent to negotiate about a refund of the hotel. Since today is just four days before our start, we lost quite a lot of money. However, if it had happened in Vietnam, I'm sure I wouldn't know what to do.

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#### The reason why I decided to study for the interpreter-guide test

2008,12,22



I have been studying English since my son entered a graduate school in the U.S. My first aim was to be able to speak English so-so in order to attend his commencement. Probably I achieved my first goal, but I had several opportunities to entertain Americans and British people at my home and some view sites. They were my pleasures and also the foreign people appreciated them. I want to deepen my English ability and my knowledge. Recently, I realized that my hope just corresponded with the aim of this test and qualification. I have been working as a civil servant for many years since I graduated from university. My retirement age is getting nearer and nearer now. After retirement, I would like to spend my days doing my favorite worthwhile thing, a tour guide for foreigners. I want to work for a private diploma. This qualification will enrich the rest of my life.

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Today's topic is a review of a science class. Water freezes into ice at zero degrees Celsius and changes into vapor at one hundred degrees. Steam changes into drops of water when it's cooled and ice melts into water when it's warmed. In a different phrase, water condenses at zero and evaporates at one hundred. To coagulate means that liquid changes into a solid and to liquefy means a solid melts into liquid. To evaporate means liquid changes into gas and to liquefy means gas changes into liquid. The English word condense has two meanings; to liquefy and to coagulate. What's the meaning of sublimation? It means that a solid directly changes into gas without liquefaction. Dry ice is a good example of sublimation. When my teacher asked me this word, I answered, "Too difficult for me. I studied about it quite long ago. Now, I can't answer even in Japanese." Anyway, when we eat hot noodle with eyeglasses, they are easily steamed up. Windowpanes are wet with dewdrops in the early morning in winter. These are caused by this natural phenomenon.



### Domestic violence

It's violence from a husband to his wife. It has been reportedly a big social problem in Japan but it's the big issue not only in Japan but also in many countries. I would say it rather happens less times in Japan than many other countries, especially developing countries. It's true that physically men are stronger than women on the average. It might be easy way for stressful men to hit women around in order to relieve some of their stress. Women who are dancing to men's tune are kind of to blame. However, if she wants to escape from her terrible husband, she can't do it without economic independence. In my opinion, it's the most important solution of this problem that women should stand on their own legs.

This is an e-mail to the hotel. Please check my English.

Thanks for the information. We would like to make a reservation for the shuttle bus from the airport. Please send me the response by e-mail to make sure of the booking.

✚ my daily life

2008,12,19



Can I describe what I was doing today in English? At five thirty, my cell phone, which I usually use as an alarm clock, awoke me. I stopped the bell and drowsed again until five fifty. I powered two cups of coffee and toasted a piece of bread for breakfast. I ate and drank them with dried persimmon while glancing at the newspaper. I read only the headlines. Then, I went to my desk to turn on my computer. I checked e-mails while drinking the remnants of a coffee. At seven, I brushed my teeth, washed my face and dried it with a towel at a washstand. I took off my pajama and put on clothes. I rushed into the powder room again and made up in a hurry. I turned off the computer and checked the switches of the stove. At five minutes before seven, I headed to the station. I rode on the same train to Atami as usual and began to read a book, then I found an empty seat at the next station. I love this time while I can enjoy reading a book for thirty minutes. Many passengers flooded out to an escalator as soon as the doors opened at Odawara. There were such long lines of people in front of it. I'm sure it was a failure of the design that there are few stairs in this station. Anyway, I safely caught another train and sat down next to a Turkish friend with whom I recently became friends. I said goodbye to him at the next station to go to my office. It was also hard work to walk to my office. After twenty minutes, I arrived at my office on time. I did this and that while I was working at the office. It's already dark these days when it gets to closing time. I came back to my house the same way but the difference was my mind. I enjoyed feeling free.

✚ Unemployment

2008,12,18



The world wide depression due to the bankruptcy of the subprime loans in the U.S. produced a lot of unemployment, even in Japan. Some big companies announced the displacement of many temporary employees. Some of the jobless people said that they could not help applying for public assistance. Once they receive the financial aid, they might lose motivation to work by themselves. It makes them lazy and lose respect from their families. Worse, an unsteady lifestyle causes illness. They need another aid, medical benefits. It's a vicious circle. These benefits come

from our taxes. It also becomes the reason of social disorder. I believe having a constant job is important to make a healthy society. What kind of policy is effective for decreasing unemployment? Should they promote public enterprises? Should the government aid companies which are in fiscal crisis? Is it important to give vocational education to unskilled workers? It's difficult for me to understand the economic system. I only hope this bad economic situation recovers soon.

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## Bonenkai

2008,12,17



This week is actually my Bonenkai, a year end party. Following last night, I had a party tonight with my colleagues at a restaurant in an affiliation with a beer factory. Our menu was so-called all you can eat, a currently popular one. Grilled meat and vegetables were good and fresh beer was nice. They served various kinds of beer. Some of them I first drank in my entire life. I especially loved stout. I'm full now. By the way, Bonenkai literary means a party which we hold to forget troubles in the year. I could drink a lot when I was young, but now I prefer eating delicious food to drinking alcohol. My office is in one of the most rural areas in Kanagawa and it takes over one and a half hours from my house to it. The restaurant was located much farther from the station than the office. The company built the plant there because the place is blessed with plenty of clear water. However, it's too inconvenient to gather a lot of customers. Today we went there by taxi and returned to the local station by taxi again. If it was in a convenient place, at least within a walkable place from the station, more people would visit there and give profit to the small town. I would like to visit there frequently in private but this visit might be my first and last one.

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## Shiwasu

2008,12,16



It's already in the middle of December. In classic Japanese, we call December Shiwasu. When we write it in Kanji, Shi means a monk and Wasu means to run around. So it originally meant a very busy month when even monks, who usually walked slowly, were so busy that they ran about all day long. Actually, I have a lot of things to have to finish by the end of this year like cleaning my

house perfectly and writing New Years Cards, but my engine has not started yet.

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## Sazae San

2008,12,15



Sazae-San is a very popular comic strip in Japan. Actually, it had been serialized every morning in a famous national newspaper for twenty-five years, from 1949 to 1974. It was also dramatized and made into animated movies several times. Sazae, it means turban shell in English, is a young cheerful wife with an infant boy who is living with her husband, parents, younger brother and younger sister. No one knows why her husband and she were still living with her family in the same house after getting married. There might have been a lack of houses. The woman cartoonist, Machiko Hasegawa, vividly depicted her humorous everyday life. I happened to find the English version books of this comic at a library. Of course, I borrowed five books. I heard our everyday life was very severe and miserable just after World War Two. There was not enough food. However, Sazae merrily distributed rations to people with her neighbors and tried to cook substitute food while listening to a radio cooking program. It's a really heartwarming wonderful society which the present people living in a big city have lost.

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## our vacation plan

2008,12,14



Our holiday plan

Below is a conversation between my first son and me through Skype.

On the 13th

I'm going to stay in Vietnam with your father at the end of this year. Where and how are you spending your New Year holidays? You can visit our house on the first of January.

We haven't decided anything, yet. My wife wants to stay at her parents' home but it is too far to go by car. I'm going to talk about our holiday plans with her tonight.

On the 14th

Mom, I'm going to San Francisco by myself during this vacation. My wife and kids are spending two weeks at her parents' home while I'm away.

You will go where? Are you going to your brother's house? Could you reserve air tickets?

Yes, last night I sent an e-mail to him. He answered yes so I called him this afternoon. Actually, he got the United tickets for me by using his mileage. I will pay him one hundred thousand yen for those tickets after arriving in America. He will let me stay in his apartment house. I'm so excited now. This is my first visit to San Francisco.

It's been already ten years since I first and last visited America when I was a student.

Is that so? Your father told me that there were no tickets during New Year Days last month, when he searched tickets to San Francisco.

Now, you can find a lot of cheap tickets through the Internet.

We've already booked the hotel. We will enjoy our holiday in Ho Chi Minh. Please check on your brother and let me know his situation. Once more, don't forget to take travel insurance. I envy you for visiting my son. Anyway, I'm glad that you are still so close.

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#### a message to a hotel in Vietnam

2008,12,13



I'm going to travel in Vietnam at the end of this year with my husband. We have nine days off during the New Year week this year. We are not so young and we decided to travel abroad as much as possible while we are still strong. Traveling abroad with heavy suitcases and suffering from the time difference might be hard after we become older. During the New Year season, package tours suddenly become expensive. My husband looked for affordable air tickets and booked a hotel through Expedia. Today I read the website of the hotel written in English. Thinking about the price, I didn't think it was a high class hotel, but actually it looked like a four-star luxurious hotel. I have to send a message to reserve a shuttle bus from the airport to the hotel. Please check if my message, written below, makes sense or not.



## Christmas illumination

2008,12,12



Colored leaves season has almost finished. Now, it's a season of illumination. Regardless of being a Christian or not, many owners decorate their shops with Christmas trees. Thanks to a light emitting diode, blue illumination has been quite common since a few years ago. You can see brightening decoration anywhere in big cities. Even near my station, actually it's not so big compared to the other stations along Tokaido line, I can enjoy beautiful blue trees. Besides, in the rural area where my office is located, the hillside is decorated with lights.



## Cram schools 2

2008,12,11



The aim of cram schools is to make students pass tests so they usually demand them to study so hard. I hear they force students to take practice examinations every Sunday and change their classes to advanced, middle and lower class. In some schools, they arrange the students' seats in good score order. It must be stressful and kids must be so tired to study for such a long time. My sons were also studying at cram schools while they were junior high and high school students. Honestly speaking, they enjoyed their cram schools days. They said teachers there were much better than ordinary teachers at school and they made a lot of friends there. It might be a stereotyped thinking that cram schools are a stressful and bad thing. So the above explanation is a general theory.



## What are cram schools?

2008,12,10



What are cram schools? The Japanese education system is consisted of six-year elementary school, three-year junior high school, three-year high school, and four year college. Above all, the former two schools are compulsory education in Japan. Every resident in Japan can study at

compulsory public schools for free but to enter high school and college requires passing entrance examinations, even though the schools are public ones. As the U.S., we have also private schools and if kids want to study at private elementary and junior high schools, they have to pass the test. Recently, many parents, especially ones with more than the average income want their kids to enter private schools. Actually, cram schools are where they teach kids the special technique to pass the entrance examinations. After school, students study at cram schools until nine or ten.

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### the Japanese style

2008,12,9



Why don't most Japanese people count our change when we get it? In my opinion, Japanese shops have been thinking the most important things for doing well with their commerce is to get reliability from their customers. If they cheat their change, the customer will never again buy merchandise from that store. What's worse, the bad rumor must spread among neighbors and finally they will lose a lot of customers. It's our traditional thinking style and thus, we basically trust shop clerks. Recently, many chain stores educated their clerks to count the change in front of the customer by themselves. They usually count the bills at first and then count small coins while showing them to the receiver. It's my thought about the question.

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### Yoga practice

2008,12,8



It was not until one of my neighbors recommended me to join the practice that I started my Yoga class at a community center on Wednesday evening last May. It's a kind of spontaneous circle so the lesson fee is quite cheap, just one thousand yen per month. What's better, the building is very close to my house. It's just a two minute walk. About fifteen women members are doing Yoga with a leader while hearing healing music. I'm a stressful woman, always staring at a computer screen and being irritated with my staff at the office. I had been suffering from terrible stiff shoulders but these days my condition is quite good thanks to Yoga. Bending and stretching myself for one and a half hours make me feel really comfortable and relaxed.

## ✚ a trip in kamakura

2008,12,7



I really enjoyed the trip with you. All of you are very nice and I was impressed with Jeremy's enthusiasm to study Kanji. He also taught me how to improve my English vocabulary; according to his explanation, English words are formed by several parts which are from Latin and Greek and mean particular meanings like Kanji. For example, a word of recall is consisted of "re" which means "again" and "call" so together it means "call back". I was also very glad that American young people were enjoying experiencing a different culture in Japan. I'm sure if you have some troubles in Japan, I will give you what I can to help even though you could solve them by yourselves. Anyway, it was very fine and everything went well except the restaurant in the city hall. We were very lucky because our behavior in our everyday lives is quite good. It's from one of Japanese saying. What's more, thank you for the CDs. I've already listened to them. They are good and I will enjoy my Christmas while listening to the music. I know several songs on them but I heard the others for the first time. If you have time, please send me a list of songs. Again, please feel free to ask me to plan another trip including kabuki.



## ✚ How to save Africa

2008,12,6



It is said that many countries in Africa is still poor. I see advertisements sometimes which ask us to donate a little money to kids who are suffering from hunger and disease in Africa. I'm moved by them but I never donate to such associations. I've heard that that money is often misappropriated by officers because of corruption. Probably associations are reliable, but after they give the contribution to the governments, it might be hard to monitor the fund. The land condition might not be suitable to produce grains in some places in Africa. People don't seem to know how to create useful goods. The literacy rate might be low there. In my opinion, the best way to aid Africa is not to give a donation, but to help people dig wells in deserts, build schools, and educate people directly. I think young motivated people who belong to Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers are already doing such activities there.

## ✚ Zen

2008,12,5



Many temples in Kamakura belong to the Zen sect of Buddhism because Zen was the most suitable and thus popular among Samurai in that period. Before that, aristocrats believed in Jyodo, which means paradise, and so it was the sect of Buddhism during the Heian era. The principal of the Jyodo sect is just to recite sutra in earnest so as to go to the paradise after death. It was the easy way for noble people, who had nothing to do except falling in love and praying for their happiness to Buddha, to depend on the region. On the other hand, Zen requires people to train themselves to gain the enlightenment. Monks practice Zazen and respect simple and sturdy lifestyle. It matched the Samurai spirit.

## ✚ Kamikaze

2008,12,4



Do you know why Kamakura Bakufu fell down in 1333? Even though the Shogun named Minamoto

ended when the third Shogun, Sanetomo, was killed, Hojo clan continued to govern Japan as Regent. The powerful Mongolian Emperor, Kublai, who conquered China attacked Japan two times in 1274 and 1281. Big typhoons luckily hit their fleet both times and they couldn't help going back. After that, Japanese people began to believe that The God Winds, Kamikaze, always protected us under serious crisis. It's the reason why we named our small combat planes Kamikaze during World War Two. However, Kamakura Bakufu could no longer afford to reward local Samurais who spend their energy against Mongolians. Frustrated Samurais complained and finally revealed against Bakufu. By the way, there is a famous but untrustworthy legend believed about Yoshitsune. It is said that he didn't die in northern Japan but ran away to China. It's also believed that the famous Genghis Khan, the grandfather of Kublai, was the same person as Yoshitsune and that Yoshitsune became the Mongolian leader.

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#### ✚ Yoritomo and Masako

2008,12,3



Compared to Yoshitsune, Yoritomo and Masako have been unpopular; especially Masako is said to be as a typical wrong wife. They had two sons and a couple of daughters. After Yoritomo's death, the first son named Yoriie became the second Shogun but soon he was forced to resign and finally was killed by Hojo family, Masako's parents' family, at the age of twenty-two. Then, the second son assumed the third Shogun but he was assassinated by his nephew, Kugyou, at Tsurugaokahachimangu. You can see a big old ginko tree near the main building and it is the tree where the assassin was hiding. After that, Masako placed a young puppet Shogun and began to govern Japan with the Hojo members.

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#### ✚ Benkei

2008,12,2



The other is Benkei's maneuver performance against enemies to protect his master, Yoshitsune. Yoritomo set up many check points all around Japan to arrest Yoshitsune. One day they pretended to be a group of monks who were traveling to collect contributions to renovate a temple. One officer suspected that they were Yoshitsune's party but Benkei quickly read off a

fake roll of donators and hit Yoshitsune who was making himself as a carrier. The officer truly believed he was wanted, but he was impressed so much by Benkey's loyalty that he allowed the party to go through the checkpoint.

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## Yoshitsune

2008,12,1



I studied history during my school days but now I have forgotten many details of it. I had better review it to enjoy sightseeing in historical places. Anyway, I want to introduce famous stories concerning Kamakura era. It has three advantages. First, I can give you a little bit of knowledge. Then, I can recall my old memories and make them solid. Lastly, I can improve my English skill.

Yoritomo Minamoto (Minamoto is his family name.) established Kamakura Bakufu in 1192 thanks to his younger half-brother, Yoshitsune's help, but after getting the power he decided to kill his brother because he was afraid of Yoshitsune's strength. Yoshitsune fled all over Japan with his several fellows including his lover, Shizu, who was a beautiful dancer, and a strong and loyal priest, Benkei. During their escape, a lot of tragic and touching incidents happened. Japanese people have a tendency to prefer the weak and unfortunate hero, so Yoshitsune has been much more popular than his cruel brother for a long time and many dramas about him were written and they are still performed as Kabuki plays. One of the most famous plays is the sad parting story between Yoshitsune and Shizu in Yoshino, Nara. After that she was reportedly arrested, taken to Kamakura, and forced to dance in front of Yoritomo and his wife, Masako at Tsurugaokahachimangu. She also gave birth to Yoshitsune's son, but he was killed as soon as he was born and buried in Yuigahama beach.