

# Roots in Ripon

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## Making Some Sushi

The article I wrote last week ended with me attempting to use chop sticks for the first time in a Japanese home in Hiroshima, valiantly attacking a sticky rice ball in clear broth. Mr. Shaw Fuji, or Fuji-san as I called him, became a good friend. On those weekends that I had off, I would grab the train and spend the weekend at his home.

His was a traditional Japanese home. He and I would sit cross-legged on a tatami mat with a table before us for drinks and food. I say it was a traditional home because Fuji-san's wife was only seen when she brought in another heated bottle of sake (Japanese rice wine), or food. Otherwise, I never saw her. We would sit and have lengthy conversations about all sorts of topics, consuming quite a bit of sake. Sake is served hot, and goes down very smoothly.

I discovered that he studied English solely in Japan. He never traveled to an English-speaking country, or attended an English-speaking school. He was proficient enough to be a teacher of English. His command of the English language was indeed admirable. I asked him one time what the Japanese thought about the United States having dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and then Nagasaki to force an end to World War Two. He was thoughtful for a few moments, and then said, "We don't talk about it, really. But, if we had had the bomb, we would have used it on you."

Since he taught in a high school, from time-to-time I would meet some of his students. On one occasion he introduced me to two teenage girls from one of his classes. I smiled, shaking their hand, saying, "My name is Chuck-san." Both girls immediately started giggling, looking from me to Fuji-san and back to me while holding their hand over their mouth (it's considered impolite for them to show their teeth). This puzzled me, so I asked Fuji-san, "Why are they giggling?" He smiled and said, "Well, in Japanese, Chuck (or it's equivalent sound) means zipper." I'm not sure if I turned red at that point, but I suspect I did!

One evening Fuji-san said, "Let's go to a sushi bar." Sounded good to me, so we left the house and walked to the local sushi bar which I learned was a favorite of his. It was early in the evening, so we were the only customers at the time. We sat at the bar watching the chef put together a platter of sushi for the two of us. I was intrigued at the way the chef sliced and diced various sea food and vegetables for the fingers of rice on the platter (the finger of rice is an oblong, compacted mound

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of rice). The next thing I knew, the chef was beckoning me to join him behind the counter. Sounded good to me, so I jumped up and made my way around the counter. After scrubbing my hands at the sink, he handed me an apron which I put on and stood beside him where he taught me to make the rice fingers. He then showed me how to slice the different kinds of raw fish to go atop the rice, including sea weed. I was really getting into it when I heard the door open. Looking up I saw a Japanese couple standing there, awe-struck, staring at this white guy from America with a Marine high-and-tight haircut, making sushi. The expression on their faces was priceless! Unsure at first, they finally decided to come in and sit. They even ate the sushi I had prepared. That was a special moment for me!

Since I was unfamiliar with many of the customs of Japan, I learned an embarrassing lesson at the Fuji home. Wishing to take a bath, Fuji-san showed me where the tub was. After the house was quiet that evening, I stepped into the bathing room. I noticed an odd shaped tub full of hot water. I stuck a toe in to test just how hot it was. It was hot! Well, I figured that if these folks could take a really hot bath, then so could I. The warning signs went off in my head, and the good sense that God gave me was over-ruled by my declaring to no one but myself, that I'm a Marine, and I'm tough, and I can do this!

When I was done, I looked a lot like a boiled lobster. I dried myself off, drained the tub and went to sleep on the tatami mat. The next morning Fuji-san came into the room smiling. He asked if I had slept well. I assured him that I had. He proceeded to inform me that the hot water I bathed in and then drained is their supply of hot water for use throughout the day. What I failed to realize was there was a pitcher for dipping the hot water and then pouring it over your body on the ceramic tile flooring. Then you soaped yourself down and rinsed with more hot water. The water would then run down to a drain at a low spot on the floor. I felt really foolish. I don't know if I was still red from the hot bath the previous night, or I was just red from embarrassment, but it was a painful lesson.

It was about eight months later that I was back in Japan playing football for the Subic Bay Admirals (from Subic Bay Naval Base, the Philippines) when I walked into a Christian Servicemen's Center in Yokosuka. I heard the Gospel presented in such a way that I simply knew I had to make my decision to trust Christ as my Savior that night.

I have always been amused with the realization that I was born and raised in the most Christian nation in the world, and yet I had spurned Christ and the Gospel. Yet at the age of twenty-four and a sergeant in the Marine Corps, I find myself accepting Jesus in perhaps the most closed nation to the Gospel in the world.

Many years later as a Navy chaplain I would return to Japan numerous times while the command chaplain of the supply ship, the USS White Plains (AFS4). More on that later.