

Anecdote One

I'm going to tell you a story about my crazy dog, Sally. When I was a kid, we had a Labrador. Like most labradors, she was a very friendly family pet, and full of character. Unfortunately, she was also very good at digging.

At that time, my parents owned a newsagent shop, selling newspapers, birthday cards, sweets and cigarettes. We lived in a flat above the shop, and also had a huge back garden. I loved it there because I could read comic books all day, but Sally sometimes got bored and tried to escape.

The shop was on the edge of Salisbury Plain, quite near a big army camp, so there were a lot of soldiers and military vehicles in the area. One day, we heard a terrible sound outside the shop. We all ran outside and saw that our dog had been hit by a tank! It sounds bad, but she was tough, and actually she was barking at the tank driver as if to say "Hey, drive carefully you idiot!"

We took her to the vet and she recovered soon. She lived to be a very old dog, but after that experience she was much more careful when crossing the road.

Anecdote Two

I like the Japanese dining style, but you have to be careful. Let me tell you about a time I wasn't careful enough.

I went out shopping with my wife one day and I found a beautiful pair of white leather sneakers, hand-made in Europe, and quite expensive. In those days, we didn't have any children so we had a lot more time and a lot more money. I decided to buy them.

Later that day, I met up with some friends for dinner. We went to an *izakaya* and ate a lot, drank a lot and talked a lot. It got quite late, but it was a pleasant summer night so I decided to walk home.

I lived about forty minutes away on foot, a nice way to digest a big dinner, but after ten minutes my feet began to feel very sore. Of course, I was wearing my new shoes. I figured that they were still a bit tight and they would loosen up soon.

However, by the time I got home it was clear that the shoes were much too small.

They had felt fine in the shop, so I didn't understand it.

The next morning, my wife looked very annoyed. "Go and check your new shoes" she said. I went to the front door and looked. They were not my shoes! Just then, my friend called me. "Hey," he said, "After you left last night I found your new shoes at the *izakaya*. I brought them back for you".

I was very embarrassed and I took the wrong shoes back to the *izakaya*. I feel sorry for the poor man who had to go home in bare feet while I was wearing his trainers. I always check my shoes very carefully now!

Anecdote Three

When I was young I didn't really know what I wanted to do and I spent a lot of time travelling. When I look back, I did a lot of stupid things... but I had a lot of fun and adventures. Let me tell you about a strange situation I got into without thinking.

In the late 1990's I quit my job to take a long train trip around Europe with a friend.

We started in France and travelled down to Spain, across to Italy, then down to Greece. We almost got trapped on the Greek island of Corfu - the boat left once a day, very early in the morning, and we missed it for three days.

But eventually we escaped and got to Athens, on the Greek mainland. From there, we prepared for the longest and most difficult leg of our journey.

We planned to take a train from Greece, through the Balkans, all the way north to Budapest in Hungary. At that time, the political situation in Eastern Europe was very volatile, but we were young and stupid and didn't really think about it. As we travelled north through the various Balkan states, immigration officers came on the train and checked our passports. We were quiet and polite.

In the middle of the night, we stopped in the middle of nowhere. This time, we were all dragged off the train and made to wait near a small shed with a hand-painted sign; 'Visas'. The American's were taken away to be interviewed, but we paid all the money we had and were allowed to get back on the train. Many hours later, we arrived in Budapest safely.

Later, I read more about the terrible situation in Yugoslavia at that time and I can't believe we just caught a train through without thinking. I guess we were lucky! It's important to know about the places you travel through, clearly.