**Chapter 1　Speeding Violation**

It was on the Hokuriku Expressway that stretches across Fukui and Ishikawa prefectures. I was driving that expressway regularly, twice a week, at that time to get from the office in Kanazawa to client in Fukui.

 I do not remember the exact date, but it was in the summer of 2001. I was driving home from Fukui on the Hokuriku Expressway as I have always done. The only difference was, I had let go of my small displacement Toyota car, Vitz, to one of my subordinates and was not driving a Toyota Harrier, provided by the company FYI, the Harrier had just been released into the market and had the same engine as today's Toyota's top car model, Lexus.

 I should note that with Vitz's displacement, I always needed to step on the accelerator all the way down to drive through the ramps and slopes between Fukui and Kanazawa. But this new car had a displacement as twice as much as Vitz and a light pressure on the accelerator was enough to get over these slopes.

Reflecting back on this, this was probably the cause....

 A few days later (I think it was Monday), a pink envelope arrived at my home. When I opened it, it was a notification from the highway patrol saying that I (or "my car" to be exact) had violated the speed limit on the Hokuriku Expressway and am requested to show up at their police station.

 Ever since I got my driver's license, I had only done one traffic violation, which was when I accidently driven into a rice paddy path in the rural area. There was a police car nearby who saw this, and the officer handed me a ticket for trespassing a designated pathway.

People couldn't get around the Hokuriku area without a car and drivers were prone to violations. It was rare that driver only had one point deducted from his driver's license in such an area.

However, in this pink envelope, there were two more items other than the besides the notice of appearance. One was a picture of myself driving, taken by Orvis (Speed Detection System) and the other was a document indicating that the car was driven at a speed of 150 kilometers per hour.

I turned slightly pale. Though it was on the expressway, the maximum speed limit is 100 kilometers per hour. If I had violated it at 150 kilometers per hour, we were not talking about a mere deduction of a point or two.

I looked up on deduction points of traffic violations on the internet and immediately found that my speeding violation was about 12 points deduction, and subject to a fine of about 100,000 yen and suspension of about 90 days.

Two days after receiving the pink envelope, I went to see the highway patrol at a police station in West Kanazawa. I was shown an even more clear photo of my violation. There was no way I could make any excuses. I had no other choice but to consent to the administrative penalty of 90 days suspension and 100,000 yen fine. I reluctantly signed the forms handed to me by the patrol officer.

It took some time before the administrative penalty became active so until then I able to drive the car as usual. In the meantime, I had to go to my clients in Fukui again. While driving I was preoccupied with thoughts of how to live during my suspension. I would have my subordinate drive me around during suspension, but still, it would not be very economical in a city like Kanazawa where one needed a car to get around. It would be pretty tough to even go shopping without a car.

I opened my mailbox as usual that Friday and I couldn't believe my eyes. Inside was the same pink colored envelope that I just saw this Monday.

 I opened the envelope and checked what was inside. I could feel sweat gathering around my temples. It was again the same Orvis data of me traveling on the expressway with my beloved Harrier, and another indicating that the Harrier was driving a mountain road between Fukui and Ishikawa at 150 kilometers per hour. Just like I saw it on Monday.

Though I was still under the process of being penalized, I have added on to my already accumulated 13 violation points. I didn't need to look it up on the internet anymore.

By no doubt, I was going to be revoked of my driver's license!

If this was an ordinary person, he/she will non-reluctantly accept this revocation of their driver's license. BUT Hiroshi Taniguchi isn't the kind of guy that easily gives in. I started studying mechanical and physical blind spots of speed measuring machines. Fortunately, my college major was applied physics, so I was familiar with science jargon. I planned to persuade the judges at court that "measurement of speed and determination of position" was impossible due to Feynman's physics of "speed and position cannot be understood at the same time."

 I wanted to gather more information but didn't have enough time. So, I set up a business trip to China for consultation of business I was engaged in at that time and had my investigation postponed twice. The prosecutor at that time was very understanding and told me it was okay if it was work. He didn't fuss postponing my investigation.

 At the prosecution, I started blabbering that if either the location I violated the speed limit or the speed that my car was driving at became clarified, then the other would become unclear. I made sure to apply Feynman's physics with a touch of Kurt Gödel’s "uncertainty principle"! 　At this point, I thought

I would be able to completely overtake the prosecution's claim!!

However, when the trial began, the judge did not bother listening to my claim.

I got so angry that during the trial I was arrogant enough to ask, "Excuse me, judge, but do you understand the uncertainty principle that I am speaking about?"

Even though I had asked it in a polite tone, the judge's response was terrible. He said,

"If you let out another word from your mouth without permission to speak, you will be held accountable for contempt of court!"

 I was too outraged to say anything. Unluckily for me, the judges had the authority to determine victory or defeat at a summary court. The summary court ordered a fine of 100,000 yen. In such a case, public security will surely order the revocation of my driver's license.

If this was an ordinary person, he/she will non-reluctantly accept this revocation of their driver's license. BUT Hiroshi Taniguchi isn't the kind of guy that easily gives in. Disgusted with the attitude of the judge who did not bother listening to my say, I started fervently studying road traffic law.

I settled myself in the library and perused through the law book. On the second day after I started studying, I found a loophole of the law.

(Operation of vehicles such as automobiles by a person with an international driver's license or foreign driver's license)

 Article 107-2: Convention on Road Traffic (hereinafter referred to as the Convention) The driver's license, as stated in Article 24 Clause 1 (excluding foreign driver's license indicated in Article 107-1 Clause 1) which conforms to the form specified in Annex 9 of the Convention or Annex 10 of the Convention ...

Okay, okay. So, in short, this is what it said:

Those who are "living overseas" as defined in the Basic Resident Registration Act and have acquired their driver's license abroad can drive for a year in Japan. However, if he/she "resides in Japan" as defined in the Basic Resident Registration Act, one must stay in the country where he/she originally acquired their license for three months to be able to drive in Japan."

Humph! I may have lost to that arrogant judge by trial, but I will win in reality!

Ha! Ha! Ha! I had great advantage. Back then, I was going back and forth between China and Japan and it was easy for me to temporarily transfer residence to China.

So, I studied further on international driver's license. This wasn't good news for me. The international driver's license is valid in 97 countries that have been ratified at the "Geneva Convention." Sadly, China was not among them.

Well then. China may be out of question, but it didn't matter where my residence was. I figured I could travel to the US and get my driver's license there. So, I called the American Embassy to ask what I needed to bring to get a driver's license. 　The Embassy asked, "Are you going to the US for business? 　Or are you studying abroad?" to which I honestly answered, "I'm just traveling." Then the person in charge promptly answered that the US only issued driver's license to those staying in the US for over three months, such as working or studying abroad.

I was back to square one.

If this was an ordinary person, he/she will non-reluctantly accept this revocation of their driver's license. BUT Hiroshi Taniguchi isn't the kind of guy that easily gives in. So, the US didn't work. How about England? Uruguay? or Ecuador? I started to call all foreign embassies in Japan in Japanese alphabetical order.

However, I kept getting the same reply. Some countries needed a visa to stay for more than three months, others required a stay of six months or one year. There were even more demanding countries where it was necessary to have a tax-payment number and social insurance number at that country. I checked with so many embassies and none of them gave me a good reply. I kept saying to myself, "Let me just try one more embassy. Just one more...." That lingering hope motivated me to call halfway down the list. I was already up to "Hungary." I was so disappointed that I started laughing with self-mockery. But the next phone call I made was a hit!

"Well, in our country... all you would need is your Japanese driver's license, its translation, an international driver's license issued by the Public Safety Commission of Japan, your resident card which will serve as your birth certificate, its translation, and your passport. Hm! I think the application fee is about 40 Fiji dollars...."

And this was my encounter with Fiji.

 In the summer of 2002, during the period I was prolonging the trial for revocation of my driver's license, I traveled overseas to try trout fishing (fishing for salmon and trout) that I had long wanted to do. My destination was Sakhalin, the Far East of Russia. It was during the Obon holidays (Buddhist customs to honor the spirit of one's ancestors, usually observed for a week in mid-August). During this period, the pink salmon comes up the river to lay eggs. They do not each much but will aggressively attack other fish if they feel they are in danger of laying eggs. I was planning to do lure fishing, taking advantage of these salmon behavior.

 There were so many giant pink salmons in the narrow river that you would not believe it had swum up through it. That summer, in the Far East, I caught 18 of these big pink salmons.

Let me note that it was not easy catching these big fish. Some were larger than 90 cm! I had only brought fishing line that could endure fish size of about 50 cm. I carefully set up the fishing rod so that the line will not break and got into the river that was so deep I could only keep my head above the water. I swam to lure the fish up on shore.

Reflecting back on this, this was probably the cause....

 I returned to the hotel and by dinner time I had the chills. It seems I was fevering up. I brought three large pink salmons to the hotel kitchen. A boy chef that had a mouth full of silver teeth cooked these fish for me into a Russian-style dish. The food was delicious, but I felt weak when eating dinner. I had planned to go fishing at another point the following morning, but I was in no mood for it.

 The next day and the day after that, I began to feel a little bit better. I took short strolls around the city of Korsakov and killed time until my flight back to Japan. I had caught 18 big fish, so I was very satisfied. I promised myself I will come back here again.

 I returned to work immediately after my return to Japan and resumed my usual life. But it seemed my poor physical condition had not gotten fully better since Russia. I did not recognize I was feverish but sweat was flowing endlessly. One of my employees urged me to go see a doctor. At the office, I had a 41-degree fever.

 I didn't think I would be able to drive to a hospital, so I decided to go to the nearest Ikeda hospital. This was right across the main street. I filled out a medical questionnaire and got a blood test.

The doctor instructed me to come back two days later, after the blood test results came in. He also added that there must be a reason why I had a fever over 40 degrees, so I should take a fever-reducer and a good rest at home until then. I went back to my office, explained the situation, and went home as the doctor instructed.

 Sweat kept flowing like a waterfall even while I was sleeping. The futon was warm and humid from my sweat. Oddly, my head was clear, and I did not become delirious from the fever. I was able to smoothly finish my work at home the next day. I measured my temperatures many times throughout the day and it would always read somewhere in between 39 to 40 degrees. It was depressing to see it, but not overwhelming that I couldn't endure it.

 When I returned to the hospital to hear my results, I was instructed to get another blood test. I also had CT scans and X-rays taken. Again, I was instructed to come back in another two days, so I returned home and worked there for the next two days.

 By the time I went to the hospital for the third time, my fever had gone done and I no longer had to take the fever-reducer prescribed by the doctor. I thought that I was getting better at this point, but reality indicated differently.

The doctor called me in the examination room where he calmly declared,

"From your blood test results, your symptoms indicate leukemia." He continued,

"I am studying leukemia at a university hospital, and from your abnormally increased white blood cell count, you are in a very critical condition. I will put words in at the university, so please go get a lumbar puncture test (spinal tap) done immediately."

I had been expecting the doctor to tell me that I was okay. Bewildered that I got a different diagnosis than I had expected, I asked the typical question of "So how much more time do I have?" as I saw in TV programs.

The doctor said that he couldn't say for sure until he looked at the results of the lumbar puncture, but if it was acute leukemia, I would only have about six months to live.

 I went to Kanazawa University Hospital to get my lumbar puncture test done as the doctor recommended. I also got a blood test almost every day, but I don't quite recall everything that happened during this period of time. Blood test results came in quickly at the university hospital, but it still took time to hear the results of my lumbar puncture test. Since we couldn't cross off the possibility of a viral disease, the doctor was also trying to identify the virus by culturing my blood. All I remember was that the food was awful. Even the food at the hospital restaurant was awful. I literally did nothing for the next two weeks. When you are facing death, you lose your appetite, your desire to sleep, and even your desires for your pastime hobbies--- in my case, the desire to read books.

 I continued to live like this for two weeks until the day came to hear my examination results. I gathered courage to step into the examination room. The doctor who was a junior to the doctor at Ikeda Hospital first kindly apologized to me. He said,

"Good news is, it wasn't leukemia. However, it could be a viral disease. I will prescribe you antibiotics. Let's see how that works."

 Just two weeks before, I was told that "the possibility of your disease being leukemia is about 70%." I rounded up and was 100% certain I was going to die from leukemia. I should not have rounded up but should have rounded down!

I repeatedly thanked my doctor who kept apologizing and left the examination room. I was only affected by a viral disease that can be treated with regular visits to the hospital! I was prepared to close my book of life, but I still had chapters left! As happy as I was, I suddenly got hungry because I had not had any appetite for a while and had not eaten properly. I went to eat soba (buckwheat noodles) at the hospital restaurant. As aforementioned, it tasted awful, but for me, anything was appetite-satisfying. It was a good kind of awfulness, allowing me to soak in the sweetness of life.

 As soon as I arrived at my apartment, I headed straight for the bathroom. I badly wanted to take a bath. There were only showers at the hospital, and I have been longing to soak myself in a hot tub. I love taking baths and I could practically live in my tub. I often bring in a small waterproof TV to watch it as I soak in the tub. My apartment in Kanazawa was an apartment for bath lovers. Each bath was equipped with hot spring water that Kanazawa was famous for. I turned the hot spring water faucet and waited for the bathtub to fill up. I stuffed all the laundry I had not been able to wash during my hospitalization into the washing machine and glanced over the washbasin to see myself in the mirror.

 Standing in front of me was Hiroshi Taniguchi, worn-out from the hospital stay, but still had vibrance left in his eyes. I tried raising the corners of my mouth to make a smile.

 I wondered if I looked like this back when I was a university student. 　If so, my smile looked terribly plain.

 I was managing a business consulting company for Chinese business at that time. I had an income much higher than my former classmates, lived in a large home that everyone envied, and traveled overseas multiple times I was freely living "the life" and yet when I looked at my fake smile reflecting in the mirror, I suddenly became uneasy.

I think I was smiling more naturally during my years at the university and I had laugh wrinkles around my eyes.

However, all I had now were vertical wrinkles enter between the eyebrows. Quite possibly, I may have looked like murderer, a person with a face that passersby wanted to avoid walking in the vicinity of.