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Japanese Kanji
for "Jesus Christ"



My Journey with Jesus

BY CHIKAKO DRAWBAUGH

WITH BECKY WEHRSPANN, FEATURES EDITOR

For much of her life, Chikako Drawbaugh has enjoyed travel. She was born and raised in Japan, worked as a travel agent after graduating from college, and, to improve her English skills, moved to the United States to attend the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP). In the past 30 years, her love of travel has served her well as she has moved between cities in the United States and Japan. Chikako shares with us how God has directed her life's journey beyond her wildest traveling dreams.

I came to the United States in October 1987 to study English at UWSP. I soon discovered my English was not sufficient to communicate with others. I was unable to lead my life as independently as I once did, easily buying things or expressing myself. I was disappointed and felt as if my world was turned upside down. Another Japanese student encouraged me to visit Peace Lutheran Campus Center. The pastor was familiar with Japan and understood the Japanese language. I was not a Christian; I grew up in the postmodern society of Japan where Christians are less than one percent of the population. I followed Japanese culture, Buddhist rituals, and Shinto events with my family.



Right: Chikako and Tim with Rev. Carl and Karol Selle at the Peace Lutheran Campus Center in 1988.



Below: International and American students of UWSP with Rev. Carl Selle



Pastor Carl Selle was the first pastor I ever met. Pastor Carl made me feel welcome whenever I visited the campus center. He and his wife, Karol, invited international students to dinner and different activities. Other church members helped me with my English by patiently talking to and listening to me. They welcomed me (and other international students) with open arms. I was amazed and wondered why they cared so much for someone as insignificant as I.

I wondered what kind of God they believed in, but I still couldn't believe in Jesus as my Savior. No one pushed me about Jesus, but they kept sharing His love. I met an American student at Peace, Tim Drawbaugh, and asked him questions about the Bible — things that I could not comprehend. He answered my questions and prayed for me. God had a special plan, and I later married him.

I returned to Japan after graduating from UWSP in 1989. I wondered if I was only interested in Christianity because of the influence of the American culture, but my desire to be baptized did not change. Pastor Carl connected me with a missionary, Pastor James Vehling, in Tokyo, and I studied the catechism with him.

Before our wedding in the United States, I was baptized on June 3, 1990, by my husband's father. Tim's father had known Pastor Vehling at the seminary, and I felt like God was connecting more dots in the picture of my life's journey. When Tim decided to participate in the LCMS Overseas Volunteer Youth Ministry (OVYM) program, I also had a desire to share God's love with others in Japan. The direction of my life was beginning to change.

Shortly after our wedding, my mother was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. We arrived in Japan after her surgery and chemotherapy. My mother hugged me as soon as I opened the door, with a changed, child-like personality. I was thankful and blessed to have another year with her; each day was truly a gift from God, and I cherished every moment. During this hardship, I worked as a part-time secretary at the OVYM office, surrounded by wonderful, supportive Christians.

After four years, our son Joshua was born, and my father was happy to have him nearby. Joshua was baptized by Rev. Chuzo Kitazawa at Takenotsuka Lutheran Church in Tokyo, and my father and sister attended the service. Joshua was the best witness to my father, encouraging him to pray at the table by saying, "Ji-ji (grandpa), amen!" When Joshua was two and a half years-old, we returned to the United States for Tim to enter Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

While in St. Louis, my father was diagnosed with lung cancer. The three of us flew to Japan. After his strength returned, we had to return to the U.S. My father drove us in his car and saw us off at the station. I remember his cheerful look, wearing the new white sweater that I had given him.

I later received a phone call from my father. His lung cancer had spread to his brain, and he would soon lose his cognizant abilities. He was a surgeon, so he knew what would happen to him. I quit my job in St. Louis, and my family flew to Japan again.

Although it was hard to part from my husband, I asked Tim to return to the U.S. and continue his studies at the seminary. As I was facing my father's death, an incident happened. When Joshua and I were on our way home, we were followed by another car. I pulled over and parked to let it pass,





Above: Chikako and Tim with her mother.

Below: Chikako's father and sister attended Joshua's baptism at Takenotsuka Lutheran Church in Tokyo.

Right: Celebrating Tim's installation at Gethsemane Lutheran Church in 2019.

but two young men began kicking and shaking my parked car. Thank God, Joshua and I were unharmed. God was stronger than evil.

After my father's funeral, a thief entered my parents' house and stole some money. We all were terrified, but thank the Lord, we were unharmed. Tim worried about us and flew back to Japan so the three of us could return together to the United States.

With other seminarian's wives,

I started the Master of Arts course at Concordia Seminary's graduate school. I wanted to use the opportunity to learn and equip myself, and it helped form my biblical thinking. It was also helpful when I had conversations with my non-Christian family and friends. In December 2001, Tim was called to be Missionary-At-Large in the New Jersey and Atlantic Districts. After leaving St. Louis, I was able to continue writing my thesis and was thankful for my thesis advisor, Dr. Kolb. I supported Tim's ministry by participating in the Japanese friendship circles where pastors and other Christians worked together to reach out to temporary Japanese residents. God gave me an opportunity to share His love with the Japanese people.

In 2004, Tim received and accepted a call from Holy Hope Lutheran Junior and High School in Japan, so we moved back to my home country again. I taught Japanese to exchange students and I taught in the Religion Department. My Master of Arts degree helped me get these jobs; God had connected more dots in my life's journey. It was a joy for me to teach students who didn't have a Christian background; most opened a Bible for the first time at school. A student told me one day, "I didn't understand what you were saying." The longer we talked, I realized the student meant, "I understand as knowledge, but I cannot accept it as my belief." I remembered when I first heard of Christ and had that same attitude. I also remembered how patient and affectionate Christian people treated me. I trusted that God was the One who gave the "a-ha" moment. I prayed every day before class, asking God to open the students' hearts.

In 2019, Tim received and accepted the call to be pastor at Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Hackettstown, New Jersey. Now, we are back in the United States. It is a blessing and joy to receive Holy Communion and sing together with other faithful Christians. *"Thank the Lord and sing His praise; tell everyone what He has done. Let everyone who seeks the Lord rejoice and proudly bear His name. He recalls His promises and leads His people forth in joy with shouts of thanksgiving. Alleluia, alleluia."*

God has worked beyond my thoughts and ability. I thank the Lord, and all the people whom He sent me. He works in every circumstance, and He never changes. May God continue to protect my journey with Jesus, as I share His love with others joyfully. Q



Chikako will be speaking at the Heart to Heart Sister's luncheon at the LWML Convention in Lexington.

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