

# An Aspect of American Culture

By *HATAKEYAMA Noboru*

Thirty years ago, I was living in Chicago with my wife and three sons who ranged in age from 2 to 6. We traveled quite often on vacation, mostly driving in our car. In one winter, we drove down to Key West, Florida, all the way from Chicago.

In another winter, we drove to the northern Mexican city of Matamoros. On our way back, we enjoyed treasure hunting on the beach at Corpus Christi, Texas. It was very warm and we could have enjoyed swimming there. However, it started snowing in St. Louis. It was a bit disturbing for me because I knew I would have to clear the snow that might have accumulated already or be accumulating from then in the driveway of my home in the northwestern part of Evanston, Illinois, even late at night when we could expect to arrive there. The snow in the suburban area of Chicago turned out to be much heavier than had been expected and my worry deepened as I thought about the hard work of shoveling the snow after a long drive from Texas.

When we returned home after 11 p.m., we were surprised to see there was no snow in the driveway of my home. The snow had been cleared! The next day, I learned that a gentleman who lived across the street from our house kindly removed the snow. When I went to see him to express my appreciation, he simply said, "That is what neighbors are for."

One summer, we drove to the Canadian Rocky Mountains. It took us three days to get there, another three days to enjoy the scenery and the last three days to return home. On the eighth day of our trip, we arrived in Jamestown, North Dakota, at around 7 p.m. and started looking for a hotel to stay overnight. The sun was still high and we were all happy with the memories of the beautiful Canadian Rockies, looking forward to going back home the following day. Although it was a small

town, there were many hotels. But we could not find any vacancy signs. I stopped and got out of my car at each hotel to see if there was any vacancy. It took time. The sun had already set. And at 8:30 p.m. or so, a severe thunderstorm suddenly struck. Because of fear and hunger, our sons were sobbing, an account they now deny. At the last hotel I checked, I asked the hotel clerk what we should do. He said flatly, "Why don't you go to Fargo?"

Fargo is the capital city of North Dakota and I thought there might be some vacant rooms available for us. However, it would take two hours or so through the thunderstorm to get there. It was already 10 p.m., and it would be past midnight when we got there. Inevitably, I decided to take I 94 to go to Fargo, but just before the entrance to the Interstate highway, my wife shouted, "There is a vacancy sign down there!" I drove my car to the motel with the vacancy sign, parked my car in a parking lot and rushed to the motel through the heavy rain.

I was stupid for having done so. Another car was behind us but the driver of that car parked it just in front of the entrance and entered the hotel first. Because it was a small motel, there was nobody at the front desk. What both of us were paying attention to was a key box attached to the wall, with only one key left. He looked at me and I looked at him without saying a word. Then, the proprietor of the motel came out and asked us, "Who was the first?" He looked at me and I looked at him once again. Then he said, "You were the first to have pulled your car in. Please take that key. I will go to Fargo. Let's meet there tomorrow if possible." I asked his name and address. He just smiled and went to his car. His family with two small children was waiting for him in the car. His car soon disappeared into the black night as I held the hotel key in my hand.

After returning home, I told this story to my neighbors. One of the ladies advised me, "You should have remembered the license plate number. It is our humble culture to write a thank you letter by getting his name and address from the State Department of Transportation, making use of the number you remembered." **JS**

## COMING UP

Some Japanese university students write their graduation theses using cell-phones. The digital revolution has left a broad array of effects. In the next issue, we will feature its impact on the advertising industry, copyright problems, Net security measures, etc., under the theme of development of the IT revolution and Japan's changing media. Writers presenting their views on these and other topics will have a variety of nationalities such as China, Australia, the United States and Britain in addition to Japan.

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