



## Cross Words

As I mentioned a couple of months ago, I made a short trip to Canada this autumn; our family had a bit of a get-together on the occasion of the birth of little Alex, my grandson. Because most of the family members currently live in or near Vancouver in Canada, the timing of such get-togethers is pretty much up to my brother and I. He lives in Germany, and I'm of course here in Japan. For two years in a row now, we've managed to arrange a simultaneous 'escape' from our jobs in order to fly to Vancouver, and we're hoping to make it over there again next summer.

I was reading a newspaper article a while back that was discussing some of the 'most stressful events' in a person's life, and quite high on the list was 'family get-togethers'. In North America, there is quite a strong tradition of families getting together at Thanksgiving or Xmas, and it seems that these occasions are fertile ground for the nurturing of family feuds. I don't have too much experience of family get-togethers here in Japan - either at *o-bon* in the summer, or at new year's - so can't really make any comment on whether or not this happens here too.

In our case, I have to say that our family seems to be pretty much free of such troubles. During none of our recent get-togethers have there been any squabbles or arguments; everybody seems genuinely happy to be seeing everybody else. Perhaps it is because our family is not so large, thus reducing the number of potential personality conflicts. We still number less than a dozen all told; as this grows in the future, it might be more difficult to 'keep smiling', who knows.

But do you know, even having said that, I have to 'confess' to you that our days were full of cross words. Or more accurately, I should say 'crossed words'. Because four of us - my parents, my brother, and I - are all very fond of doing crossword puzzles, and these family meetings provide an excellent opportunity for a crossword 'cultural exchange'.

The crossword puzzles in my local English newspaper are not so interesting, so once a week I obtain the challenging puzzle published every Sunday by the *New York Times* newspaper. My brother in Germany does the difficult puzzles published by the *Times of London*, and my parents follow the puzzles in Canada's main newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*. These puzzles are all very different in structure and design, so when we get together in the summer, we are all ready for a bit of a change, and eagerly put our heads together to challenge some puzzles of a type we are not so familiar with.

My brother 'complains' "These New York puzzles never tell you whether or not the answer is two words long!" In return, I 'complain' that his cryptic English puzzles don't have enough overlapping letters between the crossing words to allow you to figure out difficult answers ... But of course, we are not complaining, we are enjoying the new challenges!

Is this really how we should be spending our 'special' time together ... doing puzzles? Shouldn't we be having serious and deep family conversations during these rare get-togethers? Well, maybe it's those families who have the deep conversations who are doing all the squabbling. For us, we'll stick with our long and enjoyable puzzle evenings ... we may not have a large 'quantity' of time together, but I think we have some pretty good 'quality' time ... And never a cross word!

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