



Time to Move on ...

Now and then, when I sit down to write the weekly story and browse through my list of possible topics, I come across one that gives me a bit of pause. In the list are a fair number of topics that I would indeed like to write about, but which are a tad embarrassing. I think though, that I shouldn't include only stories that show my 'best' side ...

To start this one, we have to go back to the spring of 1996. I had been living as a single-parent with my two daughters for about five years - the first two while their mother was away at school in Canada, and the latter three after she and I had been divorced. That five year period was one of the most interesting and enjoyable stages of my life. During those years my printmaking work grew from the early 'hanging on by my fingernails' level, into a steady and stable income, and the girls were in elementary school, a time of life when - at least here in Japan - the days are full of pleasureable achievement and enjoyment of one's personal growth and gradual entry into society. The three of us had a very good time together, and I know that I am not the only member of the trio who still looks back on those days with many fond memories.

But in the spring of 1996 this all came to an end when the girls moved to Canada to live with their mother. Our motivation for this move was partly a desire to have them develop their English skills (which were only very rudimentary at that time), and partly a way to have them avoid the stress of the Japanese 'examination hell' that comes into play once one moves into middle and high school.

I don't want to write much about the separation; the day they left was, without exaggeration, the worst day of my life. Divorce had been bad enough, but then to lose the kids too was a very bitter blow, even though it was being done in their 'best interests', as we thought.

After they were gone, I had to decide what to do about some of the associated paperwork. I left their residence registration unchanged, and because they made frequent trips back here for visits (in the early years after the move), I also maintained their medical insurance (which here in Japan is handled through city hall). This meant that I had to keep paying the quite substantial premiums, but I didn't see that as a burden.

As the years went by though, and they grew up and developed varied interests, their return visits became less frequent, and once they were at the stage of moving into a job (for Himi), and college (for Fumi), they no longer came at all. Years have now gone by since they were last here.

But I never did get around to making another visit to the city office to update their paperwork, and I continued to pay the premiums for their medical insurance, saying to myself "It's better to keep this in place, just in case they might need it." Perhaps you are laughing at my foolishness, or perhaps you will be a bit more sympathetic ...

Finally this year though, after getting the bill for this year's premiums, and seeing yet another increase in the amount, I contacted them to get their thoughts on this. Their reply was clear - they have no intention of ever living in Japan again, so please cancel everything.

So the other day I went to the city offices, and with the friendly assistance of the clerks in the four relevant departments (residence registration, medical insurance, pension, and taxation), drew a line under everything.

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My daughters remain citizens of Japan, but are no longer residents. The registration for this home now has a single entry ... me.

But you know, this isn't actually a sad story. When I was at the medical insurance counter, the lady there asked me "How long has it been since they used this insurance? How far back do you wish to date this cancellation?" I had no idea why she was asking this, but told her the story. She then explained that because there had been no claims made on the insurance, she would be able to process a refund of the past five years of premiums.

What goes around, comes around!

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