

A Day in the Life

These days, I wake up at around 4:30. In the summer, the frogs in the rice fields are already croaking at that hour, so they wake me up. I head into the kitchen and make some breakfast – usually a very simple breakfast, because I haven't yet got very good at cooking for myself. Sometimes, I just crack an egg over some hot rice, with a little bit of soy sauce. After breakfast, I read the papers – I get two papers, both a local and a national paper. Because I don't have anyone to talk to in the mornings, I have plenty of time to read. I also think it's important to keep up with news of my local community, as well as news of the whole country.

On weekdays, when it gets close to 7 o'clock, I take my flag and walk down the road to the traffic lights. There, I guide the elementary school students across the road as they walk to school. It's nice to greet the young children in the morning – they are often the first people I talk to for the day. Seeing the children walking to school also reminds me of my own son – although he was an elementary school student more than forty years ago!

After all the children have gone to school today, I will head to the local community center. Right now, we are planning for the upcoming *Obon* festival. It's only two weeks away, so we are quite busy. I enjoy being busy though, because I haven't had a job in a very long time. Also, during *Obon*, my son and his family will come to visit. He moved away when he got married, because there weren't many jobs available for him here.

In the afternoon, I have a lesson with my art teacher. I have been taking art lessons for many years now, and I enjoy learning new techniques and styles. I find that my art lessons help me to express myself in ways that I can't with words. I also like to spend time in my garden, where I have a small vegetable patch. It's harder to keep a garden these days, because my strength is not what it used to be. But I still like to grow my own vegetables, and it is satisfying to have fresh produce to cook with, even though I am not nearly as good a cook as my wife was.

In the evenings, I have a simple meal with just one glass of *shochu*. I used to drink quite a lot, but I can't handle so much now that I'm older. I also used to watch TV at night, but now I usually read books or write letters. So many people use email these days, but I still like to write letters by hand. It feels more real to me than using a computer. I usually write to my son, and when he has time, he writes back. I hope there is a letter from him when I get home today.

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. What country does the narrator live in?

Answer: Japan.

Hints/Clues: Many – from rice fields to breakfast foods, guiding elementary school children at intersections, Obon festival, and *shochu*, amongst others.

2. About how old is he?

Answer: At least 70, probably a bit older.

Hints/Clues: He lives alone, and says he has not had a job in a long time. Also, his children were elementary school students more than 40 years ago.

3. What happened to his wife?

Answer: Likely to have died.

Hints/Clues: Divorce is a possibility, although not as common amongst the elderly. She probably passed away recently, as he mentions that he has not got used to cooking for himself yet, suggesting his wife cooked for him.

4. What month is it now?

Answer: Late July or August.

Hints/Clues: Frogs croaking in the morning suggests summer, and Obon is coming soon.

5. Does he live in the city or the countryside?

Answer: He lives in the countryside.

Hints/Clues: The frogs in the rice fields wake him up every morning. Also, his son moved away for work to the city.

6. How does the writer feel when he is at home?

Answer: Probably lonely (Although answers may vary – award points for well-reasoned answers).

Hints/Clues: Just a general sense that he tries to remain active in the community, and also when he is home, he hopes to receive letters from his son.