



Upcoming Events

Event Name	Event Summary	Event Details	Memo
Welina Joy Festa	Experience "delicious", "beautiful", and "fun" at this special event featuring bridal exhibits, wellness workshops, and delicious local foods	Date: 5/10 (Sat) Time: 10:00~16:00 Location: CoCoDe (Miyamae 1-jo 3-chome 3-30)	
K X J Exchange Lounge	Come practice your Korean and Japanese language skills through this Korean-Japanese language exchange!	Date: 5/16 (Fri) Time: 18:00-19:00 Location: Asahikawa International Center (1-jo-dori 8-chome)	
French Café	Practice your French language skills while connecting with people interested in French language	Date: 5/17 (Sat) Time: 10:30-12:30 Location: Asahikawa International Center (1-jo-dori 8-chome)	
Asahikawa Confectionary Expo 2025	This expo exhibits a variety of confections: decorative, regional, award-winning and many more! Taste confectionaries and sweets from all over Japan! Fee: ¥1,500 (Early Bird Price ¥1,200)	5/30 (Fri)~6/15 (Sun) Time: 10:00~18:00 (Until 17:00 on 6/15) Location: Dohoku Arcs Taisetsu Arena, Michi no Eki Asahikawa, Taisetsu Crystall Hall	
Spring Walk & Picnic Round 2	The Asahikawa International Committee is once again hosting its Spring Walk & Picnic! Come join us outside; meet the international community, enjoy language exchange, and enjoy the spring air.	Date: 5/31 (Sat) Time: 10:45-13:30 Location: Meet at Asahikawa Station Western Gate Registration Begins: 5/19 (Mon)	
Asahikawa Music Week 2025	Celebrate the musical arts in Asahikawa with performances and showcases throughout the station and central downtown area as well as a musical parade!	Date: 6/8(Sun)~6/15(Sun) Location: Asahikawa Station, Heiwa-Dori Shopping Street	

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Check out our website and social media for information regarding the center or any upcoming events!



For further information or to register for events, contact:

Asahikawa International Committee (AIC), (NAGATA), (MIYAUCHI) or Coordinator for International Relations (CIR), (JOHN)

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1-jo-dori 8-chome, Asahikawa 070-0031

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Website: <https://asahikawaic.jp/en/>



Follow us on social media for latest updates and upcoming events!

X (formerly twitter)



Facebook

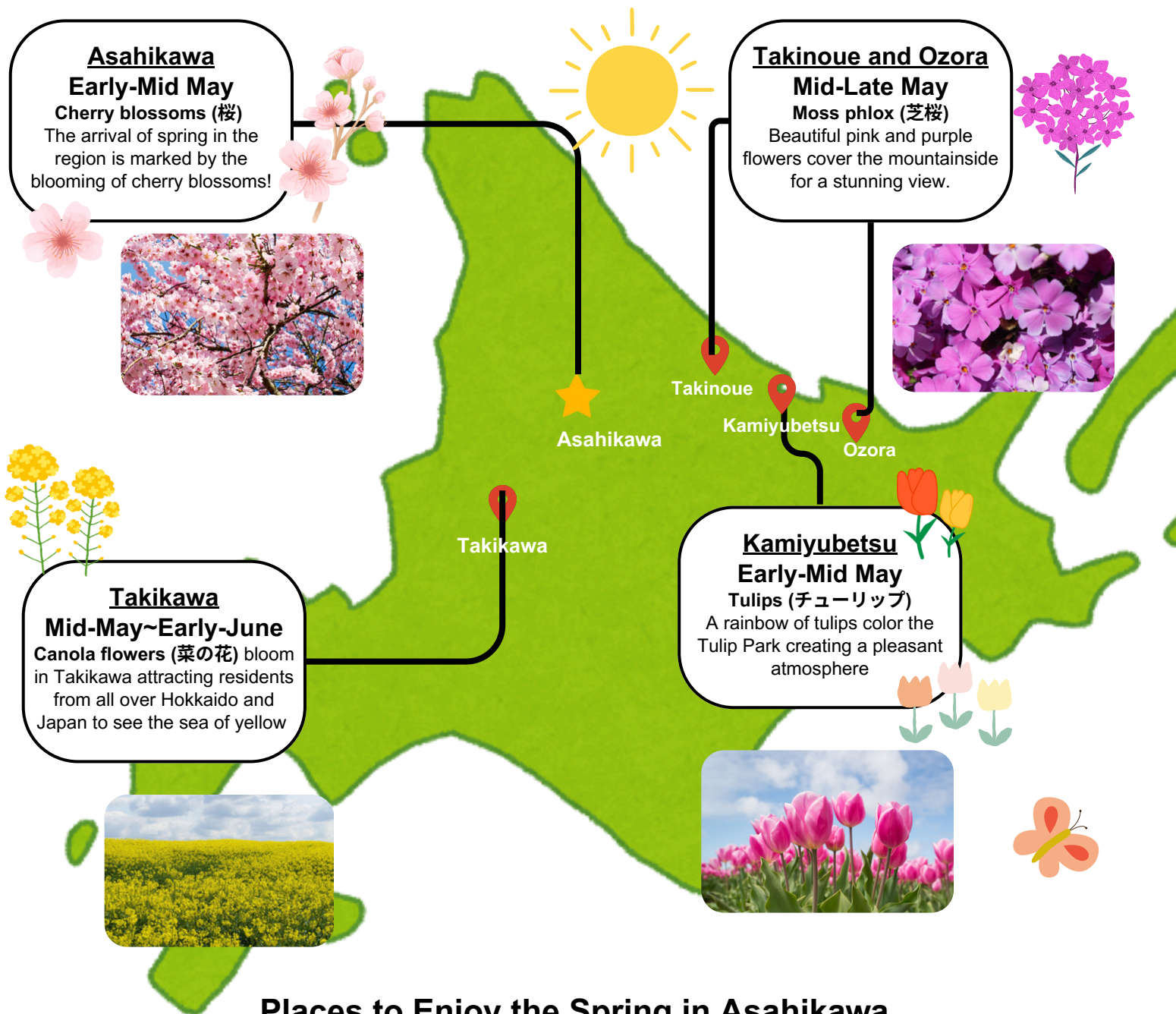


Instagram



****The opinions expressed in the essays are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the AIC or the City of Asahikawa.****

What's Up this Spring?



Kaguraoka Park

27 min. walk from Asahikawa Station

This is one of the largest park located in near downtown Asahikawa. This area not only offers rich greenery but also a nice location to enjoy the cherry blossoms, play sports, and visit the city's greenhouse.

Tokiwa Park

20 min. walk from Asahikawa Station

Located at the heart of downtown, this park is home to the Asahikawa Central Public Library. Not only do flowers bloom here, but visitors can enjoy boating in the pond as well as the flowers planted by local volunteers.

Kitasaito Garden & Miyamae Park

Right behind Asahikawa Station

The closest park from Asahikawa Station is Kitasaito Garden and Miyamae Park. Kitasaito Garden has beautiful flowers as well as trails that pass by Kagami Pond. Go deep into Kitasaito Garden and you will hit Miyamae Park; a vast park where you can go train watching and enjoy views to Chuubetsu River.

Ueno Farm

40 min. direct bus from Asahikawa Station

Towards outskirts of the city is Ueno Farm where an abundance of flowers grow throughout farm's area. The sea of colorful flowers in the farm's grounds makes it a splendid family outing or even a photo-spot. There, visitors can enjoy Ueno Farm's delicious exclusive muskat and ice cream soft-serve!

Asahikawa's Southeast Asian Foods Market

by John Mabilangan



Located at the heart of downtown, inside the Asahikawa Ekimae Building is **Cho Viet Asahi**. This small food market offers a selection of food products from South East Asia and is frequented both by locals and Asahikawa's International Community. There you can find unique items that might not be found in other foreign grocers such as fresh mangoes, locally grown coriander, and many more at a reasonable price!



For those looking to make pho or any other classical South East Asian dishes, this is the place to shop. Since this is a Vietnamese shop, most of the items offered here will be Vietnamese food products, however they do offer some selections from other countries like Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines, etc.

In addition to the assortments of imported food products, the store also offers a wide variety of frozen items such as fishballs and spring rolls as well as local meats; many of which are sourced from Asahikawa's butcheries.

If you're looking for ingredients for next Asian cooking, this place might have what you're looking for!



Cho Viet Asahi

Location: Ekimae Building, Miyamae-dori 7-chome 3897, Asahikawa, Hokkaido 070-0030

Hours: 9:30~18:30

A Baby Boomer Learns English

A Friendship Rekindled and Witnessed by Moe—A Story That Stood the Test of Time

Written Submission by Noriaki Gentsu



Clockwise from top left: Café Chiroru;
Ken's recent book: *Lover's Quarrel: The Mennonites and Me* (2025); With Ken (1968);

Summary

My cross-cultural journey has taken me not only to America but also across Europe where I encountered diverse people and cultures through the power of English. Yet, it all began back in Asahikawa when I was a student. I had joined a community of English learners where I met my English conversation teacher and friend, Ken Reed. He inspired me to express myself more confidently in English. Though we lost contact for four decades, we eventually reconnected. This is the story of what our friendship has meant to me.

Reconnecting with a Long Lost Friend

One summer afternoon in 2016, while staying with us for vacation, my twelve-year-old granddaughter, Moe, was captivated by stories of my youth—especially those about my friend Ken. As I looked over her “Moe–Newspaper”, a school homework assignment, I took the opportunity to teach her how to write a strong paragraph in Japanese—a skill I had learned in my business English class in Osaka but had never been taught in school.

As she eagerly asked me questions, our conversation naturally turned to my friendship with Ken and, of course, his unexpected role in introducing me to my future wife, Rumiko.

That moment rekindled something in me, sparking a deep desire to reconnect with Ken. In October that year, I was thrilled to write Moe an email, sharing the news that I had finally found him.

Three Key Things About Our Friendship

1. Ken's Impact on My English

In January 1968, when Ken stayed with my family during the New Year's holidays, he advised me to add more emotion to my otherwise monotone English. At the time, I didn't fully grasp the significance of his advice. It wasn't just about improving my speech—it was about making my communication more genuine and engaging. Decades later, I realized that this principle aligned with key steps to international business taught at the Panasonic Overseas Training Center: “Know the difference. Understand the difference. Enjoy the difference.”

In international business, communication is more than just exchanging words—it's about connecting with people from diverse cultures. Early in my career, I felt a certain level of stress when working with colleagues whose ways of thinking differed from mine. Rather than suppressing my emotions, I learned to express them openly—but in a controlled and constructive way.

Ken's lesson on adding emotion to language proved invaluable in these situations. I found that infusing my English with authenticity and warmth helped bridge cultural gaps. Countless business lunches and dinners fostered stronger relationships, allowing both sides to communicate frustrations candidly. In such moments, English conversation was no longer just what I had learned in school—it became an expressive tool that built mutual understanding and trust.

Through this, I learned that emotion in communication is not just about speaking—it's about forging meaningful connections across cultures.

2. Ken and My Future Wife

In 1967, Ken was a teacher of the "Wakadanuki Club," a club for young people to practice English conversation at Cafe Chiroru. Not only did Ken help me improve my English-speaking skills, but more importantly, he introduced me to my future wife Rumiko. She was taking private English lessons from Ken while our club prepared an English play, "A Long Goodbye" by Tennessee Williams. At that time, Ken connected us during our rehearsal time, saying, "This lady can help design the stage background." She joined our group while we were preparing the English play. Overtime, our bond grew stronger, eventually leading to marriage.

Ken doesn't remember my encounter with Rumiko, but it happened as she described it in her letters. After all, this may also be why I persisted in reconnecting with Ken after decades of lost contact.

3. Our Enduring Friendship

Our friendship endured despite losing contact twice. The first time was when Ken left Asahikawa in 1969; over the years, we gradually lost touch. However, in 1977, we reconnected. While I was living in New Jersey and New York on my business trip, I visited Ken and his wife, Kathy, in Lancaster County, PA. During my visit, he gifted me his first book, "Mennonite Soldier." That book sat quietly on my bookshelf for forty years, waiting for the next chapter in our friendship.

By 2016—the year when I told Moe the stories about Ken—my spoken English had declined after years of retirement, but I felt compelled to find Ken. Losing my English ability felt like losing my way on my cross-cultural journey. Ken had remained enduringly in my memory, tied to the journey's starting point. After sifting through hundreds of "Ken Reeds" on Google in vain, I signed up for LinkedIn—and finally found him. When he responded, I excitedly shared the news with Moe, saying "I made it!"

A decade later, Moe—a college student and a witness to my friendship with Ken—is becoming proficient in English and German. I hope she will set out for her own cross-cultural journey in the future.

Ken's Account of Our Friendship

As I've shared my story of a friendship with him enduring over half a century, I believe my readers would enjoy hearing Ken's perspective on our journey together.

Here is his account:

During the Vietnam War, I registered as a Conscientious Objector (CO). The US Government permitted CO's to do alternative service that fit their guidelines of 'service to the nation'. I was sent through the Mennonite Church to Hokkaido to work alongside the local congregation in Asahikawa as an English Teacher. In this capacity, I taught about ten classes every week to classes of businessmen, church members, high school students (Nishi High School), college students (Hokusei University) and private classes. I lived with Dr. Yoichi Yamaguchi and his family in their hospital residence for about two years.

Early on I met Noriaki Gentsu and his future wife, Rumiko Tetsukawa. Rumiko was training to be a dental hygienist and met with me to study private English conversation. Nori was a member of the 'Wakadanukis', a group of college-age students who met with me regularly to improve their already fluent English language skills and also perform dramas in English for the public. But Nori and I really became friends after he invited me to spend Oshogatsu with his family in rural Biei. I spent several days with them in the winter of 1967, if I remember correctly. During this time, his parents and relatives roasted jingisu kan meat morning and evening, toasted with sake and told stories. I also bathed in the family's Goemomburo!

Years later, Nori visited my wife and I in Pennsylvania. It was wonderful restarting our friendship. Recently we have been carrying on an email friendship. I treasure my friendship. He is a well-travelled businessman and skilled writer of his experiences!

(Ken Reed, Fremont CA, 3/7/2025)

What Our Friendship Brings

Since being reconnected, Ken and I have been catching up, exchanging stories to bridge the forty-year gap. He read this serial article, "A Baby Boomer Learns English," and I read his recently published memoir, "Lover's Quarrel: The Mennonites and Me." His book unveiled facets of Ken's life in Lancaster County, Asahikawa, and California. Through his memoir, I discovered two important things we share:

1. Baby Boomers Escaping Rural Farms

At first, I wondered if I—an atheistic Baby Boomer from a Buddhist family in rural Japan—could truly grasp the religious themes in Ken's memoir. My doubts disappeared as I delved into the idyllic Mennonite community of the 1950s and '60s. Ken, born into a blessed Mennonite community, describes himself as "dyed-in-the-wool"—a phrase denoting deep commitment and steadfast faith. Yet, despite his unwavering beliefs, he eventually walked away to Japan, influenced by the societal upheavals of the Sixties—such as the Vietnam War, the ideological divides within the Mennonite world—and his ambition to become a renowned writer.

One of the first connections we share is our boyhood experience. We are Baby Boomers from rural farms—Ken from America and me from Japan—bound more by a love of books than farming. Each of us left behind the communities we were born into, escaping lives that would have otherwise defined us. As a conscientious objector, Ken spent three years

in Hokkaido, Japan, teaching English, escaping the “guilt culture” of the Mennonite world while immersing himself in Japan’s “shame culture.” The news of his father’s sudden death “peeled off the disguise” he had worn in Japan—a metaphor for the false sense of detachment from his Mennonite identity. He was confused. All the Mennonite past he escaped still existed.

In a way, his experience mirrored my own feelings about my village while I was living in Germany. Every time my mother told me on the phone about what happened at home and to its people, in a good way or bad way, it felt like I was bound to it no matter how far away I was.

2. How We Regard the Past

Ken’s memoir also taught me a profound way to reflect on the past. In his book, he looks back at the past “from the distance of forty years” and asks: *What happened? What did it mean then? And how do I regard it today?* This perspective resonates with me, a non-Christian Baby Boomer, and helps me reflect on my own life:

First, there is no “undo” button in life. Ken courageously confronts his regrets, such as his missing the last chance to openly express gratitude to his father. I, too, realized too late that I had never properly thanked my own father. When I returned to my village for retirement, I was shocked to learn he had developed dementia. Although he could no longer recognize me, he still remembered that he had a son named Noriaki. Today, I make sure to stay connected with my son, often texting him and enjoying his responses.

Furthermore, Ken’s approach to examining the past—searching for meaning rather than dwelling on regret—offers me solace as I navigate this difficult time after my wife’s passing. Recently I have started a memoir in a blog-style format, sharing the stories of our life together with my children and grandchildren.

Our Wild Idea

Inspired by our shared stories, Ken and I are cultivating a bold vision: reviving the network formed through his English classes in Asahikawa from 1967 to 1969. Whether virtually on Zoom or through in-person gathering, we hope to reconnect with those who were part of that experience. As a first step toward this idea, he has contributed a letter titled “*Yoroshiku to the People of Asahikawa!*” for this issue of *Asahikawa Info*. I look forward to seeing this project enrich my life in this rural Hokkaido village.

My Journey Continues

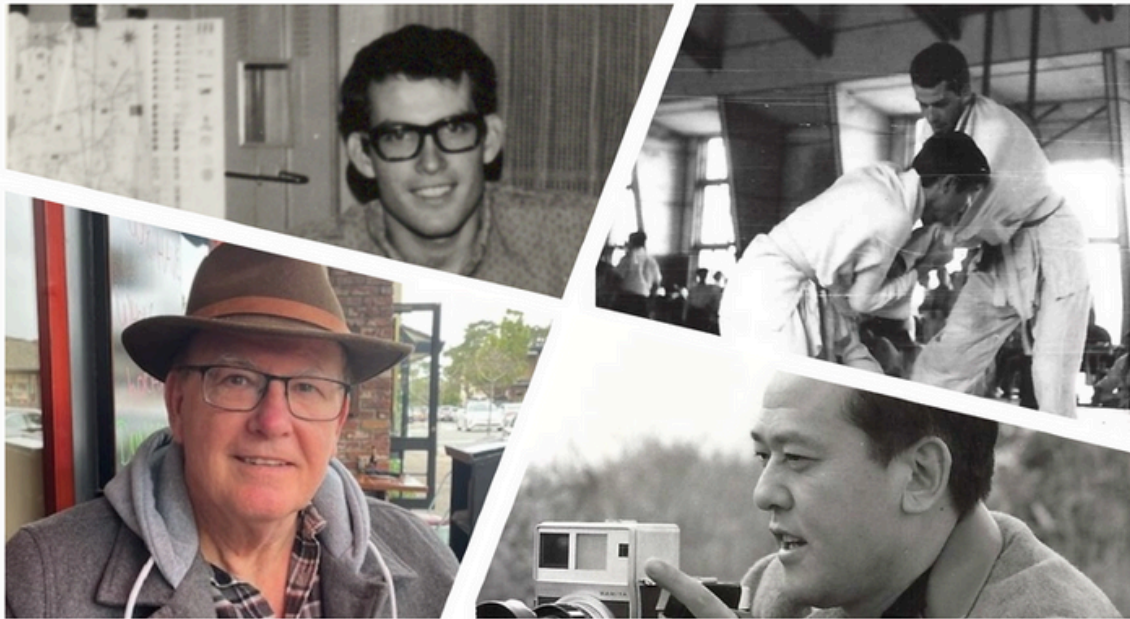
What began with an encounter with Ken during my student days in Asahikawa has evolved into a lifelong cross-cultural journey—one that has shaped and transformed me over decades. Where will this journey lead next? The answer will depend on how I contribute to the English learners’ community at AIC and collaborate with Ken on our project.

—End of “A Baby Boomer Learns English”



Yoroshiku to the People of Asahikawa!

Written Submission by Ken Reed



Clockwise from top left: In my room (1969); A judo match (1968);
Dr. Yoichi Yamaguchi (circa 1967); Me today (2025)

The map of Asahikawa is etched on my brain—for three years (1966 – 1969) I lived in your wonderful city with Dr. Yoichi Yamaguchi, his wife Sumiko and their four sons, while I taught ESL twenty-two hours every week to my students. I climbed Asahidake with my students and biked to Sounkyo Hot Springs and on to Lake Akan one summer. I ate jingisu kan at a Takasagodai restaurant with the Yamaguchi's and fresh eel at a specialty restaurant.

For two years I taught English conversation at Tony Akama's Gaigo Gakuen and a class of businessmen who met on the 2nd floor at the Chiroru Coffeeshop and another class that met at the Mennonite Church in Asahimachi.

I love Asahikawa, although my last visit was in 2005. I love all the snow and the people, who I believe are more open and friendly than the people of Tokyo and the Kansai! I still hope to return to Hokkaido once more and bring my wife, Patricia, so she can see why this city and its people are so special to me!

Yoroshiku onegaishimasu!

Ken Reed, aka kenu ridou.

(Ken Reed, Fremont CA, 3/10/2025)

