

# Turn Back Time in Japan

Bob and Mavis Hardy



**A**FTER SEVERAL DAYS in the hospital, missionaries Bob and Mavis Hardy came home to Niigata, Japan, with their six-day-old daughter. They had no idea that in less than 24 hours, their city would be thrown into complete chaos.

“About one o’clock in the afternoon the house began to shake, and there was something like a big explosion,” Bob said. “Mavis grabbed the baby and ran out of the house, shouting to me to bring the girls.” Their oldest daughters, ages 2 and 5, were in the back bedroom watching TV. “I got up and started to go back there, but the house was shaking so much I couldn’t walk. I had to crawl.” When the entire family made it outside, they watched an enormous mushroom cloud expand across the sky. “We’ve been bombed!” a neighbor shouted repeatedly.

The Hardys discovered that the catastrophe was caused not by a bomb but by an earthquake. The mushroom cloud was from oil tank explosions, which started a great fire in certain parts of the city. Some buildings sank into the earth while others tilted at odd angles. However, the city’s most immediate problem was not damaged buildings but the loss of a water supply.

“You can do without electricity,” Bob said. “You can do without gas. You can do without a lot of things, but you can’t do without water.” Fortunately, the Hardys had a neighbor with a well, and they were able to manually draw water. The neighbor immediately saw the well as way to help the community. He and a local pastor gathered new plastic containers and hauled water to the poorest part of the city.

One of the homes they visited belonged to the family of Keiko Yamazoe, a teenage girl from the Niigata Baptist church. She had earnestly prayed for her family to become Christians. Because of the Hardys’ visits after the earthquake, Mrs. Yamazoe became more open to the gospel and later accepted Christ. She even helped Bob and Mavis start a Bible study in her home. During the Bibles studies, Mr. Yamazoe always sat in the back of the home, listening to the discussion but not participating. This Bible study eventually became the seed of a new church.

Years after the Hardys had moved away from Niigata, they came back to visit their church. “The first person we saw was Mr. Yamazoe,” Bob said, “And he said, ‘I want to tell you that I’ve become a Christian.’” In the midst of a devastating tragedy, God used the Hardys’ efforts to witness to His love, begin a new church, and further His kingdom.

**Love Is Patient**  
While Bob and Mavis both had a passion for missions, the path to serving together was not always clear. Even though they had attended the same church in Kentucky for a short time, Bob and Mavis met each other in Tokyo, Japan. Mavis



was serving as a single missionary and taking language classes, and Bob was serving in the air force. During this time, Bob felt called to missions. However, he faced several obstacles: he was not appointed, he had not been to seminary, and he still had two more years of military service.

“We’d already made a commitment that . . . I didn’t want to do anything to [interfere] with her missionary career,” Bob said. “And if I couldn’t be appointed, then we’d have to make a decision to go separate ways, probably.”

Bob and Mavis spent three years courting long-distance, communicating with letters because phone calls were too expensive. Bob was accepted into seminary, and he married Mavis when she came to the states on furlough. In 1959, the newlyweds sailed across the Pacific Ocean to begin a lifelong career in missions.

The Hardys moved to various places in Asia, including Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Bob’s ministries involved building churches and training local pastors. He and Mavis also taught English and Japanese Bible classes, which were often held at their home or in a local church or mission. Regardless of where they served, the Hardys learned that building genuine relationships was essential to sharing the gospel of Christ.

## Faith Comes by Hearing

When the Hardys lived in Taiwan, Mavis studied Chinese and taught a weekly Bible class for Chinese students. The students attended regularly, especially a Chinese girl named Karey. Mavis saw that Karey was an excellent student and eager to learn. One night Karey missed Bible class, and to Mavis’s concern, she did not come back for three months. When Karey finally returned, Mavis was relieved to see her.

“Do you know why I didn’t come?” Karey asked Mavis after the class. “I knew that you wanted to teach me about Jesus, and I didn’t want to learn about Jesus. I just wanted to learn English. I thought it wasn’t right for me to come just to learn English.”

“Karey,” Mavis replied, “whatever reason you have for coming is good for me. I just want to tell you the best thing I know.” After that night, Karey attended Bible class regularly and came to accept Christ. She is now a wife, mother, professor at a university, and creator of a virtual language learning software. Karey keeps in touch with the Hardys and has visited them in the United States.

## Not So Retired

Although they officially retired from the IMB in 1994, Bob and Mavis still pursue missions in Birmingham, Alabama, specifically among internationals. They ministered to 30 Japanese families who came to work at an automobile factory by teaching English and helping them adjust to life in America. In addition, the Hardys teach English to a variety of internationals at their church once a week.



Bob is currently teaching a 60-year-old American man how to read. This man has been a Christian for many years, and he wants to learn how to read the Bible. “It’s slow going,” Bob says, “but he can almost read Psalm 23. He says that someday he wants to be able to stand before his church and read the Bible.”

Bob and Mavis both minister to a Chinese Christian family who currently lives in Birmingham. Bob discipled the man, whom he says “is one of the most eager Bible students I’ve ever known.” The family meets with the Hardys often and seeks every opportunity to grow in their faith. “It’s like they can’t get enough,” Mavis said. The Hardys continue to demonstrate that no matter where one lives, people need to hear the gospel. ■

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