

# Family Bond in Love of Trains

**Yuya** (third grade), **Hiroko** (Mother) in Chiba



Yuya is a *kotetsu* 子鉄, a child who loves trains (*tetsudo* 鉄道). While traveling around with Yuya and riding on different trains with him, his mother Hiroko became a “train-loving mom,” or *mamatetsu* ママ鉄. We will be introducing these two fans of trains and train travel in this issue.

## Q: How and when did Yuya start liking trains?

**Hiroko:** When Yuya was about five months old, he used to start crying loudly whenever the sun began to set. Fussing and crying in the evenings seems to be common among babies, but since he wouldn't stop crying even when I held him, I didn't know what to do. Then one day, I took him to a vacant lot near our house to show him the trains and the monorail that passed by there, and as we watched them, he stopped crying. When I took him there the following day and the day after that, he would immediately stop crying. We continued our evening outings for about two months. That was the beginning of his love for trains.

## Q: Did he like toy trains?

**Hiroko:** Yes! He would take one of his toy trains wherever he went.

**Yuya:** My favorite toy right now is the Plarail.\* I have about 30 trains. My mom sometimes plays with Plarail with me, too. One time, I came home from school on my birthday, and my mom said, “Here's your birthday present!” She had a railway all set up, connecting the Tomica\*\* roads



Yuya's Plarail set-up.

with the Plarail tracks for me. I was so happy! Well, just talking about them makes me want to play with them!

**Hiroko:** Yuya always plays with toy trains on days when he's ridden a train. He likes to play with the same model of the train as the one he rode. He lets it run on the tracks, sets up stations, and pretends he's the conductor, or announces “The train is coming,” “The doors are closing,” calling out the station names.

## Q: Do you still enjoy looking at trains?

**Yuya:** Yup!

**Hiroko:** There is a footbridge on the way to school where he likes to stand and watch the trains go by.

**Yuya:** I think it's neat how trains of different colors run on the same rail. I can see them on the way to school. About once a week, I get to see some old models passing by, too. I feel so happy when I see them! On the way home from school, I look forward to seeing the new Narita Express and freight trains. You know, sometimes there will be an announcement at the station that a train is passing by the station without stopping. If the announcement says “ressha 列車” it's a freight train, and if it says “densha 電車” it's a special express train.

## Q: How many different types of trains have you ridden?

**Yuya:** Too many. I've lost count!

**Hiroko:** We started taking train trips when Yuya was about three years old. Before he entered elementary school, we used to travel once, or sometimes twice or three times, a month. We went to Nikko, Hakone, Maebashi, Omiya . . . We really rode on all sorts of different trains.

When he was in first grade, we covered 95 stations in only five days for the Pokemon Stamp Rally.\*\* It took more than two hours just to get to some of the distant stations. We had to come up with a strategy to figure out the best order to visit the 95 stations in such a short time! There was also a train timetable for children made for this stamp rally, and thanks to that, Yuya learned how to read train timetables when he was in first grade.

**Yuya:** I got to ride on many trains and collect lots of Pokemon stamps. It was so much fun! I hope we can do it again next year.

## Q: Which train trip is most memorable?

**Yuya:** I really liked the time we went to Echigo Yuzawa (Niigata prefecture) by local train! There was one place where we entered a tunnel, and the landscape was just ordinary, but when we came out, there was snow everywhere—a winter wonderland. It was so pretty.

**Hiroko:** The three of us went to Yuzawa as a family when Yuya was four years old. We left the house at five in the morning, and arrived around noon. I remember how Yuya cried out with joy when he saw the snow. It's not

something you can experience in Chiba. It was Yuya who had said that he wanted to go to Echigo Yuzawa.

**Q: How do you decide on where to go or which trains to ride?**

**Yuya:** First, I look at photos of the trains on the book to see if there's a "face" I like. Every train, you know, has a different "face"! Then I check a map to see where it runs, and tell my mom that I want to visit those places to ride it. During spring break this year that's what I did for the Nankai Rapi:t, which is a special express. I'd never seen a face like that before. The front end of the Nankai Rapi:t is pointy and its body is blue—it's really cool. It was much cooler in real life than in the photo.



The "really cool" Nankai Rapi:t.

**Hiroko:** Yuya has a book with photos of trains and a map of Japan showing all the train lines in the country. After he tells me that he wants to ride on a certain type of train, or go to a certain place, I think of all the different ways we could get there. There are many different trains running in Japan, so I can come up with a variety of routes. For example, I thought about three possible routes we could take to Osaka. Yuya and I look up what types of other trains we could ride on and what tourist attractions or recreational spots there are, and then we decide on a route.

**Yuya:** I love to plan and think about where to go, too.

**Hiroko:** I think discussing and researching together like this has brought Yuya and me closer together. Researching, traveling, enjoying ourselves at the destination—it's all a lot of fun. On top of that, Yuya has learned quite a lot of kanji and Japanese geography from reading his book and deciding which trains he wants to ride. He has learned to concentrate as well.

**Q: What do you like about trains?**

**Yuya:** I like the way it can take us to different places. I also love watching the landscape go by. I'm always looking out the window. I love it when there's snow or a pretty ocean on the other side of a tunnel. I even saw lightning once.



Yuya always gets a train-shaped cake for his birthday. The pastry chef at the cake shop bakes him a special cake from a photo of a train that he likes.

**Hiroko:** If we went by car, we would simply be driving ourselves to our destination. But on the train we are taken to a destination. Of course, going by car may be much easier, but riding on trains is more fun. I also like how on the train we can share the time and space with other people. I know you can share time and space as a family in an automobile, too, but I feel our connection in that way is stronger on a train.

**Yuya:** I usually fall asleep in a car, but I never get bored looking out the window on the train.

**Hiroko:** He sits up watching the landscape, even if it's just an endless view of fields. It's we grown-ups who end up falling asleep!

**Yuya:** I also like putting my ear against the window and listening to the sounds of the train. It's fun listening to the clickety-clack sound of the train going over the joints in the track or the "whoosh" when another train passes by in the opposite direction. I don't know why, but every train sounds different. I also like it how the windows rattle when trains pass by each other.

**Hiroko:** Yuya likes to feel different things with all his senses.

**Q: Are there any trains that you want to ride in the future?**

**Yuya:** I want to ride in lots of cool trains!

**Hiroko:** Now that Yuya's a little bit older, we'd like to go somewhere farther away. We're thinking about riding trains in Kyushu or Hokkaido prefectures.

\*Plarail is a line of toy trains and tracks sold by Takara Tomy. The tracks can be connected in a variety of shapes. It's a long-selling toy line that has been popular since it came out in 1959. During the summertime and holidays, Plarail events are held around Japan and attract many families.

[www.takaratomy.co.jp/products/plarail/](http://www.takaratomy.co.jp/products/plarail/)

\*\*Tomica is a line of pocket-sized toy cars and roads sold by Takara Tomy. Introduced in 1970, they are long-selling classics. Approximately 538 million Tomica cars have been sold to this day.

[www.takaratomy.co.jp/products/tomica/about/index.htm](http://www.takaratomy.co.jp/products/tomica/about/index.htm)

\*\*\*For this rally, special stamps are provided at different train stations and lines in Tokyo, Saitama, Ibaragi, Kanagawa, and Chiba prefectures. See Japanese Culture Now in this issue.

All the train lines in Japan can be seen: [www.ryoko.info/rosen/train/](http://www.ryoko.info/rosen/train/)

**My favorites**

**好きな食べ物 Favorite food**

梅干とお肉 (特にハンバーグ、から揚げ)。梅干は毎日食べる。

Umeboshi pickled plum and meat (especially hamburger steak and deep-fried chicken). I have *umeboshi* every day.

**好きな色 Favorite color**

青色と赤色。青色は海の色だから。赤は強い色、それと大好きな梅干の色だから!

Blue and red. Blue because it's the color of the ocean. Red because it's a strong color, and it's the color of *umeboshi*!

**将来の夢 What I want to be when I grow up**

車掌さんか野球の選手!

A train conductor or a baseball player!



Note: This article is based on an interview held in August 2010.