

My Best Friend

As we get older, it sometimes gets difficult to find time to spend with friends. Nowadays, there are only a few people I keep in touch with regularly. Many of my friends still live in my home country, and because we don't get to meet very often, we keep in contact using Zoom or Skype. Sometimes, we even have online drinking parties! Of course, I also have two or three close friends in the country where I live now, including my closest friend, Nick.

Nick and I have been friends since we were young children – we first met in junior high school. We got to know each other because we both played Pokémon on our Gameboys. The first Pokémon games had just come out in the year we joined junior high school, and they were really popular. Nick had Pokémon Red, and I had Pokémon Blue, so we used to trade Pokémon a lot with each other. I chose the grass type, Bulbasaur as my starting Pokémon, and Nick chose Squirtle.

Nick and I were also big sports fans. Before I met Nick, basketball had been my favorite sport, but he encouraged me to join the baseball team. Once I started playing baseball, I was hooked! It quickly became my favorite sport, and I continued to play on the school team with Nick until we both graduated senior high school. Nowadays, I don't have enough time to play on a team, but I still sometimes go to the local batting center. Nick joins me when he comes to visit, and we watch games together sometimes, too. We both support different local teams though – Nick is a big Carps fan, but I support the Tigers now.

Anyway, before we moved to this country, Nick and I also went to college together. We both majored in foreign languages, and when we graduated, we moved here around the same time – although Nick lives in a different city to me. We keep in touch very often though – it's always nice to talk to someone who knows what it's like to live in a foreign country and speak another language – my parents and friends back home don't really understand. Nick also keeps me updated about what's going on back home, too, because he gets to go back home more often than I do. He doesn't have as many family commitments as I do.

Of course, these days we don't get to spend much time together – I'm busy with family and work, and I rarely get the chance to visit him. Sometimes he comes up to visit me, though, which is great because the kids enjoy it when he comes. I'm looking forward to when Nick has his own children, so that they can play together.

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. What country is the narrator from?

Answer: Likely the United States.

Hints/Clues: The narrator liked basketball and baseball, two sports that are popular in the US. In particular, baseball is played in few English-speaking countries outside of North America. Also, he refers to junior and senior high school, as well as college – these are words for the school system typically used in North America.

2. What country does the narrator live in now?

Answer: Japan.

Hints/Clues: The narrator lives in a country where baseball and batting centers appear to be popular. Furthermore, he mentions 'local' baseball teams, the (Hanshin) Tigers and (Hiroshima) Carps.

3. Is the narrator married?

Answer: Yes.

Hints/Clues: He mentions that he does not have much time to visit his home country, and that

he is 'busy with family and work.'

4. About how old is the narrator?

Answer: Mid-late thirties.

Hints/Clues: In the US, Pokémon Blue and Red were released in September, 1998. As this was the narrator's first year of junior high school (Grade 7), he would have been 11 or 12 years old at the time. $2024-1998 = 26$, $+11\sim 12 = 37\sim 38$.

5. Why can Nick go home more often than the narrator?

Answer: Because he is not married/doesn't have children.

Hints/Clues: Just before the narrator mentions that he is 'busy with family and work,' he says that Nick can go home more often because 'he doesn't have as many family commitments as' the narrator does. This suggests he is probably not married. Also, the narrator says 'I'm looking forward to when Nick has his own children, so that they can play together,' suggesting he at least does not have children.

6. What are the Pokémon 'Bulbasaur' and 'Squirtle' called in Japanese?

Answer: *Fushigidane* (フシギダネ) and *Zenigame* (ゼニガメ).

Hints/Clues: No specific clues in the text (apart from Bulbasaur being a grass type starting Pokémon). Hints should be given about parts of the names 'bulb' (球根) and 'saur' (a suffix often used for dinosaurs) and how Squirtle is a portmanteau of 'squirt' and 'turtle.' If students are familiar with Pokémon, they should be encouraged to guess for themselves from the English names, but if not, they can look them up.