

Faithful Elephants

Many years ago, there were three wonderful elephants at the Ueno Zoo. The elephants were John, Tonky, and Wanly. They could do tricks. Visitors to the zoo loved to see their tricks.

Japan was at war then. Little by little the situation was getting worse. Bombs were dropped on Tokyo every day. "If bombs hit the zoo, dangerous animals will get away and harm people," said the Army. So it ordered the zoo to kill all the dangerous animals such as lions, tigers, and bears.

Soon, it was time to kill the three elephants. The zookeepers did not want to kill them, but they had to follow the order. They started with John.

John loved potatoes, so they gave him poisoned potatoes together with good ones. But John was so clever that he ate only the good potatoes. Then they tried to give him an injection. But John's skin was too hard for the needles to go through. Finally, they decided to stop giving him any food. Poor John died in seventeen days.

Then the time came for Tonky and Wanly. They always looked at people with loving eyes. They were sweet and gentle-hearted. However, the elephant keepers had to stop giving them anything to eat. When a keeper walked by their cage, they stood up and raised their trunks in the air. They did their tricks because they were hoping to get food and water. Everyone at the zoo said with tears, "If they can live a little longer, the war may end and they will be saved."

Tonky and Wanly could no longer move. They lay down on the ground, but their eyes were still beautiful. When an elephant keeper came to see them, they looked so weak. He became too sad to see them again.

Bombs continued falling on Tokyo. And a few days later, Tonky and Wanly died. When the elephants' bodies were examined, nothing was found in their stomachs — not even one drop of water. Today, the three elephants rest in peace with other animals under the monument at the Ueno Zoo.

The bond of the community

Nishimera village where I live is surrounded by the beauties of nature. 96 percent of the land is mountains and woods. There are only around one thousand people living in the village, but we have been keeping the spirit of Kikuchies that started from the Muromachi Era.

Villagers are polite, warm-hearted, and keep good relationships with each other. Nishimera is really a nice place, but people around there are living in danger of landslide disasters.

Actually, we've had landslide damages for two years in a row. The main road was covered with lots of soil. Fortunately, nobody had lost their lives, but we couldn't use the road and had to commute a long way around. It was a very inconvenient experience.

This year, the long rainy season showered us with a huge quantity of water. And the Hitotsuse River has nearly overflowed its banks. Moreover, earthy and strange smell came from the woods.

I was so anxious that the disaster might happen again. Natural disasters occur frequently in Japan as well as the still fresh memory of the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami. It is predicted that the Nankai Trough earthquake might be occur in near future. There is a possibility that our village will have a great damage at that time.

So, I think we should prepare in case of natural disasters. I think there are three important things to prepare for them.

First, we should regularly check hazard maps and evacuation routes. Landslide disasters may happen at any moment. There is no telling of where and when! To behave properly in unexpected situations, I think we should know well where the safe place is and where to evacuate.

Second, we should store enough supplies like foods and living-ware to use during the disaster. If we evacuate, we may not be able to find food, medicine and so on, so it is important to always prepare emergency bags.

Third, we should deepen the local bond with neighbors. The lesson learned from the past is to have ties with neighbors. For example, after securing my own safety, I can call out to the neighbors, check their safety, and help them to evacuate from their place.

In Japan, many people's lives and properties had been lost because of natural disasters. Disasters caused by natural phenomenon cannot be stopped, but it is possible to reduce the damage, "Gensai," with our efforts. We need to protect our own lives by strengthening our ties with neighbors and the whole local community.

I love my hometown and its people and I want to contribute to their safety and happiness in the future.

Nishimera Junior High School

3rd grade Hiyori Nakano

Our School is Unique

Can you say some of the good points of your school? How many ones can you talk about?
I can talk about many regarding my school, Nishimera Junior High School.

Nishimera Junior High school is really a unique school.

First, there are special dishes in our lunch menu such as "stamina age", which is fried venison, chicken, and potatoes. All the students of our school, only 18, are so friendly and nice to each other. And, we have "Meralympic," similar to your Sports Day, and "Iki-Iki bunkasai," like your cultural festival. Most of villagers can join in these events.

The role which is given to us is great and hard, but the experience is rewarding, I believe. We know the importance of cooperation to achieve the job.

"In spite of enduring poverty, we have to study hard, train ourselves, have sense of propriety, and do our best for our country." This is the teaching spirit of the Kikuchies, the lords of Nishimera for about 400 years.

So, people in Nishimera are polite and get together to achieve something.

Besides, we have our own unique tradition that has been passed down for many years. It is to bow to the cars on the way to school, especially around the school. Our seniors had been reported by a TV channel. "Junior Highschool Students who are very polite" is the title of the show.

Lately, the TV station staff came to Nishimera to research the tradition again. Of course, we have been still keeping it. And this research taught me the things I learned for the first time.

The reason why students bow to the cars is like this. 35 years ago, the road to school was so narrow that students couldn't walk when the teachers' cars go through there. So, every student stopped and stood still there, and bow to them. That's why we students bow to the cars, and it has been passed down from generation to generation. Now, we are still keeping the tradition following the model of our seniors. This tradition is going to continue from now on, I guess.

We, 3rd graders, are going to leave Nishimera and go to high schools because there are no high schools in Nishimera. But we will continue the greetings not only inside the village but outside it too. And, I have been proud of being from Nishimera and adopting its spirit.

I would like to keep the tradition as a villager and pass it down to the next generations as well.