

## "The Pear Orchard"

*Rika Ishii*

I grew up in Yokohama city. The center of the city had many trading companies and office buildings, and it was always crowded with office workers and visitors. But across the street from my house, there were rice fields, and in front were grape vines and kiwi trees and bamboo shoots. I loved the sight of the vast rice fields, the sound of water flowing into the field, the smell of the fruit, the wind blowing gently toward my face. My life was surrounded by nature, and the scenery around my house is stamped on my memory. People in my town were very nice and friendly. They always smiled and said hello to me and asked how the rest of my family were doing. People knew everyone in the town so the whole town was like a big family. Life in my childhood seemed to go slow, because of the peaceful town and the gentle people.

There used to be a large pear tree orchard near my house, and my grandfather took care of it. Walking on the grassy path among the bamboo shoots and grape vines and kiwi trees, I would come to my favorite place, my grandfather's pear tree orchard. The path was narrow and sloped up a little, so I could not see the orchard until I walked all the way to the end of the road.

My grandfather and grandmother used to raise cyclamens in a greenhouse; however, when my grandmother died young, he began to raise the pear trees. It was probably because the flowers kept him thinking about his wife. So he started the orchard by himself. My father told me that for the first couple of years, he could not raise good pears. He had to struggle but finally he learned his own way of caring for the pear trees.

The orchard was very large with many pear trees. I had never walked to the end of the orchard because as I walked into the orchard, my grandfather became smaller and smaller, and I felt that I would never be able to go back. So I usually walked with my grandfather or walked only near the entrance. The ground was bumpy, and there were old pears that had fallen from the trees. It was difficult to run or even to walk. When I walked in the orchard, he used to say, "Watch your steps! Or you will fall down." I walked carefully and paid attention to every step. Above my head was an orange net which covered the entire orchard to protect the pears from birds. It separated the orchard from the outside and made it a different space. When I stepped into the orchard, I could soon smell the sweet pears. It was a very pleasant scent.

In front of the orchard, there was a small, simple building where my grandfather kept the tools and machines. The building seemed to be old. Its blue roof looked weak and there was no flooring. Although it was a simple, old building, it protected us from the heavy sunshine and unexpected rains. When he went in the orchard to work on the trees, I waited in the building until he came back. The building was always filled with the pears' sweet smell. In summer, he sold his pears in this small building. People who loved his pears came and bought some pears. Every summer, the number of customers seemed to increase. Most of them were our neighbors or people in our town. But sometimes people out of town came to buy his pears. He weighed the pears with a scale and put them in the plastic bags. When the customers came to buy pears, I always stood by him and kept quiet. I just watched and listened to them talking. Sometimes he made me say hello to his friends who came for the pears.

My grandfather was very kind and nice and I liked him very much. When my parents scolded me, I walked to the pear tree orchard to find my loving grandfather. Whenever I cried, he sat me down in his lap and listened to me until I stopped crying. He

always said to me, "Oh, dear. Don't cry. You are cute when you smile, not when you cry." My grandfather and his pear tree orchard was a shelter which always welcomed me.

When I was small, I used to go to the orchard and help him with his work. He always welcomed me with a smile. He let me cut the pears from the trees. Since I was too short to reach the pears, he put out a small plastic box for me. But when I could not reach the pears high in the tree, he lifted me up, so that I could reach even higher than when standing on the plastic box.

My grandfather loved his orchard very much. He went to the orchard every day in any weather conditions to take care of the pears. When he heard the news of a typhoon coming toward Yokohama, he went to the orchard and covered each of the pears with a small bag. He knew everything about the pears. Whenever I went to see my grandfather, he said, "Let me choose the sweetest pear for you," and he grabbed a pear and peeled it. Every time the pear he peeled was the sweetest pear I ever had. All the pears looked the same to me, and I could not tell which one was good, but he could tell which pear is sweet before he peeled it. I thought he possessed some power which no one had and I always talked about him to my friends. I was very proud of him.

When I was seven, he died from cancer. I had never experienced someone's death. I did not know what happened to him and did not imagine that I would not be able to see him again. I just watched as my family cried in front of his body, and wondered what I should do when everyone else is crying. At the same time, I wondered what would happen to his pear tree orchard without him.

Since both of my parents had jobs and nobody could take care of the pears, they decided to give up the pear tree orchard. When my parents told me that, I was really sad because the pear tree orchard was my favorite place. Losing the orchard, I had the same feeling as I felt when my grandfather died. I begged my father to let me take care of the orchard for my grandfather. But I was too young, and I could do nothing about their decision. I had never imagined that the orchard would disappear from my life. The pears, the small building, and my grandfather's smile, everything in the orchard flitted through my mind.

As I grew up, I got over the loss of my grandfather and his orchard. We sold the orchard to a truck company, and now it is a big parking area for trucks. It looks totally different from what it used to be like. There is no pleasant scent of pears, only the bad smell of trucks and gasoline. The noise of trucks sometimes wakes me up at nights. No one could imagine that there used to be a beautiful pear tree orchard in the truck parking area.

Although I will never again see my grandfather, nor his orchard, they left me a great present. I was born in April when the little white pear flowers were in full bloom. My grandfather loved the sweet scent of pear flowers. My father told me that grandfather was very pleased to hear about my birth and asked him if he could name me. He named me Rika, "pear scent" in Japanese. I really like my name. Although it has been a long time since he died, the memory comes back whenever I write my name, reminding me of pears and my grandfather. The sweet pear scent and my grandfather's smile are always in my heart.