

1 NIIMI Nankichi

< 新美 南吉 > Part 1

A : Have you ever visited NIIMI Nankichi Memorial Hall?

B : Yes, I have once. And you?

A : No, never. What do you think of it? I mean, is it worth visiting?

B : Sure. Once you read his stories and poems, you'll love this place. I'm crazy about stories and poems written by NIIMI Nankichi. On your way there and in the building, you can see a lot of his relics, catch a glimpse of his character and life, and feel the atmosphere of his times.

A : Is Memorial Hall the only thing there?

B : No. Next to it, there is Nursery Tale Forest, which will remind people of 'Nakayama', the setting of a famous picture story "Gon-fox."

A : How do I get there?

B : You can take local trains on the Meitestu Kowa Line and get off at Handaguchi Station. Of course you can walk to the place. It takes only 20 minutes on foot. And on your way there, you can drop in at Nankichi's Parents' House, Hachiman Shrine and Korenji Temple.

A : Thank you for the information. Will you come along and join me in my adventure?

B : Sure! Why not?



NIIMI Nankichi Memorial Hall

NIIMI Nankichi

Part 1

His Childhood

Nankichi was born in Handa-cho (now Handa City) on July 30, 1913. His father, WATANABE Tazo, was a *tatami* (straw mat) artisan and later he dealt in *geta* (Japanese wooden clogs) and general merchandise. Nankichi was his second son. His original name was WATANABE Shohachi. When Nankichi was four, his mother Rie died and at six his father got remarried. He and his stepmother Shin did not get along. When he was eight, he was adopted into his real mother's family, the Niimis. So in his childhood days he was isolated and lonely.

His gentleness and love for people, which can be seen in his works, might originate from his loneliness.



At the back of the house, there is a bump and the house has an extra floor under the first floor. There are a kitchen, a dining room, and a very small closet on the extra floor.

Nankichi's Parents' House



Nankichi's Foster Parents' House



His Secondary School Days

In his primary school days Nankichi was doing very well, and after graduating he entered Handa Secondary School (now Handa Senior High School). Around second grade he began to write stories and poems. After graduation he took the entrance examination of Okazaki Normal School to be a teacher but failed it because of physical weakness.



Jyoyato(常夜灯)



Korenji Temple(光蓮寺)

His Substitute Teacher Days of Yanabe Elementary School

In 1931, when he was 18, he was employed as a substitute teacher of Yanabe Elementary School. He was in charge of the second grade classroom. In those days, he wrote many stories and poems and told them to his students. In July of the same year he told his famous nursery tale 'Gon-Fox' to them. He wrote this great nursery tale when he was only 18 years old. His genius for making stories and poems blossomed very early. Here is an excerpt from that text:

"Gon, was it you? Did you bring me the chestnuts?" Gon nodded weakly, but his eyes were shut. Hyojū dropped the rifle. A thin line of blue smoke was still rising from it

And at that time he began to use the name Nankichi.
In August he left the job because his contract expired.



EXERCISES

1 COMPREHENSION CHECK

本文の内容と一致するものには を , 一致しないものには × を付けなさい。

- (1) Nankichi was born in Handa-cyo on July 30, 1913.
()
- (2) When Nankichi was eight, he was adopted into his real father's family.
()
- (3) Nankichi failed the entrance examination of Okazaki Normal School because he had a bad record at his primary school.
()
- (4) Nankichi wrote his famous nursery tale 'Gon-Fox' when he was 18 years old.
()
- (5) Nankichi quit his job at Yanabe Elementary School because his disease got worse.
()

2 USEFUL EXPRESSIONS

文中の () 内の表現を参考にして , 次の日本語を英語にきなさい。

- (1) 彼はその仕事の責任者だ。(in charge of ~)

- (2) 当時 , 人々は今よりもはるかに質素に暮らしていた。(in those days, simply)

- (3) 彼の文章には彼の知性が見られる。(can be seen)

- (4) 彼と彼女はもうすぐ結婚するかもしれない。(might)



A : What beautiful flowers these are! I'm very fortunate to see this view. Do you know the name of these red flowers?

B : Yes, they are called cluster amaryllis (*higannbana*). Every year we can enjoy this picturesque scene in autumn. Just walking around here is a lot of fun for me. You can feel the changes of the seasons. In spring, cherry blossoms and rape blossoms (*nanohana*) bloom all over. I don't know how to express the beauty of the scenery. They are beyond description.

A : I do want to come back! Anyway this small stream called 'Yakachi-River' is the one which is used as a scene in 'Gon-Fox', isn't it?

B : Yes, a very famous scene. In this river Hyoju managed to catch some eels in his nets to feed his loving sick mother, but Gon was so playful that he mischievously set them free. Hyoju got angry with Gon, and eventually shot him. At the very last moment, they understood each other, but it was too late

A : Yes, it's a tragedy! I was deeply depressed by this mournful ending caused by misunderstandings when I read this story for the first time. Despite this sad ending, it is still fun to walk around the area, and think about the world of NIIMI Nankichi.

B : It sure is.



His Substitute Teacher Days of Kowa Elementary School

In 1937 when he was 24, he began to teach fourth grade students at Kowa elementary school. Around that time parents started treating him coldly and demanded him to be independent. Considering his age, it was quite natural for them to do so.

He wrote a lot of things in his diary about his school life, feelings and nature.

For example:

May 10

I didn't think of suicide for the last half month. I need neither honor nor reputation. I really hope that I can keep teaching in this school while looking at this beautiful sea.

July 5

Now I am a substitute teacher in this small town Kowa, which is a very gentle, beautiful, and comfortable place for me. Here I am enjoying modest happy days, and I can finally see that living is not always useless.

These were his brief happy days.

But he wrote this, too.

July 5

I feel terribly bad today, too. After teaching just two classes, I am too tired to speak.

His Teacher Days at Anjo Girls' High School

In 1938 when he was 25, his new life started at Anjo Girls' High School and he became a full-time teacher. His parents were very happy to hear the news that he got a new job.

He spent many fruitful and steady days, surrounded by understanding colleagues and female students who admired him.

During his first year, he gave up writing and tried to become a good teacher. He taught composition and English, but in those days the war cast a dark shadow over them. It became more and more difficult for him to teach English, so he infused most of his energy into teaching composition. His lessons were very unconventional. At that time works which were formal and flowery were praised, but he guided his students to write things as they were. Nankichi praised whatever they had written, and because they were praised, they became used to his way of teaching and they wrote many works willingly.

Such a teaching method is quite natural now, but at that time when everything was influenced by militarism, he stood out a great deal.

In 1941 his first book 'The Tales of Priest Ryokan - a Handball and an Alms Bowl' was published in Tokyo. And on December 8, World War broke out.

In 1942 the book "Grandfather's Lamp," which is one of his best works, was published. Here is an excerpt from that text:

Lamp, lamp, my longed-for lamp! Then, Minosuke knelt down and picked up a stone at his feet. And aiming at a lamp burning most brightly, he threw the stone with all his might. One of the big lights went out with a loud smash.

In terms of literature, 1942 was his best year. He finished writing a series of his best works, such as 'Gongoro Bell,' 'The Camellia Tree to Which an Ox Was Tied,' 'Hananoki Village and the Thieves,' and 'Peasants' Legs and Priests' Legs.'

However, writing these works in a very short time took a toll on Nankichi. Even a man who is in good health would become sick after straining himself. Nankichi was bothered by bloody spitting and urine and needed much more rest than ordinary men. Without a doubt, writing shortened his life. If it had not been for his intense writing, he might have lived longer. Two years later the war was over and peace came to Japan. From then on, medical technology developed rapidly. Nankichi could have benefitted from such technology.

Nankichi was an idealistic and sharp teacher, and his students found him rather cool at his first sight: he graduated from the University of Tokyo (Tokyo School of Foreign Language); he was very tall; he always kept smiling and was gentle to his students. The most charming thing about him was his long hair. In those days, militarism had spread and other male teachers were all short-haired.

In 1943 Nankichi finally took to his bed and had to quit his job against his will. His illness was larynx tuberculosis. In those days medical supplies were few and medical science was not developed. Tuberculosis was very hard to cure.

His loving students had come to see him, but at that time he was so weak that he could not sit up or speak.

On March 22 he passed away. He was just 29 years old.

After His Death

Now Handa, Kowa, and Anjyo have changed a lot, compared with Nankichi's days. But even now his stories and poems are very familiar with people and alive in our minds. "Gon-Fox" is a central story in the textbook for fourth grade elementary students.



Nankichi's Tomb

EXERCISES

1 COMPREHENSION CHECK

本文の内容と一致するものには を , 一致しないものには × を付けなさい。

- (1) Nankichi finally got a full-time job at the age of 23.
()
- (2) The subjects Nankichi taught at Anjo Girls' High School were English and Japanese.
()
- (3) In terms of literature, 1942 was Nankichi's best year.
()
- (4) Nankichi quit his job at Anjo Girls' High School in 1943 because his contract expired.
()
- (5) Nankichi passed away when he was only 29.
()
- (6) 'Grandfather's Lamp' is in the textbook for fourth grade elementary students.
()

2 USEFUL EXPRESSIONS

文中の () 内の表現を参考にして , 次の日本語を英語にきなさい。

- (1) あなたが彼に対して腹を立てるのも当然だ。(It is natural ~)

- (2) 彼はその荷物を家に忘れてきたかもしれない。(might have + 過去分詞)

- (3) もし彼の助けがなかったら , 私は成功できなかっただろう。(If it had not been for ~)

- (4) 今から私と図書館で勉強しませんか。(Why don't you ~ ?)