

Synopsis:

On August 20, 1974 (Shōwa 49), a stone tablet bearing a haiku was placed at the summit of Mt. Fuji. My father initiated this, perhaps a reckless endeavor, to transport a haiku monument to Kengamine, the mountain's highest peak situated beside a weather station. This iconic symbol of Japan has been venerated since ancient times. This act was in honor of my grandfather's dream, a haiku poet.

Episode:

My mother departed on June 3, 2018.

I always knew we would have to part ways. The everyday life I knew was abruptly disrupted. Our dog, who was incredibly close to my mother, left us mere months after, seemingly tracing her steps. Our family plunged deep into sorrow.

I recall my reluctance to inherit the family enterprise, thinking of my father, now left alone. I haven't yet tasted the success I dreamt of abroad and remain single. Nonetheless, a few years before my mother's demise, I was able to invite my parents to my debut museum exhibit in Tatebayashi, Gunma.

At 74, my father's age weighed on me. Out of respect, my solo exhibition in an Ebisu, Tokyo gallery was themed around my grandfather's monument on Mt. Fuji.

"Won't you climb Mt. Fuji with me once more?"

Of late, his heart troubles concerned me, and he declined. But he had one wish:

"Would you bring back a stone from Mt. Fuji as a keepsake?"

I remember a childhood ascent to the peak with family, paying respects at the haiku monument. I vaguely recall my father's tear-streaked face as he stood there.

My grandfather, during his life, aspired to erect a haiku monument on Mt. Fuji. However, his sudden death thwarted this. My father, grandmother, and several others realized this dream.

The land atop Mt. Fuji's ownership – be it Asama Shrine, Shizuoka Prefecture, Yamanashi Prefecture, or the national government – was under contention.

With the project's future uncertain, Mr. N, the observatory's director at Mt. Fuji's peak, proposed, inspired by Ooka Echizen-no-Kami Tadasuke**. He suggested that the observatory was on government-controlled land and the monument would serve as a border marker. Despite the ambiguity, my father seized the opportunity.

A haiku from the renowned Yamaguchi Seishi* is engraved on one side and on the opposite, one by my grandfather Heijiro (haiku pseudonym: Kitafuko), his disciple, and two from other poets.

Their effort was immense. Yamaguchi Seishi's haiku played a significant role in the monument's establishment. Intriguingly, it was originally my grandfather's idea.

The observatory staff even employed a bulldozer, in direct violation of regulations, for transporting supplies and relocating the massive monument. From that point, GÔRIKI (strong men)** hauled it up using ropes, reminiscent of a tug-of-war, successfully installing it. The over one-meter tall Nebukawa stone monument and its 353-kilogram base were more cumbersome than anticipated.

Years later, when my father attempted to publicize the project in a magazine, he received a message from Mr. N: "Elegance of Silence."**** It was a plea for discretion.

Mt. Fuji remains sacred for the Japanese. I hesitated about revealing this at my solo exhibition, but my father jovially remarked:

"What's the worry? The statute of limitations has passed. It's okay. Both the late Mr. N and your old man would be thrilled."

Notes:

* Yamaguchi Seishi (1901-1994), a Kyoto-born haiku poet, was mentored by Kyoshi Takahama. Active during the early Showa era in Hototogisu, he later became an influential figure in Shuoko Mizuhara's magazine Masuigi. Many of his poems are inspired by mountains, especially Mt. Fuji. His inscription reads, "Standing atop Mt. Fuji's sheer cliff, gazing down at the world below." Remarkably, his first Mt. Fuji ascent was at age 74.

** Ooka Echizen is famously dubbed as the 'rampaging general.' The "Ooka Ruling" or "pompous trial" is attributed to Ooka Koshizenmori, a distinguished mid-Edo period bureaucrat.

*** GÔRIKI refers to robust individuals who assist climbers by carrying their gear and guiding them.

**** "Elegance of Silence" (Hisureba-hana) is a phrase from Zeami's Fushikaden, a treatise on Noh theater. It describes concealing emotions.

Supplementary Information on the Haiku Poet:

Hokushûshi (Grandfather)

Nanshûshi (Father: Yoshida Kikujirô)

Hatsujo (Wife of Yamaguchi Seishi)