

# The Day of the Great Wave

Retold by Marcella Fisher Anderson



It is said that long ago a young Japanese boy named Jiro lived near a village by the sea, a tiny village of only 122 people. Around the fish cannery with its

tall chimney clustered all the houses - except for Grandfather's little house. His was build beside an old cherry tree, high, high on the mountainside. Jiro lived there with him.

Like all of the villagers, Grandfather had relatives on the other side of the mountain. When he went there to visit, Jiro took special care of the little house.

On the last day of one of Grandfather's visits, Jiro stepped outside. The air was very hot and heavy. No breeze stirred through the rice fields far up on the mountain. Earthquake weather, Grandfather would say. Just then, the ground trembled a little under Jiro's feet.

Jiro closed the door of the little house. Safely in their places were all of Grandfather's precious possessions, which had also belonged to Jiro's great-grandfather and to his great-great grandfather.

Jiro started running down the long, steep path to the village, but he stopped suddenly. He stared at what he saw. All of the water in the village harbor was going out, as though sucked up by a monstrous fish. Out went the water until only sand and stondes and giant weeds were left behind.

Jiro watched the children run to the sand flats to pick up shells they had never seen before. Dogs dashed about, teasing fish that were left flopping in puddles. All of the grown-ups were indoors, resting from the day's work or cooking the evening meal.

"What is happening?" thought Jiro. Then he remembered his grandfather's stories about earthquakes and huge waves that sometimes followed.

"Run! Run!" he shouted through cupped hands to the children below. But the children did not hear him. Jiro took off his wide straw hat and waved it up and down and back and forth. But the children did not see him.

Jiro's hands started shaking. The fiery sun went behind a smoke-grey cloud and Jiro knew what he must do. But how could he? What would his grandfather say?

He opened the door of the little house. Carefully, he carried out a few of his grandfather's most precious possessions. There was not time to carry out everything.

Jiro ran inside again to the earthenware pot filled with charcoal still hot from his morning tea. He hesitated. His eyes filled with tears. Was there no other way?

Quickly, he turned the pot upside down onto the straw floor mats. At first the mats only smoked. Then they caught fire. Soon the walls of the house were engulfed by a flame that flashed high into the sky. The thatched roof caught fire, too, and made a tall column of smoke. Jiro brushed the tears from his cheeks.

Down in the village, the children saw the flames. They ran to call their parents.

Up the mountain, past the rice fields, climbed the villagers carrying pots and jugs of water. By the time they reached Grandfather's little house, only glowing embers remained.

The village leader pushed his way through the excited crowd. Red-faced, he stood before Jiro. "Everyone in the village climbed high up the mountain to put out the fire."

"Good," said Jiro.

The village leader's eyes flashed. "Why did the house catch fire? You were left in charge of it. What will your grandfather say?"

Before Jiro could answer, someone shouted, "Look! A giant wave!"

A towering wave approached from far, far out in the ocean. Slowly at first came this giant wave. Then it moved faster. In time it filled the ocean sands and the harbor.

The wave threw fishing boats high into the sky and flung them like toy ships against the mountain. It swept away the piers as though they were bamboo splinters. It dropped gaping sharks and twisting tuna onto the tops of trees.

The villagers shouted and pointed as they saw their houses drowned by the wave. At last, only one building was left standing - the fish cannery with its tall chimney.

A call reached Jiro's ears. "Jiro!" It was Grandfather's voice.

The wind made a terrible roaring through Jiro's thoughts. What would Grandfather say? Quickly, Jiro walked over to his Grandfather and bowed very low in front of him. Grandfather bowed back. When he straightened, his eyes took in the glowing remains of his little house. "I see you could not save all of my precious possessions."

Jiro swallowed. He trembled a little.

"But you have saved something more precious." Grandfather smiled, and his eyes glistened. "You have saved 122 lives. What more could a grandfather say?"

For Jiro it was as though the old cherry tree beside the little house had suddenly blossomed with white flowers on every branch.

From the village came a rushing sound. Everyone turned around. The fish cannery with its tall chimney slid out to sea. The last of the village was gone!"

Of course, the people had their rice crop to eat and relatives on the other side of the mountain to shelter them. But they never forgot how Jiro had saved them. When they rebuilt their homes, they built Grandfather's first. His little house still stands today beside the old cherry tree, high, high on the mountainside.