

Why I Write Poems in Three Languages: Japanese, English, and Italian

When I was a teenager and going to school in Japan, I often had chances to write poems in Japanese and I liked it; but afterwards, I completely forgot the activity. Then, at the age of thirty-seven, my husband's career brought me to live in Michigan, USA for one year in 1995. I decided to attend a college to improve my English writing skills. At that time, my four children were aged eight, six, four, and almost two, making me a busy mother. A college consultant persuaded me to become a part-time student taking a few courses.

First, I chose College Writing for four months. According to the given themes such as description, comparison, and claim, I spent most of my free time (outside of household chores and childcare) writing. After the staff at the Writing Center corrected huge numbers of words and phrases in red, I rewrote and submitted six rather long essays. It WAS hard and enjoyable. In the second semester, I selected Creative Writing for a challenge to write a story in my second language.

The winter temperature reached below -27°C (-17°F) in Michigan. Surrounding ponds and lakes became frozen thick one after another, and we could walk on them. It was a mysterious and almost moving experience for me. Based on that, I wrote a love story *Frozen Lake*. Female students liked it and gave some positive comments, but unfortunately, male students showed no response. Then, the teacher ordered us to write poems as well.

When spring came, the ice began to melt first at the lakeshore. Chunks of partially transparent ice -- larger than houses -- floated on the water surface here and there in Lake Michigan. Later, the winds carried and collected these icebergs at one offshore spot and formed an island of glass-like mountains. It was a very impressive scene. While walking along the lakeshore, my daughter slipped and fell, and was soaked in the icy water up to her chest; a fearful event. Based on these experiences, I created a poem, "melting ice tricks innocent children to slip and fall and carries them to the center of the lake as an offering to the cruel spring goddess." I thought the image was sharp and cool, and the poem was the best. However, the teacher completely ignored it.

Instead, the teacher praised *Chickadee* during the lecture in front of all the students, saying, "Look. This is the type of poem I want you to create!" Though I had felt that the poem could be mawkish and not too good, I then decided to change the direction of my poetry to contain sentimental, romantic feelings. Living abroad was something special for me, and I was rather excited, in a condition where poems were easily created. After the children fell asleep, I concentrated on the mental images I got and expressed them in poems one after another. Some students commented that the combination of

nature and emotions in the products such as *Bouquet* and *Acorn Tree* was great, reminding them of Robert Frost. When I submitted *Wild Apple*, the teacher judged it “Very Christian.” I wondered that there could be a Christian part in my heart.

After coming back to Japan for two years, we moved to Milan, Italy. After three years there, when I could converse fluently in Italian for the daily life, I found I had breast cancer. Then, I saw a poster of a poetry competition in standard Italian and the dialect of a small northern town, and the notion of applying for it occurred in me. My Italian teacher liked the idea and kindly edited my poems that were translated from English to Italian. She advised that the three poems submitted to the competition should be *Chickadee* and *Weeping Cherry* that had sweet, gentle images and *Narcissi* with its strong impression. She had high expectations that I might even win the first prize. The result was the modest Rosa Finale. The organizers must have thought that a foreigner from Asia would add an international atmosphere to the tiny local competition.

Thus, some of the poems have Japanese, English, and Italian versions.

Publishing them now would be no great fete, I guess. However, any poet would wish to publicize his/her work in any form. Fortunately, modern websites are globally accessible. Maybe, something will happen, maybe not.

I believe that poems should be felt in the heart rather than understood in the brain. If any phrase of my poems vibrates in any part of the reader’s heart, I will be content.