



Rescue in the Night

What do you think about that title? Are you expecting an adventure story this time? Let's see ...

The 'adventure' I will tell you about took place nearly twenty years ago. I had moved from Canada to Japan together with my two little children and their mother. The girls were very young, one and three years old, and we felt it was important that they become integrated with Japanese society as much as possible, so we enrolled them at a nearby day care center. That way they would have a total immersion in Japanese for about half of each day, and then a good mix of English and Japanese at home for the other half.

It worked very well, and their days were full to the brim with activities, games, and play - both at the center and at home in our apartment. Their mother and I had a pair of bicycles with child carriers on the back, and the four of us would make the trip back and forth every morning and afternoon.

One afternoon as we arrived at the daycare centre to pick the girls up, I noticed that some furniture was stacked outside the gate. The staff explained to us that there had been a delivery of some new shelves and cupboards that day, and these were the old ones being discarded. A truck would be coming the next morning to take them away to the trash.

Trash!? I couldn't believe my ears! The things being discarded were wonderful old shelf units, made from solid wood. I am sure that they were much higher quality than the new units that had just been brought in, but as they were old and a bit battered, they were being discarded without a second thought.

I felt this was a huge waste, so I asked the director of the centre if I could have some of them; after all, if they were just going to be taken to the garbage the next day, surely that would be OK? She apologized, but told us that she had to refuse our request; this was a publicly-owned daycare centre, and city rules didn't allow them to let us take these things, even though they were 'garbage'.

But even as she said this, she also added, "But they will be sitting out there on the sidewalk all night ... I wonder if they will be all right?" And she winked at us ...

I needed no further encouragement. Later that night, when I felt that most of the town would be fast asleep, I got to work. The main piece I wanted was a fabulous wooden cabinet with 30 drawers. It took me quite a few trips, using our baby buggy as a kind of trolley to bring back the drawers first, a half dozen at a time. Then, when those small pieces were safely home, the kids' mother and I brought back the main cabinet itself, balancing it on top of the buggy as we made our way up a long and steep hill, then through the back streets of the town to our home, where we wrestled it into our apartment, desperately trying to maintain absolute silence as we struggled with the large and very heavy unit.

There were two of those cabinets being discarded that day, but we only had space in our apartment for one of them. When we arrived at the daycare centre the next day, we saw the splinters and wood chips in the road where the remainder of the furniture had been smashed up and tossed into the garbage truck.

But at least we were able to save one of them, and it is here still in my home; for many years it stored all manner of children's toys and other possessions, and these days it provides a secure home for many of the woodblock prints in my collection. It is wonderfully well-made and strong, and I have no doubt at all that it will easily outlast me. And after I am gone, and it is put outside on the sidewalk to be picked up for disposal, I certainly hope somebody will be quick off the mark that night!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>