

A Story a Week ...

... from woodblock printmaker David Bull

Basket Case

A couple of weeks ago I mentioned in the story that I sometimes do a bit of work in Sadako's garden. Today's story also mentions the same thing, so I'm a bit afraid you might get the idea that I'm over there all the time helping out. That's not actually the case, as her garden is very much a 'one-woman' show, and it is only rarely that I am able to do anything useful over there.

One reason for this is that she hesitates to ask me to help, knowing that I always have plenty of my own work to do, but perhaps more importantly, she knows that my poor knowledge of plants makes me dangerous in a garden!

Just for a simple example, imagine if I were over there trying to help her with the daily weeding. I wouldn't have a clue which plants to pull, and which ones to leave. She would have to watch me like a hawk to make sure I wasn't doing any damage!

So the only real way I can do anything useful are those times when it is purely manual labour that is required, and this week was one such occasion. She has recently been tilling some of the soil, digging down quite deeply to remove chunks of concrete that are embedded there from previous construction on the property. This had resulted in quite a large pile of earth building up in one place. "See that mountain of earth? Please shovel it all into this deep hole over here." Now that kind of gardening I can understand - no chance for making a mistake with this job!

Her plan was to put the soil back into the hole in layers: dirt from the mountain, then some compost, then more dirt, then some ash, etc. etc. At one point she asked me to stop shovelling and help her carry a load of compost over to the hole. But when we inspected the compost - right over on the other side of the garden - found that it was quite a bit heavier than she had expected. I was unable to lift the container, and it was doubtful whether or not we would even be able to pick it up together.

We stood there for a moment looking at the basket, and each of us was thinking the same thing, "Hmmm ... how can we best get this container from here, over to there by the hole?"

I started looking around for something with wheels with which we could roll the container over to the hole. Was there some kind of 'dolly' there in her storeroom? How about that bicycle! We could balance the container on the seat, and wheel it over ...

And Sadako? She had no such 'complicated' ideas. She reached over, grabbed a wooden pole that had probably been the handle of some long-dead garden tool, and shoved it through the handles of the basket. "Let's go!" We each grabbed an end of the pole, and one minute later the compost was right where it belonged, being dumped into the hole!

I found this episode very interesting! Did this happen because men are more likely to be interested in 'technology', and women are more straightforward? Or is it perhaps that the 'stick to support a basket' is more of an Asian tradition than a western one?

Or perhaps it's even simpler than that; just before this episode, Sadako had spent a couple of days helping with a local festival, where people spent many hours carrying the very heavy portable shrines, using - of course! - long wooden poles! Yes, that's my excuse!

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