Far Away from Home

Have you ever traveled to another town, city, or country? If you have, perhaps you felt bewildered by new foods, different kinds of transportation, or even a language you didn't understand. You may have been surrounded by unfamiliar sights, sounds, or smells. But other things may have reminded you of home and made you homesick. In Grandfather's Journey, you will read about a man who traveled from Japan to the United States one hundred years ago.

The Asakusa temple in Tokyo, Japan, late 1800s

At that time, a Japanese traveler might have longed for his homeland where many people still wore traditional robes called kimonos, rather than the hats and overcoats that were popular in the United States. But he also might have marveled at this big, new country, which was so different from the small island country of Japan.

Young women in a Japanese garden, early 1900s

People riding a trolley in San Francisco, late 1800s

Market Street in San Francisco, late 1800s

San Francisco, United States

Tokyo, Japan
My grandfather was a young man when he left his home in Japan and went to see the world.

He wore European clothes for the first time and began his journey on a steamship. The Pacific Ocean astonished him.

For three weeks he did not see land. When land finally appeared it was the New World.
He explored North America by train and riverboat, and often walked for days on end.
Deserts with rocks like enormous sculptures amazed him. The endless farm fields reminded him of the ocean he had crossed.
Huge cities of factories and tall buildings bewildered and yet excited him.

He marveled at the towering mountains and rivers as clear as the sky.
He met many people along the way. He shook hands with black men and white men, with yellow men and red men.
The more he traveled, the more he longed to see new places, and never thought of returning home.
Of all the places he visited, he liked California best. He loved the strong sunlight there, the Sierra Mountains, the lonely seacoast.

After a time, he returned to his village in Japan to marry his childhood sweetheart. Then he brought his bride to the new country.

They made their home by the San Francisco Bay and had a baby girl.

As his daughter grew, my grandfather began to think about his own childhood. He thought about his old friends.
He remembered the mountains and rivers of his home. He surrounded himself with songbirds, but he could not forget.

Finally, when his daughter was nearly grown, he could wait no more. He took his family and returned to his homeland.

Once again he saw the mountains and rivers of his childhood. They were just as he had remembered them. Once again he exchanged stories and laughed with his old friends.
But the village was not a place for a daughter from San Francisco.
So my grandfather bought a house in a large city nearby.
There, the young woman fell in love, married, and sometime later I was born.

When I was a small boy, my favorite weekend was a visit to my grandfather's house. He told me many stories about California.
He raised warblers and silvereyes, but he could not forget the mountains and rivers of California. So he planned a trip.
But a war began. Bombs fell from the sky and scattered our lives like leaves in a storm.

When the war ended, there was nothing left of the city and of the house where my grandparents had lived.

So they returned to the village where they had been children.

But my grandfather never kept another songbird.

The last time I saw him, my grandfather said that he longed to see California one more time. He never did.

And when I was nearly grown, I left home and went to see California for myself.

After a time, I came to love the land my grandfather had loved, and I stayed on and on until I had a daughter of my own.
But I also miss the mountains and rivers of my childhood. I miss my old friends. So I return now and then, when I cannot still the longing in my heart.

The funny thing is, the moment I am in one country, I am homesick for the other.

I think I know my grandfather now. I miss him very much.

Meet the Author and Illustrator

Allen Say

“"My favorite painting in Grandfather's Journey is the picture of myself as the F.O.B. (Fresh Off the Boat), standing in the sun-drenched, empty parking lot. I love that painting.”

FACT FILE

- Allen Say was born in Yokohama, Japan, on August 28, 1937.
- At the age of six, he wanted to be a cartoonist. When he was twelve, he went to work as an assistant to a well-known cartoonist.
- When he was sixteen, he moved to Southern California with his father.
- After high school, he went back to Japan, but soon he returned to the United States. He worked for many years as a photographer before he started to illustrate and write books.
- When he starts a new book, he paints all the pictures first and then he writes the story. It took him two years to complete Grandfather’s Journey.
- His favorite hobby is fly-fishing.

OTHER BOOKS:

Tea with Milk, Tree of Cranes, The Bicycle Man, The Lost Lake, A River Dream

Internet

If you want to find out more about Allen Say, visit Education Place. www.eduplace.com/kids