



I was there, I remember!

by Yuu Sakamoto



Recently, it was great to look again at my old picture album from 1980s Osaka basho. It contains pictures of ozeki Konishiki, sekiwake Sakahoko (now Izutsu Oyakata), Asahifuji (now Isegahama Oyakata), Kirishima (now Michinoku Oyakata), Terao (now Shikoroyama Oyakata) and Masurao (now Onomatsu Oyakata). There are also pictures of Masurao's brother, who used to be a gyoji for makushita. The best pictures were of former yokozuna Chiyonofuji (now Kokonoe Oyakata) and Waka and Taka when they were still tsukebito. I also kept the tickets in the album, and it was 8000 yen for one masu-seki!

My sister also went to konpa (a young people's party) with rikishi and took private photos of them. All my family members used to be big fans of sumo. In my home town of Kawachi, there was a very famous yakiniku restaurant named 'Yokozuna' where many rikishi came to eat. My parents were close friends with the owner, who called us every time Nakamura Oyakata dined there. My parents were big

fans of Fujizakura, who always had great torikumi with Kirinji. Weren't we a crazy sumo family?

My sister and I liked Asahifuji a lot because he somehow looked like our dog 'Sakura.' We also liked former komusubi Takamisugi because he resembled the manga character Doraemon. Takamiyama (now Azumazeki Oyakata), who wore an orange-coloured mawashi (so rare!), was my favourite rikishi because he sometimes beat Kitanoumi, who was the strongest yokozuna of the day. I remember Kitanoumi not being loved by people because he was too strong. But for me, that IS a yokozuna. A yokozuna is not usually cheered by people because he is supposed to win and never lose. Yokozuna and ozeki are not supposed to need sympathy because it is atarimae ('to be expected') that they are phenomenally strong.

More than 20 years ago, Takamiyama starred in a TV commercial for Maruhachi futons. He danced and sang and screamed: 'nimai, nimai!' The commercial was incredibly

popular and all people in my generation seem to know about it. When I met an old school friend recently, we danced and sang the nimai-nimai song – which was really funny.

One day, when I was very small, my father drank lots of alcohol in the Osaka masu-seki, and went to talk to Azumazeki Oyakata while he was working as a commentator for NHK. My father showed the oyakata a picture of my sister and I, and the oyakata promptly signed the back of it. My father was overjoyed, and told me that all great rikishi are gentle and have a warm heart. It was over 20 years ago, but I remember it well. Since then, I have had a very good impression of big sumo rikishi!

As a child, I loved sumo and wanted to marry a rikishi. I even wrote in my elementary school album that I wanted to become an okami-san in future. But maybe I was joking. Afterall, I am a typical Osakan, with a typically Osakan sense of humour.