

## TELEPHONE OF THE WIND.

Written by Christine Keeble



In 2011, an earthquake and tsunami tore through Japan. Almost 16,000 people died due to the natural disaster and many communities across the country still have not recovered. The Japanese often deal with grief in a unique way—talking of everyday topics to ensure their lost loved ones are confident they are OK and thus, allowing them to move onto the other realms of the afterlife.

A family finds an old unplugged telephone booth that becomes the gateway to speak to a lost husband, father and son after tragedy strikes.

### **This 20 minute play incorporates the following:**

- 1) 4 characters – a mixed-race Australian/Japanese 12 year-old boy, a mixed-race Australian/Japanese 17 year-old girl, an Australian mother in her 40's and a Japanese Grandmother in her 70's. The grandmother can only speak Japanese.
- 2) The language of the play is in English. However, since the grandmother only speaks Japanese, the Australian mum breaks the fourth wall to interpret for the audience.

- 3) Projection media to add to the atmosphere is recommended.
- 4) Set is minimalistic with an old phone booth, an old phone and a bench chair.
- 5) Exploring ways for dealing with grief. The dynamics of a family trying to show courage and normality in the face of tragedy.
- 6) Australian and Japanese mixed heritage.
- 7) The play finishes with footage pictures of the devastation and a recorded voice-over summary – approx. 2 minutes
- 8) Costumes can be easily created - school uniforms x 2 and everyday modern clothes for mum and one traditional Japanese outfit for the grandmother.

**Son/Brother Takumi-** 12 year old Boy on the cusp of puberty. Wanting to be the new man of the house and look over his Mother, Grandmother and sister.

**Sister/Daughter Mia:** 17 year old teenager – full of confusion and angst. Caught between womanhood and whatever the phase is before that. Who knows! It's all confusing

**Mum Donna:** about mid 40's Australian born mum. Blonde and strong. Character and matter of fact- ness .

**Grandmother Saschiko** – late 70s. mid 80's - Dignified and stoic. Soft, calming with an air of wisdom.

The scene opens with a single, old fashioned telephone booth on stage (3 sides, 1 open door side facing audience), and a park bench to the side. The scene is supported by projection and the sound of wind, isolation, sky etc. giving an eery feel.

A boy, Takumi, about 12 years old and in school uniform, gingerly and unsure walks in towards the phone booth. He is familiar with the area, but still cautious. He calls in his teenage sister Mia, also in school Uniform, who is off stage.

**We begin.**

**BOY (Takumi)**

Come on, it's OK, no one is here. We are lucky today. The place is empty.

***He walks to the phone booth and looks back and encourages his sister to hurry up - she is still off stage.***

***She drags her feet and walks in. A non-plussed, arrogant, typical teenager, looking at her phone, she finally looks up.***

**SISTER (Mia)**

This is so stupid. Mum will *kill* you. I can't believe you come here each week!  
You are as crazy as many others to believe this stuff.

**TAKUMI**

Don't say that.... she won't *kill* me. And I'm not crazy. Papa needs to hear that everything is OK. Otherwise.... ***he stops himself short...***

I'm calling papa!

***Boy picks up the phone and dials an imaginary number. Waits a beat as if it's ringing.***

Hi Papa, it's me, Takumi. I wanted to tell you I did well at Math today. I got 100% and top of my class. The teacher said I'm clever like you. A few of the kids laughed at me, but I don't care. How are things going where you are?

***Waits as if there will be an answer and forces a nod...***

I've bought Mia along to say hi.

***Takumi motions and voices to his sister, who sits away on the bench looking at her mobile phone.***

**TAKUMI**

Come on Mia, say hi to Papa.

**MIA**

This is silly. He can't hear you. It's not real!

**TAKUMI**

Yes, it is. Come on Mia...

He can hear us. Just come and say something.

***The sister shrugs her shoulders, rolls her eyes and stops for a minute as she hears something.***

**MIA**

Shhhh, what's that? Someone's coming. I can hear voices.

***Before they could think and run. The mum and Grandmother enter the area.***

**MUM (Donna)**

So here you both are. I thought as much.

**(Very matter of fact)** Son, are you talking to your father again? How is he today. You convinced Mia to come with you?

**TAKUMI**

Yes ma, I've told him about my math score and wanted Mia to also speak to him, but she is being mean.

**MIA**

Mum, this is crazy. Papa can't hear us, this is just a phone that isn't even plugged in!

***(Takima holds the phone up and looks at the unplugged lead and thinks hard about it, puzzled as if he didn't know but he did know.. but for the first time acknowledged it as he thinks about that , the reality of the situation and thinking maybe this is a bit crazy. He is caught between childhood dreams and adult sensibilities.)***

**GRANDMOTHER (Sachiko)**

***Walks towards Mia***

***(Spoken in Japanese and translated to the audience by Donna)***

*Mia-chan... demo, kono denwa wa konsento ni setsuzoku sa rete inaindayo.*

**Donna:** Yes. Darling... but I see this phone is not plugged in.

***(taking her mobile away and looking at it closely)***

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*Soredemo, anata wa hanashi, kaki, sorekara kikukoto mo dekiru jan. Chigai wa nannano?*

**Donna:** Yet you speak, you write and hear from it.

What can be the difference?

**MIA**

Gran... it's just different, trust me. you wouldn't understand.

**DONNA**

Your grandmother understands more than you realise, young lady.

Let me have a chat to your father and then it will be your turn!

**Mia rolls her eyes and plonks back down looking at her phone**

Hello, my love, it's been many months now, almost a year and not everything comes easily, but we are all going OK. The garden is looking good, Spring is soon here. Your bees will be happy. The children continue to be our biggest joy **(a quick look at Mia with a raised eyebrow)**. Your mum has been a great help, and my mum will soon arrive from Sydney to enjoy the cherry blossoms.

Our favourite time of year.

I found a small part-time job and there is another lady there who asked me to see if her children might be with you. Can you look out for them? They were at the school when the sirens sounded. They were told to stay in the assembly area. They should have fled to higher ground, but the teachers didn't know, no one knew what to do. Their names are Jun and Hikari. They are 5 and 6.

I can't imagine her grief...

There must be so many there with you.

We hear stories, People are still searching, day after day, they walk for hours, looking, hoping. At least we found you, at least we can talk to you.

I can't imagine how lost they must be, not knowing.

**Donna starts to cry, lightly and quietly. She wipes away a tear, takes a deep breath and motions the phone to the grandmother.**

## SACHIKO

*(Spoken in Japanese and translated to the audience by Donna)*

Ne...

**Donna:** Hello my son.

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*Issho ni itakattano, sokode. Hahaoya wa kodomo yori mo nagaku chijō ni ite wa naranai...*

**Donna:** I wish I was there with you. A mother should not be on earth longer than her child.

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*Mōsugu issho ni dekiru to omoukedone. Ima, anata no mawari ni iru ōku no kodomo-tachi ni totte sobo ni narerunoyo.*

**Donna:** I feel I will join you soon. I can be a grandmother to many of the children that surround you now.

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*Anata no niwa no teire o shiterushi, anata yori jyōzu kamoyo! Mōsugu koko ni kuru mōhitori no o bāchan ni mukete, ikutsu ka eigo mo benkyō shinakya.*

**Donna:** I'm tending to your garden, and I think my thumb is greener than yours! I'm learning some English words for the other grandmother who comes here soon.

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*Tadashi, gengo ga jūyōde wanai baai mo arunone. Kono sekai demo, anata no sekai demo... mina, onajiyōni kanashimukara, sorezore kotonaruyone.*

**Donna:** Sometimes however, language is of no importance. In this world or in yours. We all grieve the same, yet different.

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### ***She takes a beat and straightens up***

*Mia ga aisatsu suru jikanda. Mia-chan ga utsukushī wakai josei ni seichō shiteruyo. Kanojo wa anata to onajiyōni tsuyoishi, sensu mo aru.*

**Donna:** Now it's time for Mia to say hello. She is growing up to be a beautiful young lady. She is strong like you. Smart also.

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*Kashiko sugiru koto mo aru kamone...*

**Donna:** Maybe too smart sometimes

***She looks at Mia in a loving way.***

***Motions to Mia to come to phone. The others also encouraging her. She reluctantly puts away her phone, gets up and walks over. She obeys and respects her grandmother, and gently yet under sufferance takes the phone.***

**MIA**

***Being awkward at first and annoyed, the conversation starts with a certain cynicism.***

Papa... It's Mia. Of course, you know my name, duh.

***She looks at her mum daring not to question her grandmother. Her mum waves her on to keep going.***

This so silly. Do I have to do this?

***They all nod***

Well, what can I tell you.

I've been practicing my violin and tennis each week. I'm sure I have violin elbow!!! ***(she bends her arm to exaggerate the condition)*** Sorry Papa... I know it's not a time for jokes, but you always had so many dad jokes, it was embarrassing.

***She thinks hard for more conversation topics. Looks at her mum and brother as if needing more encouragement.***

Aika has been a real cow at school. She is so mean to me and then other times my best friend! Everything about everything confuses me now.

School is OK... I'm still not sure what I want to do.

***The mood saddens as Mia becomes more reflective.***

Papa... I'm really sorry I called you stinky before you went on your last job.

I didn't mean to say that.

I wish you were here.... I'd never call you stinky again.

I miss our walks Papa and you telling me about the bees and how important they are to so many things.

Maybe I'll be a beekeeper.

***The mood changes again... trying to get back on track but failing.***

Are there bees where you are?

***A beat and moment for this next question. She looks at her family then back to the phone.***

Papa, why did God let this happen?

How can there be a God if he creates such an awful thing.

I have so many questions, why you, why did you have to go back and do that extra delivery. You should have been home.

I'm angry about that. Mum had cooked a special meal for all of us. You shouldn't have taken that last call..Papa.. I don't want to be angry. I'm so sad.. angry I don't know..

I am trying so hard to understand. Everything is so confusing.

***Cries into the phone.***

Papa... Papa

***Cries uncontrollably.***

***Mum steps forward to comfort daughter.***

***Takumi takes the phone and assumes an air of caretaker, but yet still not old enough to understand fully his sister's grief.***

**TAKUMI**

Papa. Mia is OK, don't worry, you know how girls are. I'm sure there is a boy she likes who doesn't like her.

***Mia looks up and gives her brother a stern look and goes back into her mother's arms.***

Papa, we are doing fine, please don't worry about us. I can help now.... I'm the man of the house.

***Whispers into phone.***

Papa... there's already 3 girls and soon another one arrives! Maybe I'll walk and tend to the bees like you would do for hours every day.

***Thinks a bit more – a beat.***

Look after the children Papa, their mums and dads are sad.

If you do that job there, we will do ours here.

See you next week.

Bye Papa.

**Close to darkness:**



***Visions of the Japanese Tsunami on screens for a couple of minutes as backdrop to the following postscript over the imagery.***

***Narrator explaining the facts and impact and the process of grief and beliefs.***

***And how the 'Telephone of the wind' helped a nation.***

In 2011, an earthquake and tsunami tore through Japan. Almost 16,000 people died during the natural disaster and many communities across the country still have not recovered. The Japanese often deal with grief in a unique way—talking of everyday topics to ensure their lost loved ones are confident they are OK, and thus, allowing them to move onto the other realms of the afterlife.

The telephone on top of a hill, offered a form of grieving for many. Hoping that their message may somehow be heard, they trek to the booth and state their message before returning home for the day, often returning to the phone time and time again.

The tragedy struck in March... just as the Cherry blossoms prepare their journey for spring.

***Spot Light back on Mia.***

***MIA***

'I can't hear him, it's just me talking, but he heard me, so I can keep living'.

***Lights up:***

All cast on stage final bow.