

手鞠 temari

Posted on [June 27, 2013](#) by [John Marshall](#)

Japan entered the modern era dramatically and not entirely willingly. Part of the cost of modernization has been a loss of many of the more endearing aspects of folk customs. The following is a story told to me by a great auntie from the northern regions of Japan.

Picture a rural farm setting long, long ago, when even a few miles to the next village seemed like an insurmountable distance to a poor farmer, when people owned only the clothes on their back, the roof over their heads, and the bit of food for their next meal and girl-children were sent away at a very early age to the home of a stranger to be wed to a man they had never met. Women were familiar with the pain and abandonment a young girl experienced until the drudgery of daily life numbed her to the feelings of longing for the loving embrace only a mother could offer.



A baby girl is born to a young mother and cherished as the thing most precious to her heart. As the baby is nurtured from infancy to adolescence, her mother will worry over her future lot in life. From the moment a girl-child is born, her mother is painfully aware of the fate that awaits the child, and that in an all too fleeting instant, her one joy will be sent away most likely never to be heard from again. Long hours are spent contemplating the future of her loved one. Will she marry far away? Will her new family be kind to her? Will she

be able to have children and bear the suffering that comes with watching them eventually disappear from her life?

Day in and day out, as the young mother goes about her chores of taking kimono apart to launder, she saves the precious bits of threads from her own kimono, from her daughter's kimono, and from the happy occasions experienced together while wearing them.



Starting with a carefully selected polished stone, a pure white bit of shell, or some well-worn bead handed down through generations of country women, each salvaged thread is wrapped, strand by strand, using nuanced colors and subtle memories to fashion patterns of hope and happiness,

as heart-felt prayers are bound to the secret core with every turn.

Day in and day out, year in and year out, as the young child grows in health and potential, her mother prepares this bundle of hope – for when the day comes for the girl-child to leave, it is the only gift a mother has to offer. She can only hope that when life and despair close in on her child, she will be able to return to the prayers and in each bit of color recollect the memories and joys of her childhood, and strand by strand to begin the process again for her own precious infant.

