

# Part One

## 1. Boyhood

### Childhood

South of the metropolises of Kyoto and Osaka stretches the Kii peninsula, wrinkled with steep wooded mountains and laced with rushing rivers and streams. In the late nineteenth century, the former castle town of Wakayama, at the mouth of the great river Ki on the peninsula's west side, was a bustling center of commerce and industry. Wasamura, the village where I was born, was less than ten kilometers away.

My family had no illustrious ancestry to boast of, but prided itself on a rather long history of residence in the village. The family tree that was kept in a drawer under the household Buddhist altar went back as far as the early eighteenth century. I was born in 1894, the youngest of eight children, two brothers and five sisters. We owned a modest amount of land, putting us in the upper stratum of village society, and this meant having the means to send my eldest brother to middle school, of which there was only one in the whole prefecture. Ostensibly my father was a farmer, but it seemed he spent most of his time attending village assembly meetings or involving himself in community affairs.

As the youngest child of the family, I was the most indulged and doted upon. My early childhood was peaceful and carefree. I faintly remember going fishing in the nearby streams, playing tag, and drowsing happily while being carried home on my nurse's back along the paddy field pathways to the comforting sound of a



My birthplace in Wakayama Prefecture

### *My Way of Life and Thinking*

country lullaby.

But the idyll was short-lived. I was four years old. The Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) had ended, and buoyed up by its victory, Japan was at last carving a place for itself as an international power. Its economy was rapidly growing, and the fever of enterprise was spreading throughout the country. The Wakayama area, too, felt the ripples of industrial prosperity. In accordance with the government's program of encouraging local industry, a rice exchange market was set up there, as in many parts of the country, and a rush of speculation ensued. My father was a farmer, but like most landowners then he spent little time working in the fields; the family income was assured by the portion of the harvest handed over by the tenant farmers who actually cultivated the fields. He was of a rather progressive disposition, moreover, and had a penchant for trying out anything new or different.

The lure of easy money was naturally irresistible, and he began to frequent the rice exchange and speculate on the commodity market. Speculation of any kind, especially when the national economy is unstable, is risky and bound to bring failure. It was practically no time until his adventures took away our family property, including all the farmland and even the house we lived in. We were forced to sell our land and leave the house passed down from our ancestors, taking with us only a few household possessions. We left Wasamura and moved to a cramped tenement house in the city of Wakayama. My father sold off some of our household goods, and with the meager funds this brought and the help of a clog dealer who was a friend, opened a shop that sold wooden clogs (*geta*). My eldest brother had only one year to go before graduation,



Gate of childhood home