***The Flowered Kimono***

*A story suitable for children (5 yrs +), teenagers and adults. It was written to help strengthen resilience and perseverance after the Tsunami ravaged the coast of Japan in 2011. It is included in the Japanese publication by Tokyo Shoseki of a collection of stories entitled ‘Stories to Grow Hearts’ and can also be found in Susan Perrow’s ebook:* A SPOONFUL OF STORIES #3: Fairy Tales for the 21st Century.

Once upon a time there was a tailor who made the most magnificent silk kimonos in all the land. His shop was in the middle of a garden in a small village by the sea. The villagers used to say that he stitched the garden, the hills, the ocean and the sky into his fabrics, the embroidered patterns were so beautiful. People came from all over the land to buy his silken wares.

The tailor lived alone, working every day on his designs, and doing very well from his sales. But there was one kimono he would never sell. It was pale green, like the rolling hills that stretched down to the sea, and it was embroidered with every kind of flower that grew in the land. No one could persuade the tailor to part with this treasure. He hung it in his shop window, in a strong frame behind the glass, for all to see but for none to buy.

For many years life continued as normal, with the tailor working every day on new designs and new kimonos. But one day a terrible tragedy came to the tailor’s village. Without any warning, far out from the coast, the ocean reared up high like an ugly beast, sending a giant wave towards the shore. The great wave covered the whole village, turning all the houses and shops, and everything in them, upside down and inside out. The villagers, together with their children and their animals, were swirled around in the black mud. Some were sucked back out to sea. Some survived and some did not.

The tailor was visiting the city on this day. When he returned all he could see was black mud and mess – he hardly knew if this was even his village, so broken and mixed up everything appeared. Then he recognised a tree from his garden, the only tree in the village that had stood strong throughout. He frantically began digging in the mud around the tree, looking for his flowered kimono. Day after day he dug, week after week he dug. He found bricks and wood, and built himself a small room to sleep in. Day after day he dug, week after week he dug, desperately looking for his precious kimono.

Eventually, in a sodden pile of mud and broken glass, wrapped round some roots of his tree, the tailor found his silken beauty, battered and beaten, ripped and torn. He laid it out on an old board that he was now using for a table. The embroidered flowers, once so vibrant and alive, could hardly be seen – the kimono was black with mud. The tailor wept and wept, bending his head in sorrow over the muddy silk.

Then a tiny miracle happened – the tailor’s tears dropped onto the kimono and everywhere they landed a little spot of green silk began to shine through the black mud. Quickly he fetched some soap and water and began to gently rub and scrub, and after much work the kimono was clean again. But the battering of the wave had caused the threads of the embroidery to hang limp and lifeless, and there was so much mending to be done.

The tailor continued digging, looking for his spools of embroidery thread. After many more days of digging and searching he found the box of threads that he was looking for, but they too, like the kimono, were black with mud. By now the tailor was exhausted, and the thought of trying to clean all the threads was too much for him to bear. He wept and wept, ready to give up this task.

The tailor’s song of sorrow was carried by the wind all the way up the valley and into the hills. Still he wept, and his song of sorrow was carried by the wind all the way over the hills and up into the mountains. Still he wept, and his song of sorrow was carried by the wind all the way into the mountains and up to the sky above.

High in the sky, hiding in the clouds, the sky spirits heard the tailor’s song of sorrow and decided to come down to earth to help him. They flew down to the box of spools and pulled on the ends of each coloured thread and carried them together, up into the clouds. High into the sky the muddy threads were stretched out, like a black band from earth to heaven.

Then the sky spirits called on the cleansing rain …. pitter patter, pitter patter, pitter patter. The tailor was woken out of his sorrow by the sound of the raindrops. When he looked up into the sky, he saw a shining rainbow of coloured threads, washed clean by the rain, stretching from heaven down to earth.

With great joy, the tailor reached up to take hold of the rainbow. He carefully began winding each colour back onto its spool, until his box was once again full of shining threads. Now he could begin the task of mending his precious kimono and embroidering new flowers into the silken green fabric.

For a year the tailor worked on this task, every day working a new petal onto a new flower. Eventually the flowered kimono was repaired and hanging once again in the window of his new little shop, in the middle of the garden in the small village by the sea.

Now the tailor was ready once again to create beautiful clothing for the people in his land – stitching patterns of the garden, the hills, the ocean and the sky into his silken kimonos.