

Her First Kimono

Photos and text by Sonia Katchian



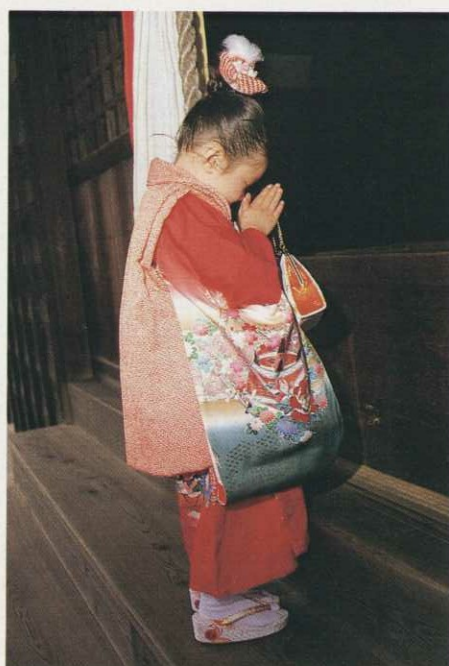
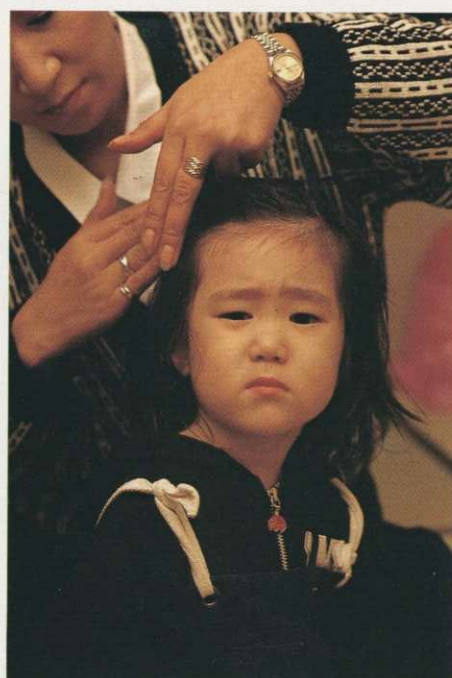
On one day in November, children throughout Japan wear their finest kimonos and make their way to the nearest shrine to pray to the Shinto deities for their health and future well-being.

The festival is called *Shichigosan* which means "Seven-five-three." Boys aged 5 and girls of 7 or 3 are entitled to participate.

And what must it be like behind the scenes? Here we see 3-year-old Erica Watanabe of Chiba, going through the grueling one-hour process of preparing for the ceremony. The kimono "kit" has been rented from the local kimono shop: it comes complete with *zori* sandals and the appropriate bow for her hair. A friend of the family (in striped blouse), an expert in kimono dressing, has come to help out. Erica's makeup gets the nod from her auntie in the mirror.

As the fourth layer of clothing gets tied on, Erica begins to look more like a human maypole. "Hang in there, honey, just a bit longer," her mother encourages her. After a celebratory snack, it's off to the shrine where you'd never know it was all so painful.





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