

Andersen Institute of Bread & Life Co., Ltd.

“Let the founder’s philosophy sink in for the entire company through the Andersen’s Fairy Tale Award”

The life of author Hans Christian Andersen

Hans Christian Andersen, who left behind numerous fairy tales including “The Little Mermaid,” “The Ugly Duckling,” “The Little Match Girl,” and “The Snow Queen,” was a person who lived his life as if in a fairy tale.



Hans Christian Andersen

Andersen was born April 2nd, 1805, into a poor shoemaker family in Denmark. He tried to become an opera singer but gave up. He went to university with the King’s support but faced bullying. Even after his literary fairy tales became loved by people all over the world, he repeatedly had his heart broken.

His works incorporate elements such as the happiness of receiving apples, the pain of a glass splinter, a yearning for beauty, and many setbacks.

“—One evening I was standing quite distressed at my window. I opened it and looked out. Oh, how happy it made me when I saw a face I knew – the round, kindly face of my best friend from my old home! It was the Moon, the dear old Moon, with the same old brilliance.” (From “A Picture Book Without Pictures”)

It is said that when Andersen passed away, the church was packed with everyone from royalty to the homeless, all there to mourn his death.

“My life is a beautiful fairy tale,” he wrote in his autobiography.

The foundation of Andersen, a bakery-restaurant complex

Seventy-three years after Hans Christian Andersen passed away, shortly after the end of Second World War, a small bakery was opened in Hiroshima: Takaki Bakery, run by Shunsuke Takaki and his wife Akiko, who later established the [Andersen Group](#).



A business founded by four people:
Mr. and Mrs. Takaki, a baker, and a female assistant

Takaki's goal was to bring delicious bread to people in this time of confusion, when only poor-quality flour was available. What Shunsuke Takaki had in his heart was a book entitled *A Story of Denmark*, by Kanzo Uchimura. This book describes how Denmark, which was defeated by the Prussian and Austrian alliance, cultivated the land and rebuilt the country without losing hope in the 19th century.

“—When they lost the war and his comrades returned to their home country overwhelmed by despair, only Dalgas had a smile on his face and embraced the spring of hope around his neck.” (From A Story of Denmark)

Determined to build the business over the long term and to develop a bread-eating culture in Japan, just as Denmark had rebuilt its country over a long period of time, Shunsuke Takaki went on an observational trip to Europe and the U.S. in 1959. There he encountered a flavor that brought a smile to his face at a hotel in Copenhagen, Denmark: a buttery and flaky bread with many light and airy layers. He immediately decided to introduce it to Japan and sent a telegram to that effect.

This is how the bread that is now loved by people across Japan as “Danish pastry” was born.



Danish pastries

A few years later, Andersen opened in Hiroshima. More than just a bakery, it also had a restaurant, and the store carried delicatessen items, meat, wine, and even flowers for decorating the table. “Just as H.C. Andersen gave dreams and hopes to people around the world through his delicate fairy tales,” Shunsuke Takaki said, “I want to bring a rich life to people through a table with bread.”

Bringing richness to life through fairy tales: Andersen's Fairy Tale Award

Japan's economy grew steadily after the war. The "Three Sacred Treasures" (color TVs, refrigerators, and washing machines) became common in households, and it was said that a society with a middle-class population of 100 million was realized. But while people became materially rich, what had happened to the spirit of Japanese people? Pollution had worsened, death from overwork had gained public attention, and bullying had become a major social issue.

Andersen's [Fairy Tale Award](#) was launched by [Takaki Bakery](#) in 1983 to celebrate its 35th anniversary motivated by the desire to contribute to the inner richness of Japanese people.

It invites entries for fairy tales from all over Japan, and after Erika Tachihara, a fairy tale writer and the Selection Committee Chairperson, reads all the entries and conducts a preliminary screening, five professional picture book illustrators finally select the entries that they want to illustrate. The results are announced on April 2nd, which is Hans Christian Andersen's birthday. Awarded fairy tales are published in books as the Andersen's Fairy Tale Collection in October of the same year. This prestigious award reached its 41st edition in 2024.



The 40th Award Ceremony



Illustration of “The Red Sweater of Happiness,”
which won the 40th General Category Grand Prize



Awarded fairy tales are published in books

Erika Tachihara made the following remarks in her review of the 4th competition:

“The most important technique to win the Fairy Tale Award was enjoying writing. To enjoy writing, you need to enjoy living first.”

The goal is to enrich the lives of the participants and make them happy by providing not a gateway to success for fairy tale writers but an opportunity for creation. There are as many as 1,000 entries every year. Tomomi Takeuchi of [Andersen Institute of Bread & Life](#) Co., Ltd., who is in charge of this award, says, “Andersen’s Fairy Tale Award symbolizes the activities of the Andersen Group.”

“The Andersen Group has a deep connection with Denmark, pursues originality, and most importantly, continues to promote a fulfilling lifestyle and culture. Andersen’s Fairy Tale Award underlies all these corporate activities. At every award ceremony, there is a moment when I feel that I was really able to bring happiness. This is the best part of overseeing the event.”



Ms. Takeuchi introducing the first edition of Andersen’s fairy tales

Instilling the philosophy into the Group through fairy tales

It has been 75 years since Andersen’s establishment, and the Andersen Group has expanded to more than 6,000 employees. From directly operated stores to franchise businesses using frozen bread dough, provision of bread for commercial operations and retail distribution, the Group operates a wide range of bakery businesses, with nine companies in Japan and overseas. “The challenge is to convey our founding philosophy again,” says Daisuke Kameoka, Director of Public Relations, Andersen Institute of Bread & Life Co., Ltd.

“The Fairy Tale Award has put time and resources into external public relations. However, I think it is necessary to convey and share the goal of the award to our employees again as the company grows bigger and the organization is being divided into separate companies, because Andersen’s Fairy Tale Award is the symbol of our philosophy. By renewing our appreciation of our roots as Andersen, we wish to develop a culture where we can work with enthusiasm toward our vision.”



Mr. Kameoka sharing his thoughts on the Fairy Tale Award

In recent years, data-driven management has been a topic of discussion, but it is difficult to appeal to people’s emotions only with numbers and symbols. Fairy tales will surely make us aware not only of a meaningful life but also of working a fulfilling job. A single story or illustration could make human society clearer than a thick report.

The Andersen Group is still creating dreams and hopes like a fairy tale through bread today.



In front of Hiroshima Andersen, which was rebuilt and reopened in 2020

After the interview

I strongly felt that delicious bread leads to a truly happy life while I was having several refills at the bread bar at the restaurant in Hiroshima Andersen.

Mécénat Writer: Yoshiaki Seto

[Andersen Institute of Bread & Life Co., Ltd.]

Date of interview: Wednesday, February 7, 2024

Place of Interview: Hiroshima Andersen (7-1 Hondori, Naka-ku, Hiroshima-shi, Hiroshima 730-0035, Japan)