Japanese children’s book writer KADONO Eiko believes that “everybody has a magical ability.” She said, “All people have something they’re good at or that they want to do. To find it, you have to do something you like every day. When a person does something they like, they shine and they can lead a life that is vibrant, not boring.”

Kadono’s magical ability is undoubtedly writing stories. When she made her writing debut, her daughter was still little, so she wrote on a drawing board hanging from her neck while engaged in her daily childrearing. “Writing for me gave me time to relax and be myself amid the daily grind of taking care of my child. I realized I’d found something good.” In the half-century or so since she began writing at the age of 34, Kadono has published over 250 works.

Kadono was born in 1935, and therefore experienced war as a child. After the fighting ended, she was enamored of new foreign cultural influences and decided to major in British and American literature at university. After graduating, she worked for a publisher, then married and emigrated with her husband to Brazil, where they stayed for two years. They traveled around Western countries using the money that they had saved from working in Brazil. Reflecting on her youth, when she hopped around the world looking for new places to explore, Kadono said, “During the war, we didn’t have enough food and we lived with all sorts of restrictions. Being freed from that was such a great joy.”

She added, “It’s not that I dislike tradition. What bothers me is having to go in one direction that somebody else has chosen against my will. I want to be the one making the decisions about myself. I guess most people who experienced a time of war when one couldn’t speak one’s mind probably think the same way.” In Kadono’s definitive work, Kiki’s Delivery Service, a young witch named Kiki leaves home and finds her own way as a witch, occasionally butting heads with tradition. When the book was adapted into an animated feature film, the story crossed the seas and inspired readers across generations and borders, but what was the inspiration behind her works?

Kadono’s works are always surprising, engaging, and empowering. She won recognition for her achievements in 2018, when she received the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing, which is also considered the “Little Nobel Prize.” A girl trying to start a career as a witch, a ghost of a little girl who wants to go to school, a girl who lives through the calamity of war, an old woman who travels on a motorcycle … such women and girls, who take action and have a positive attitude, frequently appear in Kadono’s works, and their stories overlap with the author’s own.

Jumping into the wider world, untreating yourself, following your ambition, and finding the magic within you—helping readers across generations and borders find magic in themselves in such a way is the magic of Kadono’s works.