



For Abductee's Immediate Return !

***North Korean Human Rights Abuses
Awareness Week Essay Contest 2018***



Awarded Essay

Junior High School Category 1st Prize

Coming Together to Completely Resolve the Abductions Issue!

Niigata Junior High School Attached to Faculty of Education, Niigata University

2nd grade, Naoyuki Koizumi

As a 13-year-old, I am now enjoying a fulfilling life at junior high school. Today, after finishing my after-school club activities, I leave the school gate. On the right-hand side of the school is the beautiful blue Sea of Japan. However, when I stand at school gate there is something else I always see. I can see the corner, entering a residential area, where 40 years ago Megumi Yokota was abducted by North Korea. There is still a sign standing nearby asking people to provide information. Megumi, who was abducted in front of my school on the way home and taken by boat from the shore near the school to North Korea, was, like me, a 13-year-old student in the fall. Her school life, her time with her family, her happiness in daily life was suddenly taken away. What kind of life is she living now? It is impossible for us to imagine the fear and desperation she had lived in such an extreme difficult situation. Every day, when I think of Megumi, I feel my chest tighten.

One day, after watching the animation Megumi, I felt a shock again at seeing the activities of the abductee families who continue to fight on the abductions issue. For the families, the pain is still real today. What can I do? I didn't know what to do with myself and so I decided to buy and read the book by Megumi's mother Sakie Yokota. In the book, she describes the family's remarkable lives, including their struggles during the first 20 years as they looked desperately for Megumi not knowing why she had disappeared, and then how the family sacrificed everything to resolve the abductions issue once they found out that Megumi had been abducted. Due to the vigorous action of the Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea, public interest in the issue has grown. The current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe from the start understood the issue and set up the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue. It seemed that, little by little, a solution was becoming more likely. In 2002, North Korea, admitted abducting Japanese citizens, apologized, and promised to prevent it from ever happening again. Five of the abductees returned to Japan. However, still today, not all the abductees have returned. The worried families, who are now elderly, must have reached their limit. Given the situation, I felt that communicating this issue is important. Actually, once the abductions issue was featured in the media, an increasing number of volunteers took action including handing out pamphlets and doing petition drives. They tried as hard as they could to reach the hearts of those around them. If more people take action, change can be achieved. Taking advantage of the moment, without letting it pass, and expanding the scope, those activities leads to even greater power.

As I move on in my life, I will remain sensitive to the word "abduction". I want to actively participate in events such as symposia, and speak to people I know with the clear objective of finding a solution. I will speak not only to my friends, but will try and raise awareness of the abductions issue among a broad age range of people, so that more people have an awareness of the issue. My aim will be to talk to people, encourage them to have even just a little interest, and increase the number of people taking action. If people with different individual characteristics come together then the actions they take to solve the issue will be more diverse. Even when facing problems that cannot be solved by a single individual, we can have more influence if we increase the number of like-minded people. The power of the group is immense. I want to get people to cooperate and use the power of citizens to influence the government.

The victims and their families can never get back again the times they have lost. However, if they can be reunited, their efforts so far will have at least some reward. I hope to see the moment that they are reunited and can smile saying "well done for keeping on going". By continuing to tell people I know about the abductions issue, I want to be someone who can gather like-minded people and work towards a solution.

Junior High School Category 2st Prize

It Starts with Showing an Interest

Matsusaka Municipal Chubu Junior High School

1st grade, Kanata Masui

The scenes of North Korea's Chairman and South Korea's President shaking hands and hugging were broadcast prominently on the television news. Additionally, the they summit meeting between the US and North Korea was featured on the news every day. At such times, we often saw comments and articles on television and online saying that there are "hopes for the resolution of the abductions issue".

I had heard about the "abduction issue", but I thought this was something from a long time ago so when I heard that people were calling for it to be "solved", I wondered what kind of issue this was and wanted to know more about the matter. When I tried to survey the abductions issue online, I found the animation film Megumi.

Megumi Yokota, who was a first-year junior high school student, was suddenly abducted by North Korea in 1977. When she was the same age as I am now, she suddenly lost her happy life, and has now for more than 40 years been living a life that no one should have. Anyway you look at this, it should not be allowed to happen. In the animation, it shows just how hard life has been for Megumi's family after she was taken away from them. It really shows their pain. More than 40 years have passed since Megumi disappeared from Japan, but when I heard that her parents have continually been calling out for her to be brought home, I realized that in Megumi's parents' mind she is still a first-year junior high school student who never came home.

In the animation, there is one scene where Megumi's parents hand out pamphlets on the street. However, the people who walk past are not interested, with some of them refusing to take the pamphlet and others throwing the pamphlet away as soon as they receive it. I think that in order to solve human rights issues, we need to start by showing an interest in the issues. When I was in elementary school I read a book written by Dr. King in the US. Dr. King fought against racial discrimination not with violence but by taking a stand through protest, showing many people that discrimination is unacceptable. Among Dr. King's various quotes, I remember especially well that he said "in the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends". Taking this phrase, which means that the silence of those who stand by doing nothing is more cruel than the harsh words of people who discriminate, and applying it to the abductions issue, you can see that if you think the issue is nothing to do with yourself or something that cannot be helped since it is a problem between two countries, then such thought will cause further suffering to the victims and their families, making a solution more distant.

To resolve the abductions issue, I need to not simply know about the issue, but to imagine how Megumi and her parents, as well as the other victims and their' families, have lived down the years, and then make a wish for a solution as rapidly as possible.

Junior High School Category 2st Prize

We are all Involved - It is Not Someone Else's Problem

Nantan Municipal Sonobe Junior High School

3rd grade, Touka Takaya

Do you know how to write 'rachi', the Japanese word for abduction, in Kanji, I was unable to write the characters without looking at the textbook, but if I had been interested in the abductions issue and had believed it to be something closely related to me, I could have written the characters properly. For example, my friends can write the names of the celebrities they like in Kanji. Moreover, you can write your own name in Kanji, even if those characters are complicated. Should we think more about the abductions issue so that it becomes something close to us.

I learned more about the abductions issue through the film Megumi which we saw during our social studies class. Before watching this movie, our teacher asked us how many of us knew about the abductions issue. Out of the class of 31 people, only two raised their hands. I did not raise my hand as I did not feel confident enough to explain the issue, but I did think that I knew about it. However, after watching the movie I was forced to reflect. The movie blew away my previous vague ideas about the abductions issue as simply referring to 'someone who was unlucky enough to be taken away somewhere'. I realized that it is an important issue involving the loss of human dignity and that it is a problem that affects each individual one of us who lives in this global society.

One scene in the movie had a particular impact on me. Some people did not even look at the pamphlets that Megumi's parents had handed out on the street, even treading on them as they walked by. This must have been extremely shocking to the people who were hoping from the bottom of their hearts and continually campaigning for Megumi's return to Japan. I am sure they felt not simply that the pamphlets had been trodden on but sad and downcast as if their hearts had been trodden on too.

Back when Megumi was abducted, perhaps people did not have as much interest in the abductions issue as they do today. This made me stop and think, and I asked my family about it. This led my mother and grandmother to mention the names of Megumi Yokota and Kaoru Hasuike, and then to tell me many things. Even my younger brother, who studies at elementary school and was close by, showed an interest in the topic saying "please explain so that I can understand what you are talking about". This made me feel that it was the first step towards resolving the abductions issue that we communicated and shared what we knew within our families so that we all could know about it. That is why I think that having an interest in and knowing about the abductions issue is important. If we talk to each other about the abductions issue and spread awareness of it, then we will start to think of as something that feels closely related to us. I thought that if we do this, then we will start to feel deeply in our hearts that the abductions cannot be forgiven, and without doubt this will lead us towards a solution.

The saddest thing for anyone is when no one takes an interest in them and they feel that they are alone. The best way to remove the sadness of those who were desperately handing out those pamphlets is of course a solution to the issue but at the very least we all feel that the abductions issue is not something that relates to someone else but instead continually feel that it is something that relates to us personally, knowing in our hearts it is something that we are involved with, and then offer support to those who are feeling sadness. Then, by actively taking part in petition drives and the blue ribbon campaign, I hope I can become someone who takes those feelings of sadness and personal involvement as a starting point to spread this issue around the world, making a step towards finding a solution to the issue.

High School Category 1st Prize
Now, 40 Years Later
Ehime Prefectural Matsuyama Higashi High School
1st grade, Nozomi Fujioka

A single aircraft comes into land at the airport. Down the aircraft steps comes Megumi Yokota wearing a blue ribbon. People in Japan around the world would surely be transfixed by this historic moment. If Megumi were to return to Japan, what would happen? Megumi retains traces of the face we have all seen so many times as a photograph. Mr. and Mrs. Yokota shed tears. It is the first time they have seen her since all those years ago. In 1977, Megumi was just 13 when she was abducted by North Korea. She suffered the sadness of having everything taken from her. Her parents were sad, not knowing whether their daughter was alive or dead. Perhaps the family were no longer able to enjoy their time together, feeling as if time had stopped. They suffered every time her birthday came around. They were unable to see her in a kimono at the coming-of-age ceremony. They must have been filled with sadness and longing seeing other parents embrace children as old as her. North Korea abducted many other people, but in 2002, the same year when I was born, five of the abductees returned to Japan. Although I was born after these matters took place, I taught myself about what happened through the animation Megumi and through the stage play "The Pledge to Megumi –Regain-". I was so shocked that it scared me to think about is happening to me, and I felt that I could not stand it.

Why did such cruel abductions occur? It is said that North Korea's main objective was to train spies that could pass and enter South Korea as Japanese. But do North Koreans, who forcibly involved innocent Japanese people, have no morals? I read an article that said that "as North Koreans witness cruel human rights violations from a young age, they are unable to judge right from wrong". In North Korea, their country comes first, and their society is based on "the strength of the fist rather than the strength of the law". I think we can say that it is not a question of the presence or absence of morals but rather that North Korea has a completely different notion of "common sense" and this produces the cruel human rights issues that are affecting Japanese people.

Why, after more than 40 years have passed, are we unable to solve this issue? Japan refuses to offer any economic assistance to North Korea unless the abductions issue is solved. North Korea, still angry over Japan's past occupation of the Korean Peninsula, claims that the abductions issue has already been solved. Should the abductions be solved first or should diplomatic relations be normalized first? Time is passing with neither country giving way. While we can think of this issue as a matter of human rights, it also has a political background. It is now being used as a tool for jockeying between nations. I wonder if there is any way to find an answer to this issue that has become so complex that even politicians have been unable for many years to solve it. If there is a solution, I think that it lies in the opinions of each of us as an individual in building a public consensus. Unlike 40 years ago, people around the world are now linked together via the Internet and social media. Information and communications in North Korea is also reportedly changing. Perhaps the ability of people around the world to broadcast information can help find a resolution to this issueproblem. The power of a strong public opinion can perhaps change how people think about certain issues. What I can do for this purpose is to collect information and make my opinions known. The abductions issue is a huge matter but I can try to learn just a little about it, talk about it with my friends, and give shape to my opinions as I did through this essay. I can then help tell future generations that we must avoid this ever happening again. Hoping for a solution, I will continue to build up the small steps.

High School Category 2st Prize
We Need to Change
Fukushima Prefectural Aizu Agriculture and Forestry High School
1st grade, Mayu Okajima

Why had I never tried to find out about this in detail before? This made me feel bad about myself.

When you hear about the abductions of Japanese people by North Korea, what do you think of? Most people will probably just literally think that North Korea abducted of Japanese people by North Korea. I was one such person who thought like this. I did not try to learn in detail about the issue, but simply thought a little about it. I thought that I would continue to think about the issue in this way.

However, after watching the DVD “Megumi”, I felt pained. I was shaking with anger. When she was abducted by North Korea, Megumi Yokota was a first-year junior high school student, just 13 years old. In the darkness, she must have been scared about what was happening to her and what was going to happen to her. She suffered the sadness of separation from her beloved mother and father. I think she must have been overwhelmed by fear, sadness and desperation. I was so afraid to imagine that something similar happening to me that I was unable to stop shaking. The evening I watched the DVD, I was feeling very anxious, and I asked my mother

“What would you do if I suddenly disappeared?”.

My mom looked a little surprised and then she said

“I’ve never thought about that, and I don’t want to think about it”.

She scowled as she said this. I think that parents do not even imagine the sudden disappearance of a precious daughter. However, Megumi’s parents did lose their precious daughter suddenly. The truth of why this happened is still unclear.

17 victims of abduction, including Megumi Yokota, and their families are today still fighting in the belief that they can be reunited. Is it enough for us simply to “know about” the abductions of Japanese people by North Korea? Is it enough for us simply to think about it? Is it OK if nothing changes?

I don’t think so. Having learned about the problem, we must change. There must be something we can do. I haven’t yet found what I can do personally. However, I think that is a major step forward simply to have this attitude. It is a big step forward not to forget the abductions issue and to actively get involved if there is something that we can do.

Recently, I have kept a blue ribbon attached to my bag. The blue ribbon represents the wishes of the abductees and their families as they look upon the blue sky and blue sea, which have no borders, hoping to be reunited again. I hope to use the blue ribbon to raise awareness of the abductions of Japanese people by North Korea, an issue that is still unresolved. Do not forget about this. The most important thing is to show an interest in the issue. Rather than simply thinking vaguely about the issue, we need to move on to the next step. I will continue to work together with everyone else until the abductions issue has been completely resolved.

High School Category 2st Prize

The Issue of Human Rights Violations by North Korea

Fukushima Prefectural Taira School for Special Needs Education

3rd grade, Kodai Tani

On 15 November, 1977, Megumi Yokota was abducted by North Korean spies on her way home from Yorii Junior High School in Niigata city, Niigata when she was 13 years old.

I felt surprised that a 13-year-old child, junior high school student, was suddenly abducted one day by North Korea. I also felt fear that the crime of abduction could suddenly happen on the way home from playing badminton, something that is familiar to us in our daily life. Abduction is an act that tears into pieces not only the life of the individual who is abducted but also the lives of their family members and various other people who are related to the abductee. It is not only a crime but also human rights violation. I felt angry.

The abductions issue begins with North Korea's intention of turning South Korea into a socialist country and unifying the Korean Peninsula. For that reason North Korea abducted Japanese people to use as instructors teaching Japanese customs and the Japanese language to North Korean spies who then pretended to be Japanese. Were there no other available methods other than abducting Japanese people? Why did they have to abduct Japanese people of various occupations simply to teach their spies the Japanese language? The abductions occurred entirely because of the selfish reasons of North Korea.

There is something called the Treaty on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The treaty today guarantees the dignity and rights of people with physical, intellectual and mental disabilities. I also have a disability, but in Japan and around the world the rights of disabled people are protected. In other words, our human rights are protected. I once researched the history of the human rights of people with disabilities like me. In Japan, even after the start of the Meiji Period, people with disabilities were considered useless to the nation and an unnecessary presence in society. After the Second World War, the introduction of legal measures began, and people with disabilities like me finally had their human rights protected, resulting in the society we have today where everyone can live their own lives in a manner appropriate for them.

A society that does not protect human rights is I think harsh, frightening and a struggle to live in.

I wonder what Megumi Yokota, who was abducted to North Korea, is feeling now? I think that today, in 2018, she is still feeling the same anger as people with disabilities like me felt through history when our human rights were continually ignored. Is she not discriminated against and suffering?

I have a younger sister. If she, like Megumi Yokota, were one day suddenly abducted by North Korea, I would even by myself, demand that North Korea return my sister. That is why we should not simply wish that Megumi Yokota "is in good health" or "can safely come home", but all of us throughout Japan need to demand that North Korea "return Megumi home right now".