

## Hope

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“Have a good day.”

Click, as your mother swings the door shut behind you. All goes well, until you’re walking home in the dark with your friends and waving them goodbye at the curb before heading towards the beach shore, 7 minutes away from your house. It sounds like a typical day and feels like one too – until you find yourself surrounded in darkness, locked up in the bottom of a ship.

Misfortune can swoop into one’s life and flip it upside down in an instant. Misfortune, such as being “in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Megumi Yokota was 13 years old – only one year younger than me – I had noted with a jolt – when she was kidnapped from the shores of Niigata in the 1970s on her way home from school. For over 40 years, she has been held captive by authoritarian North Korea.

Imagine being stuck in the cycle of grieving the undead. Her parents and twin brothers spent years dealing with the loss until they learned the truth; she was alive and just across the sea, yet there was nothing they could do.

The complexity of this problem is the lack of information known about North Korea due to their high security, dishonesty and language barrier. Mystery and suspicious behavior surround the country like a death shroud, suppressing our voices along with the possibilities of progress. The government has prolonged Megumi’s return to the point where her father, after years of fighting for her freedom, retired to his resting place, his dying wish uncompleted. But does that mean we must surrender to their power and deem her case “mission impossible”?

Hope is not lost, for it is indeed a thing with feathers. We must stay firm in our stance and not let the truth fade out with time. We cannot afford the government to further prolong Megumi’s return.

I, as an individual, have little power and influence. But I can use what little tools I have: writing, the ability to collect information or raise awareness among those unaware of this situation. I can take advantage of my language abilities and youth to communicate with the world using technology and social media, a source unavailable to influencers back in the 1970s. As a young person I would

be able to reach out towards a larger audience in the long term. As the tense relationships between North Korea and other countries are gaining more attention than ever, it is essential that we give Megumi's freedom one last push.

These efforts are the least we can do as responsible fellow Japanese citizens or, rather, as moral people with a conscious, knowledgeable mind, sincere emotions from the heart, and a burning passion for justice in our body.