

# Silent Victims

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Imagine a family member telling you they are going to the beach to watch the sunset, but they never return.

This happened to Shuichi Ichikawa and Rumiko Masumoto in 1978 in my hometown Kagoshima when they were abducted by North Korean agents. Not only were their lives changed, but also the lives of their families, friends and relatives. Since then, their families have been campaigning, collecting signatures and appealing to the government to get them home. However, sadly, in 2002, the North Korean government admitted and apologized for abducting Japanese citizens. They confirmed that eight of the victims including Shuichi and Rumiko had already passed away. Despite hearing this shocking news and the lack of North Korea's transparency, the families still believe their loved ones are alive and continue to fight for the truth or bring them home.

I actually had the chance to talk with Mr. Ichikawa, the brother of Shuichi Ichikawa. He has gone through innumerable tough times, but the situation hasn't really changed. When I talked to my classmates about the abduction issue, many of them weren't even aware of this problem and that's when I realized that this could be because of the younger generation, and our lack of understanding, cooperation and help. I feel even more strongly about this issue now because I am the younger generation. I feel compelled to stand up more for this cause and take action to make sure Mr. Ichikawa will suffer less. I am taking this opportunity to share with you two solutions.

First, my generation seems to be unaware about these abductions. Mr. Ichikawa told me that he is afraid of the abduction issues fading away. He also mentioned that, currently the youth are not interested in petitions and ignore flyers. Ignorance is a major concern and must be acknowledged as one of the biggest problems. So, we must continue to debate, discuss and deepen our understanding among the younger generations. I am sure that Mr. Ichikawa would be pleased if we are more willing to work on this issue.

Second, Mr. Ichikawa said that he desperately wants to hold a summit with North Korea to directly discuss and negotiate, aiming to change the situation and reach the truth. But to make this happen, all generations must cooperate with the signature campaign. If people have a strong will, diplomacy will spread, Mr. Ichikawa said.

Mr. Ichikawa's mother passed away without seeing her son and could never wear the kimono Shuichi gave to her. Mr. Ichikawa said when it is Shuichi's birthday the family can't talk about him and keeps silent. While their voices are silent, their house is filled with frog memorabilia from supporters around Japan. So, he always remains in their hearts as the meaning of frog in Japanese is to return.

The least we can do is sign a petition, keep negotiations open and finally keep engaging the youth to give the silent victims a voice. Please, let us help keep Mr. Ichikawa's will alive.