

The Families

Chapter 7

Terakoshi Family

“What we say and what we think are two different matters.”

“Pa, will you take me to fishing with you today?” Akio Terakoshi, then age 13, asked his father, Shoji, who was scheduled to go out fishing for rockfish that day. Akio already had been out fishing with his father twice since he entered junior high school.

The fishing port in Takahama, Shika-machi, Ishikawa Prefecture, is located in the middle of the west side of Noto Peninsula. Fishing was not only a boost to the family budget but an exciting adventure for a boy in a fishing town: beautiful blue-white sea sparkles glowing in the waves created by the net being pulled into the boat; the color of the dawn when the boat full of fish returns to the harbor. Last time he was onboard, Akio became severely seasick, but this time the sea was dead calm under the perfectly blue sky of an early summer day. Besides, the following day was a Sunday. Akio was as excited as if it were the day before a school excursion. However, when he went to the harbor, the boat was already gone. He did not remember why he was late; he might have stayed at school or played somewhere.

If I had been on board that day - Akio could not help thinking about the strange twists of fate.

The next morning, Akio ran to the fields when someone told him, “Go get your mom now!” The boat carrying his father Shoji, then age 36, uncle Sotoo, 24, and cousin Takeshi, 13 (the same age as Akio), did not return to the harbor, and was found drifting without them. His mother, Toshiko, was planting tobacco when Akio explained the emergency. She ran to the main Terakoshi house.

It was May 11, 1963. It was confirmed that the small fishing boat Kiyomaru had left Takahama harbor around 1 p.m., stopped by Fukuura harbor in Togi-cho, north of Takahama, and set its fishing net 400 meters off the coast around 4 p.m. The Kiyomaru was scheduled to return to Takahama harbor late that night. It did not, and was found drifting about 7 kilometers off Takahama harbor. Although the left side of the bow was damaged and green paint was stuck there, the engine was in good order and showed no trace of being overturned. Only the crew, Shoji, Sotoo and Takeshi, were gone. The net

remained off the coast of Fukuura, and Takeshi's school uniform was found nearby.

Later that day, Kataro, the father of Shoji and Sotoo, submitted a request for an investigation to the local Hakui Police Department. A wide search began, including all the townspeople, the Coast Guard, Police Department and the local fishermen's cooperative. All the fishermen suspended their work and searched the sea and the coastline. Every boat in the harbor was checked in the search for a hit-and-run suspect. A helicopter searched from the sky. Akio remembered well the uneasiness, though children went to school while the adults were searching intensively. After a week, the search ended without turning up any clues.

After the weeklong search, the main Terakoshi family held a funeral with the pictures of the missing three in lieu of their remains. However, Akio's family did not attend. His mother, Toshiko, refused, saying that without seeing his body she could not believe her husband was dead.

Suddenly without a husband, Toshiko was at a loss; how could she live and raise by herself their three sons, Akio, 13, Masao, 12 and Mitsuo, 10? She could not easily admit to herself that her husband was dead. However, she had no clue how to find him. She knew she had to accept the fact. She had to raise the children and survive anyway.

It was a year prior to the Tokyo Olympic Games. The Japanese economy had just begun growing rapidly, and life in a fishing port on Noto Peninsula was anything but rich. Only a few households had tatami-mats in those days. Akio's family lived on woven straw spread on the floor. They piled tatami-mats in the corner of their house and spread them only for occasional celebrations or funerals. The front door was made not with glass, but with thick boards. When lying on the floor and looking up, they could see sunrays through the cracks in the roof. If it snowed, the inside of the house was covered with snow. When a typhoon or heavy snow hit the area, Akio's family evacuated to a neighbor's house. Since they did not have a TV set, when they wanted to watch their favorite programs, they visited neighbors who had a TV set.

Children's shoes were either "short shoes" made with thin black rubber or rubber sandals. Those shoes were easily torn if they stepped on slightly pointed pebbles and stones. Their feet got very cold in the winter. Their school uniforms shined since they blew their noses on their sleeves. There were no

dry cleaning or spare uniforms in those days. When the brothers got hungry and could not find anything to eat at home, they stole persimmon fruit grown in the neighborhood. Although poor, they enjoyed playing, competing to see who was best slapping cardboard and throwing nails and bricks. They often played hide and seek, and later when they were older, they played softball. They did not have kid-size bicycles, so they rode bikes built for grownups. If they sat on the saddle, their legs could not reach the pedals, and they had to bike by standing on the pedals. They swam in the summer. They did not have swimming trunks, so they substituted with a triangular cloth usually used to cover the ears when they had mumps.

Toshiko, without a husband, worked at various places such as a fabric factory, a pachinko parlor and a tofu store. The sons helped their mother well. The family did not have its own rice field, so they worked for the main Terakoshi family. They helped planting rice in spring, and reaping it and putting it on racks to dry in the fall. They worked hard until dark. The front of a trailer would rise when the trailer was loaded heavily with rice straw. It was the kids' role to push forward or downward on the trailer.

The brothers also worked for the neighbors, helping to plant sweet potatoes or tobacco. It was the girls' duty to dry pine needles for fuel. Boys caught clams in the sea with a basket tied to a pole. They also carried a big basket on their back and collected mushrooms in the mountains. There were big crabs in the river. The boys caught them and cooked them in clay pots. Children in those days didn't have much time to study. After school, they either played or helped their parents. Only a few went to high school.

After finishing junior high school, Akio took an apprenticeship at a tofu store in Osaka. The wages were 1,000 to 2,000 yen a month. He sent his savings once every few months to his mother. Bowling balls were becoming popular, but he never went bowling or visited anywhere in Osaka. When the tofu store closed and became a public bathhouse, he quit his job and returned home. He changed jobs many times--from a car repair shop to a body shop to a knitting factory.

None of Akio's brothers went to high school. His younger brother, Masao, went to Tokyo shortly after he graduated from junior high school. He worked at house-construction sites and pasted lath under mortar for house sidings. He earned about 7,000 yen a month. He spent only a fraction of his wages and sent the rest home.

His youngest brother, Mitsuo, also worked after finishing junior high school, but he never opened the wage envelope himself. He always handed it to his mother. Even with the brothers' earnings, the family lived a hard life. Toshiko could not even pay her pension premiums. After Shoji disappeared, the family lived on welfare for a long time.

It was January 22, 1987, 24 years after the disappearance of the three, when "the letter" arrived at the home of Shoji and Sotoo's sister, Toyoko Kurihara.

"Dear Sister Toyoko:

It's almost the end of the year again. You must be surprised to receive a letter from the brother who hasn't contacted you at all for 25 long years. Sis, I cannot express myself well trying to write how lonely I have been for 25 years, and how much I want to see my parents. Shoji, Sotoo and Takeshi suddenly wound up living in North Korea in May 1963. Please don't worry, since I married here, have two children and I am happy with my family. I believe that you, our parents and other brothers and sisters are all well. I wrote you to make sure I remember the right address. Please write me back as soon as you get this. I will be anxiously waiting for your letter." (Editor's memo: the rest omitted. Punctuation and etc. were added to the original.)

His address in North Korea and his name, Sotoo Terakoshi, as well as his Korean name, "Kim Chul-ho", were written on plain paper with a ballpoint pen.

Is this a letter from Sotoo, who didn't return from fishing 24 years ago? Is he still alive, even though we held a funeral then? What does it mean that he is in North Korea? Did he actually write this letter? Nobody can confirm his handwriting after 24 years.

It was not clear from the Sotoo's letter whether Shoji and Takeshi were also alive. Munetoshi Kurihara, Toyoko's husband, wrote back to ask Sotoo the whereabouts of Shoji and Takeshi. To verify the person who wrote the letter, he added a few questions such as "What were near the house?" "Where was the outhouse located?" "Where was the shrine?"

Then, another letter addressed to Toyoko came from Sotoo.

"As for brother Shoji, he died March 30, 1968, due to chronic disease.

I'm sorry to give the sad news to Akio, Masao and Mitsuo and aunt (wrong Chinese characters were used for Akio and Masao; editor). I will write them later, but please give them my condolences. As for Takeshi, he lives with his wife, two sons and a daughter. Recently on February 5th, he received a letter from his mother and was delighted." (Editor's memo: the rest omitted)

The family was told that Shoji had died of chronic heart disease five years after his disappearance. Akio and his family hoped that father Shoji might be still alive when Sotoo's first letter arrived. They were devastated to learn that he was dead. However, as well as Sotoo who sent the letters, Takeshi was alive in North Korea, married with three children.

Are Sotoo and Takeshi really in North Korea?

North Korea: in those days, the name conveyed only "terrors" to Akio and others. They could not put much reliance on those letters from such a "terrifying" country. The family checked the fingerprints when they received the first letter, trying to match them with old fingerprints left on Sotoo's toy. However, they could not confirm they were the same person's. The family made a full copy of the letters they responded to, to make sure they could handle any situation later on.

On March 17th, two months after the first letter arrived, an article appeared in both Tokyo and Chunichi newspapers that the three "were alive." When the media made headlines such as "Letters from North Korea after 24 Years!" the family told reporters that they burned the letters.

The family began corresponding with Sotoo and Takeshi, while trying to keep it secret from the world. Soon, letters from Sotoo began showing mostly requests for money and necessities.

The letter Sotoo and Takeshi wrote together to Takeshi's mother, Tomoe Terakoshi, on February 7, 1987, read, "Please be relieved since we live happily without any inconvenience," but continued.

"We have one request. Although our life is quite fulfilled, there are inconveniences living in a foreign country. If my sister and brothers could send about 100,000 yen a year to me and Takeshi, we would be able to live much happier lives (Editor's memo: the rest omitted)."

However, even if the family members in Japan wanted to send money, they were not living in affluence, either. How to wire money to North Korea? Nobody knew wiring procedures. Besides, if they wired money, would it surely reach Sotoo and Takeshi?

The Kurihara family figured out how to conceal money by putting bills in a pickled plum jar. When going through customs, a pickle jar would not be examined. They also sewed bills in the pants seams and the back of neckties. Then, they would draw pictures and give instructions where to mend the fabric. To let Sotoo and Takeshi know that a 1,000-yen bill was hidden, they mentioned Mr. Ito (portrait of the bill). In response, letters from North Korea noted that the pickled plum was delicious, and that they were glad to see the picture of Mr. Ito, all of which indicated that they surely received the money.

How could the family get Sotoo and Takeshi back from “frightening” North Korea? Was there any possible way? They had no idea at all. There was nothing a poor family in a small fishing town could do.

Why on earth did Shoji, Sotoo and Takeshi disappear abruptly after leaving the harbor for fishing? Why did they end up in North Korea? Why did they have to live without contacting their family in Japan for 24 long years? Nobody heard the term “abduction” in those days.

While Sotoo and Takeshi kept living in North Korea, only Takeshi’s mother, Tomoe, frantically made every possible effort to visit them without knowing where to target. In August of 1987, she went to North Korea with a delegation of then-Socialist Party and saw Sotoo and Takeshi for the first time in 24 years.

Nobody in the Terakoshi family in Shika-cho wanted to go. “It’s frightening. You cannot come back again if you visit such a country,” they said. Even if one family member volunteered to go, other family members opposed it. Eventually, Tazaemon, Takeshi’s father and Shoji and Sotoo’s brother, decided to visit North Korea and represent the whole Terakoshi family. The family got 200,000 yen ready for Sotoo, and Tomoe managed 200,000 yen for Takeshi. In the suitcases, they put as many necessities as possible - clothes, watches, umbrellas, etc.

Only after Tomoe and Tazaemon returned from North Korea did the Terakoshi family learn why and how Shoji, Sotoo and Takeshi disappeared that day and wound up living in North Korea. Politician Yuzuru Shimzaki, the leader of the then-Socialist Party delegation summarized the details of their

disappearance in a booklet titled, "Seeing Them Again."

"After cruising for about three hours, the engine of the Kiyomaru conked out and the boat stopped. They tried to fix it for an hour, but in vain. It was pitch dark at sea. Shoji told Sotou and Takeshi to take a nap and began fixing the boat alone. Sotou and Takeshi went down to the cabin and slept. Nobody knew how much time had passed when they heard a big thump and the boat rolled heavily. Sotou and Takeshi, though fast asleep, jumped up immediately, rushed outside and saw a boat of about 100 tons, which most likely collided with their boat, running away. They could not see if it was a freighter or a fishing boat."

"When he looked up, Sotou saw Shoji had been thrown into the sea. He was sickly and not strong. Especially with his clothes on, it was tough to swim. Sotou jumped into the sea to rescue him. He was in a hurry, so he forgot to take his clothes off. The clothes were heavy and hindered him from swimming. Sensing the danger, Sotou shouted to Takeshi, "Throw me a tub and a board!" The bow was cracked from the collision, water was flooding in through the crack and the boat listed to one side. Takeshi thought the boat was sinking, so he jumped into the sea as well and the three were drifting... (Partly omitted)... They were losing consciousness..."

"They found themselves in the beds of a hospital when they came to... (Partly omitted) ... They learned that it was a hospital in Chungjin on the coast of a northern section of North Korea, 800 kilometers from Fukuura Harbor in Togi-cho. They had been rescued while drifting at sea by fishermen who belonged to the fishermen's cooperative in Chungjin."

The booklet "Seeing Them Again" gave this account of how the trio ended up living in North Korea.

" - The three pretended they were Korean Japanese and obtained citizenship four months after arriving in North Korea. Their Korean names were Kim Chul-ho for Sotou and Kim Young Ho for Takeshi. Two years later, in May 1965, Sotou and Takeshi moved to Kusung, four hours from Pyongyang by express train. Sotou worked as a lathe operator and Takeshi as a welder at a construction machine tool factory. Sotou married in 1965 and Takeshi in 1971.

Shoji died on March 30, 1968, five years after their arrival in North

Korea. It was also Shouji's 41st birthday. To celebrate his birthday, the three drank and went to sleep. When Sotoo and Takeshi woke up the next morning, they found Shoji had fallen out of bed and was dead.

Akio and other family members had a hard time believing those entries in the booklet. According to the booklet, the engine was out of order and they were trying to fix it. However, when the search party found the boat, the engine was not out of order. While the boat was drifting the next morning, the booklet described it as flooded. When Shoji was thrown out from the collision shock, it should have been easy to lift him up if the two tried to reach him from the edge of the boat. Even if the boat was drifting, it was only 400 meters off the coast. The three, all of whom were good swimmers, could have swum back easily to the shore. Besides, the sea was dead calm that night. Why should they have been rescued and taken to Chungjin in North Korea, 800 kilometers from their hometown?

Later, Takeshi's note, titled "Sea of Humanity," was published in North Korea. It described all the details from the wreck to the rescue. The description that they were rescued when drifting at sea is the same as what Sotoo wrote in his letter.

Since Sotoo reportedly died of lung cancer at age 55 in 1994, Takeshi is the only person alive who knows exactly what happened that night.

Later, former North Korean operative An Myoung-jin testified as follows:

"When a spy boat was approaching the Japanese seashore, a small fishing boat persistently followed it. Since the operatives feared their identity would be revealed, they abducted the crewmembers and sank the boat. It was near Noto." Further, he wrote, "When we were trying to abduct them, one of the crew made a strong resistance, so they shot him to death and sank the body with a weight to keep it from floating to the surface. The crew included a boy who cried furiously after being abducted. They taped his mouth, pushed him into the engine room and brought him to Chungjin."

Former operative An Myoung-jin heard the above story from an operative who abducted the three Terakoshis. When Hitoshi Takase of Japan Wave News interviewed An Myoung-jin regarding the Megumi Yokota incident, he heard about Terakoshi incident and later made it public. Although there is a discrepancy regarding the fate of the boat, the detail exactly fit the story of the three aboard the Kiyomaru who disappeared at sea

near Noto. If so, in “Seeing Them Again,” written by a Diet member Shimazaki, Shoji was described as having lived in North Korea for five years, but was he actually killed on the boat that night? Poor Takeshi, was he crying and taped and pushed inside a boat?

Prime Minister Koizumi visited North Korea on September 17, 2002. It was also a shocking event for Akio, Masao and Mitsuo, the sons of Shoji Terakoshi. Kim Jong-il admitted to the abduction of Japanese citizens and apologized.

The brothers wondered. “Does it mean that father Shoji and uncle Sotoo, who did not return from fishing on May 11, 1963, were also abducted? It might have been true that our father was shot to death and thrown overboard.”

Thirty-nine years. Anger may have dwelled in them if it were only five years. However, 39 years were too long for the brothers to sustain any emotions.

The letter from uncle Sotoo was delivered 24 years after their disappearance. “Dad is alive!” However, the brothers’ expectations from the first letter were crushed by the next letter. It told them that their father was dead and would never come back no matter how much the family complained. Besides, they were worried about the security of Sotoo and Takeshi who were still alive there. They needed to keep silent. There was no other course for them to take. That was the tacit understanding among family members. They needed to live anyway. After the loss of their father, the young sons had to take over the responsibilities of family life.

They felt guilty, since they had done nothing special while Tomoe worked frantically to get her son Takeshi back. They also considered Tomoe’s feelings; she kept saying that, as Takeshi claimed, he had not been abducted.

However, now that North Korea acknowledged the abductions, the brothers could no longer remain silent. They decided they had to raise voices of protest when they saw Takeshi returning home on October 14, 2002, as a member of a North Korean delegation visiting Japan.

Takeshi who returned home for the first time after 39 years was no longer the Takeshi they had played with in their childhood days. He simply looked like Kim Young-ho, an executive member of the North Korean Workers’ Party. Akio found a different feature of Takeshi when he made a speech in Korean at the end of the welcome party.

“I owe thanks to our great General that I could come home.” They were

clearly the words of Kim Young-ho, vice-chairman of Pyongyang Committee of the North Korean Workers' Party, not Takeshi Terakoshi.

After Takeshi had spoken in Korean, a member of the Chosen Soren interpreted his remarks. As Akio watched Takeshi during the interpretation, he was surprised by Takeshi's expression. Takeshi's face was wry, and he looked sad and lonely.

Akio was sure Takeshi's remarks differed from what was in his heart. Akio believed Takeshi was not completely brainwashed. Did his face reveal sadness at having to leave home again? His heart must be still his own. Did he want to say he wished to stay in Japan?

Takeshi, taken to North Korea at age 13, would not have received enough education since he was busy surviving. He must have learned from experience, not from education, how to suppress his opinions in order to survive.

Once Takeshi's mother, Tomoe, began visiting North Korea with money and necessities, his status rose rapidly. Akio worried that with his status, Takeshi could not say what he really thought. He must have to obey what North Korean authorities intended him to do. Akio was sorry for Takeshi, his childhood playmate. "We did nothing for Takeshi. Sotoo has died now. Can't we rescue Takeshi?" Akio wondered.

However, Takeshi's mother, Tomoe, had a different opinion of Takeshi's facial expressions. While Akio thought he looked sad, Tomoe believed he was proud. Tomoe said Takeshi was not such a sissy.

On October 11, 2002, Akio and Mitsuo went to Tokyo and appeared live on "News Station" at TV Asahi. They appealed to viewers to support their request to the government for an investigation into the disappearance of Shoji, Sotoo and Takeshi 39 years earlier. The next day they visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and requested an investigation. They avoided using the word "abduction," since they were afraid of a negative effect on Takeshi and Tomoe. However, the Abductee Rescue Association and the Abductee Family Association met with them in Tokyo and assured them that it was clearly a case of abduction.

Akio, Masao and Mitsuo decided to join the Abductee Family Association. "We have been waiting for you to join us," said Toru Hasuike, secretary-general of the Abductee Family Association.

Their mother, Toshiko, had died in February that year. When the

Terakoshi family held a funeral for the missing trio 39 years earlier, Toshiko refused to attend it, saying she would not believe her husband was dead unless she saw his remains.

When Tomoe Terakoshi visited North Korea with her daughter Masae in October 2002, she brought back a picture of Shoji's tomb. The photo, taken in suburban Kusung, looked strangely new, as if it had been set up in a hurry recently. If what An Myoung-jin testified before was true, Shoji "was killed that night since he resisted hard, and was dumped into the sea with lead tied to his body." It was a murder, then. Mitsuo believed that it must be a bogus tomb to fabricate evidence that Shoji lived in North Korea. Akio was suspicious of what actually happened to his father. He could not fully believe An Myoung-jin's testimony that his father had been killed and thrown overboard that night, or the tomb, which was said to be his father's. If his father died in North Korea, Akio would like to have his remains returned home and bury them together with his mother Toshiko's remains. He tried to request an investigation of the remains when the government's second investigative team visited North Korea. However, the team was never sent to North Korea because North Korea stiffened its attitude.

Akio and his brothers believe there is no question that Shoji, Sotoo and Takeshi were abducted. They say Takeshi's story that they were rescued while drifting at sea is false. Mitsuo does not believe Takeshi at all.

The Kiyomaru was only a year old at that time. For fishermen, their boats are the basis on their lives. If they lose their boats, their lives will be jeopardized. The three must have tried to catch the other boat when it collided with the Kiyomaru and damaged it. They ended up being caught and taken to North Korea, since they pursued the other boat too hard. That is Akio's guess. Whether or not Shoji was thrown overboard was unknown. Either way, Akio thought, we cannot believe what North Korea says.

Akio and his brothers finally decided to appeal to the world the disappearance of Shoji, Sotoo and Takeshi, since they want to know what truly happened to their father, Shoji, and uncle, Sotoo, even though for a long time, they did not take any action. They now want to hold an appropriate memorial service so that the souls of the two can rest. They also want to report father's true fate to their deceased mother, Toshiko, who closed her life after many hardships earlier in the year. When Takeshi returned home for the first time in

39 years, they do not know how, but they want somehow to “rescue” Takeshi, who looked sad at the welcoming party.

In January 2003, three brothers--Akio, Masao and Mitsuo--attended a meeting of the Abductee Family Association for the first time and requested that abduction of Shoji and Sotoo Terakoshi be acknowledged and their true fate be investigated. On March 9th, the Association of the People of Ishikawa Prefecture for the Rescue of Japanese Abducted by North Korea” (the Ishikawa Abductee Rescue Association) was established. On March 12th, they went to Tokyo with the Abductee Family Association and participated in a luncheon meeting with Kyoko Nakayama, a Councilor for the Cabinet Secretariat. The following day they met with Yoriko Kawaguchi, the Minister of the Foreign Affairs, and requested government acknowledgement that Shoji, Sotoo and Takeshi had been abducted. On May 9th, they went to Tokyo again to meet with Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda and Vice Chief Abe and requested an acknowledgement.

On May 12th, 40 years after the incident, a meeting was held at Fukuura harbor where the three had stopped before disappearing. Akio made an appeal, saying, “To know the truth of the incident is our right. Forty years have passed and they were getting old. We would like to solve the issue while they are still alive.” They decided at the meeting to designate May 12th as Terakoshi Incident Day and hold an annual event.

Akio and his brothers believe that abduction is ongoing terrorism.

Five abductees returned home permanently, and the possible number of abductees was indicated to exceed 100. However, the National Police Agency has not officially acknowledged that all were abducted. Father Shoji, uncle Sotoo and cousin Takeshi were yet to be acknowledged as abduction victims and their disappearance is still an unsolved mystery.

To Takeshi’s disappearance acknowledged as an abduction, his mother, Tomoe, only has to appeal to the public and respond to questioning by the National Police Agency. However, Tomoe stubbornly refuses to join the Abductee Family Association. Why does she refuse to request that the abduction issue be acknowledged and the truth be investigated? Akio believes that is because Tomoe, together with Takeshi, is now used as propaganda by North Korea. Tomoe keeps her mouth shut for her son, even though she knows she is taken advantage of. Akio and his brothers understand well Tomoe’s feelings as a mother.

- Parents have to compromise for their kids

The following is based on the dictation of Takeshi Terakoshi's mother, Tomoe.

Tomoe is not a member of the Abductee Family Association. She does not think that her son Takeshi, together with his uncles Shoji and Sotoo, was abducted by North Korea while fishing on a small fishing boat Kiyomaru on May 12, 1963. Thus, it may not be appropriate to include Tomoe in this book published by the Abductee Family Association. However, we ultimately decided to ask Tomoe to tell her story.

Tomoe was once in a close relationship with the Abductee Family Association. Tomoe and Takeshi deny publicly, but they think deep in their minds, that Takeshi is one of the victims of abduction by North Korea. Tomoe says, "What people say and what they think are two different matters." She cannot say everything she thinks. If so, we should say Tomoe is also a victim.

Takeshi is already 53 years old. Last time I visited him, he has become a grandfather, "haraboji" in Korean. A 13-year-old Japanese boy now is a grandfather, deeply rooted in North Korea. He cannot leave North Korea and come back home. When I saw him in Japan, I knew I had lost the struggle to get him back; I knew Takeshi had won.

I was waiting for him in the arrival lobby at Narita Airport on October 3, 2002. My son Takeshi, who did not return from the fishing trip in the sea near his hometown at age 13, a second year student in junior high school, was about to come back from North Korea after 39 years.

How much had I been waiting for that moment! I was over age 70. At 1:44 p.m., an Air China flight from Peking landed at Narita Airport 11 minutes ahead of schedule.

Not yet? Not yet? I was waiting for Takeshi to clear customs. The media called out, "Tomoe-san!" trying to get my attention. Those smart guys with college degrees trying to shoot an old woman like me with expensive TV cameras that probably cost 10 million yen each. "Idiot! Who would turn to your cameras! Who would speak to your microphones! Tomoe, brace

yourself,” I encouraged myself, but I was shaking from tension. Finally, Takeshi appeared at the gate and step by step he approached me. I brushed my hair with my hand several times and tried to calm down. Now Takeshi was just in front of me. I looked him in the eye, and shook hands with him in the flood of klieg lights. We did not hug that day.

Takeshi went to a parking lot beside the airport terminal to avoid the crowd and read a short comment in Korean. “I came to Japan through the consideration of respectful General Secretary Kim.” “I hope Japan and North Korea will tie close relationships as neighboring countries.”

Those were the comments he made as Kim Young-ho, vice-chairman of the Pyongyang Committee of the North Korean Workers’ Party. Four days after Prime Minister Koizumi held a summit meeting with General Secretary Kim Jong-il on September 17th, I met with the former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, from the local constituency, and was informed that Takeshi’s temporary return had been made official. However, his return was not “a homecoming” but “a visit to Japan.”

On his arrival day, Takeshi’s sister and aunts, and the Chosen Soren people welcomed Takeshi at Narita Airport, but nobody from the Japanese government was in sight. The airport lobby was crowded with more than 100 media people.

“Is this a homecoming after 39 years? Dreary. Sad.” I could not enjoy the moment. We rode in a car provided by the Soren from Narita to downtown Tokyo.

I am not a Korean, nor a resident Korean. However, I could do nothing but rely on assistance from Chosen Soren.

The following day, October 4th, Takeshi went home to Ishikawa, visited the cemetery, and met with friends and relatives. In the afternoon of October 12th, he completed his 10-day visit to Japan and flew back to North Korea on Air China. It was 3 days after Takeshi’s departure to North Korea that 5 abductees, Kaoru Hasuike, Yukiko Okudo, Yasushi Chimura, Fukie Hamamoto and Hitomi Soga, returned home on a government-chartered airplane after 24 years and received a warm welcome by a big crowd at Haneda Airport. Takeshi had flown on Air China, the five abductees on a government-chartered special flight. I was bitterly disappointed at the difference.

I was scheduled to go to North Korea on June 12, 2003. A travel agency

affiliated with Chosen Soren planned my itinerary as the Soren designated. It was supposed to be my 18th visit.

My visit this time had a certain purpose--to bring back Shoji's remains to have his DNA checked. According to former secret agent An Myoung-jin, Shoji, Sotoo and Takeshi were abducted by a North Korean spy ship and Shoji was shot to death on the ship because he put up strong resistance. However, Takeshi denied that testimony. Takeshi said Shoji had been his "father" for five years before he died in North Korea.

Upon returning from my 17th visit in March 2003, I had brought back as "evidence" a folded paper crane Takeshi learned how to make from Shoji. However, Shoji's sons said, "We don't believe it," when they saw the crane. When I brought back a picture of Shoji's tomb, they didn't believe it, either. "You don't believe any evidence? Well, then, I will bring back his remains for you. You can have his DNA examined as you please." I believe Takeshi rather than Akio and his brothers.

However, my 18th visit to North Korea was canceled. On June 9th, three days prior to my departure, the scheduled entry of the North Korean vessel Mangyongbong into the port of Niigata caused a huge uproar. Accordingly its entry was delayed.

My decision had nothing to do with the Mangyungbong, I have insisted many times. However, it was clear that the timing was bad. I canceled the visit since Shoji's son Mitsuo had said, "I don't want to see dad's remains. I want the government to examine his remains." Why should I bring back the remains while his sons don't want them? It was not a North Korean issue, but a Terakoshi family issue. I was angry at my nephews, Akio, Masao and Mitsuo. I could not forgive them appearing live on "News Station" while Takeshi was visiting Japan and suddenly announcing they had joined the Abductee Family Association. What did they do when I was frantically trying to find Takeshi? The biggest victim is Takeshi. Why does everyone interfere with whatever I do for Takeshi? I don't care if people criticize me as blind with love for my child. That's a mother's love.

At some point before Takeshi's 2002 visit to Japan, I was on the deck of the Mangyongbong on the way to Niigata from North Korea. I could not stop my tears when the ship's whistle sounded and left the pier. There were about 60 Korean Japanese onboard who lived in the Kyoto area. I talked to a late

middle-aged man who was staring at the pier. “Excuse me, sir, who came to see you off?” “You see that old woman with gray hair? It’s my mother. She is 82.” I saw an old woman shout something, but her voice no longer reached the ship. When the ship’s whistle sounded again, the woman gradually settled down on the pier.

“Sir, whoever you are or wherever you were born, it is hard for parents and children to be separated,” I said. “Coming to see them is a pleasure, but leaving them is horrible. It’s like your body is ripped apart.”

It has been 15 years since I received a letter from my son, Takeshi, whom I had given up as being dead for 24 years. I have already visited my son in North Korea several times, but now I am torn with sorrow since I have to leave him there. I can visit Takeshi, but he can never visit me in Japan. My visits have never been reciprocated.

Takeshi said, “It’s hard to see you leave.” He said it was hard to see his old mother, over age 70, come all the way to North Korea carrying heavy stuff for him. Takeshi, now over 50, realizes that the older he becomes, the more he misses home. Why can’t he visit Japan? Why is it always me who visits North Korea? I will do anything to have him visit Japan. “Takeshi, mother will make sure you can put your feet on the hometown soil so that you can visit your grandma’s cemetery. I will do my best. I will make sure you can visit Japan.” I promised Takeshi.

I slept in the same room with Takeshi that night.

“Under what star of fate were you born? You’ve been having hard time, haven’t you?” While murmuring, I rubbed Takeshi’s sturdy body.

I rubbed his chest, back, buttocks, and arms. “You have such strong arms, still you need to depend on my thin arms.” Takeshi was silent and allowed me to rub his body. I was glad to share time with my son and kept rubbing him. “People would laugh at me if they saw me. We were like newlyweds.” I kept rubbing Takeshi’s body until three o’clock in the morning; rubbed his head, chest, buttocks, arms... “You’ve had a hard time, haven’t you, poor boy.” I kept saying it as if caressing a baby, singing a lullaby.

Almost 40 years ago, Takeshi was only 13 when he went out fishing and never returned.

At noon on a Saturday, when Takeshi, in his 8th grade, came home from school, I, then age 33, urged him on. “Hurry up, eat your lunch and go to the

harbor, Hurry!” At the harbor, his uncles Shoji and Sotoo were preparing to go out fishing for rockfish and were waiting for Takeshi. Takeshi finished a quick lunch of rice, miso-soup and croquettes, put on my short jacket over his jeans and rubber boots, and ran to the harbor carrying a kettle of water.

I still regret that I urged Takeshi to get aboard that day. That was the last time I saw my 13-year-old son.

Late. Very late. I was getting impatient. It was after eight o'clock the following morning and the Kiyomaru, which Takeshi and his uncles were on, had not returned yet. Usually, they came back around seven at the latest. “Are they stopping somewhere?”

I need to go to the fields soon; otherwise my mother-in-law will be upset. Potatoes should be ready now for pickup. Besides, I need to sort out the catches of the day and feed the hungry guys when they are back.”

“I can't be waiting like this any longer.” When I stepped out of the front door to go to the fields, I saw blood dripping from my nose. I never experienced nosebleed. “Strange. Is this a bad omen?”

While I was lying on the front step holding my nose with a towel, a motorbike stopped in front of the house. “Sis, have your guys returned yet?” It was a guy from the fishermen's cooperative who often visited our house. “Not yet. Do you need fish soon?” “No, but I heard that the boat was drifting without anybody on board.”

“What? What do you mean?”

It was Mother's Day. My husband's sister Toyoko and her child walked by the house on their way to a Mother's Day excursion held by the kindergarten. When I told her that the three had not returned from fishing yet, Toyoko ran to the main Terakoshi house to tell the father-in-law. I ran to the harbor.

At the harbor, emergency sirens were on. A fire engine drove by with its siren on. I felt uneasy. “Have you seen Takeshi?” I asked everybody I saw there, but nobody had seen him. I went to the seashore to try to find Takeshi. “Takeshi is a good swimmer. He may have reached the shore by now.” However, I could not find him. Finally, I was beat and sat down on the sand. My shoes were torn while I searched for over an hour and I threw them away. I got a ride on a horse-drawn cart and went home. I found many people gathered at my house talking about the empty boat.

“They may have gotten hit by a Fukuura trawler. They may have gotten

on the trawler, fishing together somewhere.” “Don’t be so anxious. They’ll be back by tomorrow night. Eat something.” How could I eat? Where’s Takeshi? Tears welled up. I saw the youngest brother of the Terakoshi family in the corner of the house where tatami-mats were piled up. “Strange. People may be telling me a lie that they must be coming back tomorrow.” I became more and more uneasy.

No clue was found after searching for a week by all the authorities and townspeople, and the search was terminated. Even the family members began suggesting a funeral. “What’s the good for continuing to search? In the meantime, the rice fields are getting dry and young rice plants are growing too big to plant. We cannot bother the townspeople any further. We should hold a funeral.”

On May 23rd, the family held a funeral for the missing three without their bodies, but only with their pictures. The funeral was a grand one which all the people in town attended.

Black ribbons were on a youthful-looking picture of Takeshi with his close-cropped hair. I could not stop crying while listening to the Buddhist priest recite a sutra. “Takeshi, why did you die?” I wailed, ignoring others.

I could not do anything after the funeral and stayed in bed over a week. My father-in-law, Kataro, scolded me. “You lost only one child. I lost two.” Kataro and his wife, Kokin, had the same sorrow of losing children. They lost two, Shoji and Sotoo, at once. However, I said to myself, “You have eleven children. Even if you lost two, you still have nine. I have only two children and I lost one of them. Everybody cares about his own child the most. That’s a parent’s love.” Of course, I could not say it aloud.

I was born in 1930 in a farming family in Mikohara, between Ishikawa and Toyama prefectures. Mikohara is 16 km from Takahama, where the Terakoshi family resides. After my father died of illness when I was in 6th grade, I had to quit school to support the family. I spent poor girlhood days and I was always busy taking care of my younger siblings or working in rice fields. In 1948, a sudden matchmaking was arranged and I joined the Terakoshi family at only 18 years old. My husband Tazaemon was 28 years old, 10 years senior to me.

The Terakoshi family was a big family with parents and ten children in addition to the oldest son, Tazaemon.

Of the two who didn't return from fishing, Shoji was the second son and Sotoo was the fourth. The Terakoshis supported their family by fishing and farming. As the wife of the oldest son, I could never feel relaxed. I fed the guys who went out fishing early in the morning and came home late at night, worked in rice fields and vegetable patches, took care of my husband's younger siblings, and even worked at a nearby fabric factory.

Takeshi was born the year after we married, September 21, 1949. Three years later, daughter Masae was born. On top of my already busy schedule, I raised my own two children.

One day I was spraying pesticide in rice fields. It was tough for a woman to carry heavy equipment and spray pesticide. I was not feeling well that day, but I could not ask my in-laws if I could take a day off from work. Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain in my abdomen and squatted there. I was carried to a local hospital but they could not treat me there and transferred me to a hospital in Kanazawa city, where I was narrowly spared by a blood transfusion. I did not feel well even after being discharged from the hospital. The doctor said my liver was not functioning well. Although I didn't have to go to a hospital, I was always feeling tired after that; I easily caught cold and had to stay in bed. I had to put my children in my mother's care in Mikohara.

When I met Takeshi 24 years after his disappearance, I asked him if he had missed me. I was quite shocked to hear him say, "I missed Grandma in Mikohara." When he was little, we were so poor that I could not buy him what he wanted. Besides, I forced him to work for the family even when he was a little boy, since I wanted to show I was dedicated to the family as the wife of the oldest son. I was a young immature mother of 19 years old when I gave birth to Takeshi. My children must have felt lonely when I was often ill in bed. I was separated from my 13-year old son before I had a chance to take good care of him. I cannot be more regretful that I had not shown him more love.

It was impossible to give him up even after the funeral was over. I was criticized by my in-laws, still I could not concentrate on anything, and wandered up and down the shoreline looking for Takeshi. "Is there any clue? By some chance, Takeshi may come back home alive." I put flowers and offerings and burnt incense on the rocks of the sound where the Kiyomaru's fishing net was found. The offerings were candies and Takeshi's favorite jerry-filled buns, which the missing three were supposed to eat as overnight

snacks.

I also had a fortune-teller read Takeshi's fate. I asked, "Is he dead?" The fortune-teller said, "Yes, he is dead, sunk in the sea wrapped in a fishing net. Thus, his body cannot float up. His rubber boots and pants are getting rotten." Every fortune-teller I visited said Takeshi was dead.

When I visited Isurugi Shrine in Toyama, I was dead scared when the fortune-teller said, "You have a daughter, don't you?"

The water gods will come to take her from you as well." Takeshi has a sister, Masae, who was in the 5th grade, three years junior to Takeshi. "Will she be also taken away from me?" I shrieked, "Help me, help me." The fortune-teller responded, "I will help you if you pay a daily visit to Isurugi." I said, "Yes, yes, I will."

When at home in bed I agonized. How could I manage the train-fare from Takahama to Isurugi? I had only an allowance of 500 yen each month from my in-laws. If I used up the money, I could not go to the public bathhouse. My husband quit fishing and was working at the quarry. He said he didn't want to go to the sea where he had lost his own son and two brothers. He went to work early in the morning, so when I came home, he was already asleep. I could not ask him to go to Isurugi with me. Finally, I made up my mind to take a chance. "I will not pay a daily visit. If my daughter is also taken from me, then I'll kill myself since I have no reason to live."

Instead, I asked my daughter's teacher at the elementary school, "Please allow my daughter to take the day off if it rains on a school excursion day." I was afraid of a water god. I would not allow her to swim in the sea. Even when it was not raining, if the route of the school excursion included a bridge, I would not let her go.

My father-in-law told me, "Write the Chinese character for water on a towel and wrap it around Masae's neck." I was skeptical, but I followed his advice anyway. Nothing happened to Masae. I suddenly felt the fortune-teller's prophecy was pointless. During my critical year of age 33, I paid homage at Keta Shrine, the most prestigious shrine in Noto Peninsula. After that, I decided not to go see fortune-tellers any more.

I could not believe Takeshi was still alive, although I kept visiting shrines praying for his safety and searching for him along the shore. I had no clue at all. I spent the first year crying and thinking that his body might have been fed by fish in the sea.

Several years after his disappearance, a human skull was snared in fishing net near Noto. I suspected it might be Takeshi's. How old may it have been? Should I go to the police to inquire about it? I pondered on it, but even if it might be Takeshi's, I could not do anything about it, since it meant he was already dead.

Three years after the funeral, the fabric factory I was working for sponsored a trip to Ise Shrine for its employees. It was fall, and the seasonal colors were beautiful. I joined the trip expecting divine grace from the shrine. However, I could not stop missing Takeshi, and cried during the trip. Finally, a peer said to me, "You are ruining such fun of the trip." I was shocked, "What a greeting when I am in deep sorrow!" However, of course, I could not disagree with her point.

In the meantime, five years passed, then seven years. My daughter Masae married and made me a grandmother. I was too busy to weep every day. However, I could not stop my old habit of looking back repeatedly while walking in town, expecting Takeshi might appear any moment and call out for me "Mom!"

I eventually moved to Kanazawa with my daughter's family. One night (in 1987) sometime after eight o'clock, the Terakoshis' second daughter, Toyoko, called me. "Takeshi is alive!" she said. "Alive? Where?" "In North Korea. We received a letter from Sotoo." My legs were shaking as I listened to Toyoko read the letter on the phone. When I called my mother's house, my brother Kiyoshi answered. "Kiyoshi, Takeshi is alive!" But he did not believe me. "Mom, Tomoe's talking crazy." Then my mother took the phone and said "Tomoe, you are all right. Don't worry, I'll see you tomorrow." Mother thought that I finally became insane after weeping over my son so many years.

It was no wonder that nobody believed the news. In May of 1965, two years after the funeral, the three were all recorded as dead in their respective family registers. On January 19, 1980, Kokin, the mother of Shoji and Sotoo, died. Their father, Kataro, died on June 23, 1984. "We bothered the townspeople so much." Kataro died apologizing about the week when the three became missing and the whole town united to search for them. In August 1986, a year before the letter from Sotoo arrived, we held a memorial service. It observed the 2nd anniversary of Kataro's death, the 6th anniversary of Kokin's and the 23rd anniversary of the missing trio.

I discarded Takeshi's memorabilia after the 23rd anniversary service. For a long time I had kept Takeshi's school uniform, which searchers had found in the sea while looking for the missing crew. "Do you want to wear Takeshi's school uniform?" I asked my grandson in junior high school. "Why do I have to wear such a rag?" he said. I understood him. The uniform was a cheap synthetic one. Its buttons were rusty and dangling. "The dear memorabilia to me is only a rag to him. Even if I keep it, it would be thrown away after I die. The 23rd anniversary was over, and that should be long enough. I should dispose of it." I disposed of the uniform with all his memorabilia, such as his elementary school diploma, school cap, and others.

The following day, Toyoko visited me with a copy of Sotoo's letter. As I was told on the phone, the letter said they lived in North Korea. "Takeshi is alive! I gave him up as dead long ago. Is it true? If it's true, I want to see him. Or is it only a bad joke?" The Terakoshi family told me, "Don't tell anybody about the letter. If you let others know, they will be killed." Nobody knew about North Korea then. It was only a "horrible country."

Was the letter genuine? I brought in the letter and inquired at the police, Red Cross, Prefectural Office, and all the other places I could think of. I might have looked like a "ghost" when I walked around in my sandals inquiring about Takeshi in one place after another.

When I took the letter to a police box in front of the train station, a young police officer looked doubtful and asked, "Can I keep this letter?" I left the letter as was asked, but I didn't hear from him at all. Finally I went to the police box and asked him to return the letter, but he said, "I trashed it." I could not quench my anger, though Toyoko had a copy. "What do the police think about my important letter?"

When I visited a Red Cross office, a clerk asked me, "Ma'am, what do you think the Red Cross does?" When I answered him I didn't know, he said, "The Red Cross helps those in danger. This letter says your son is alive and happy."

Then, what should I do? Nobody at the police, government offices or the Red Cross listened to me.

I visited a Chosen Soren office in Kanazawa, although I did not even know what organization it was. I thought they could give me some useful information since it had "Chosen" (Korea) in its name. However, to my regret, a clerk there told me, "You know what? Japanese people used to bully Koreans."

This is the result of those days.” The clerk continued his harsh words. “Japanese started to work late and finished early, whereas Koreans started early and finished late, still they earned only half the amount Japanese made.” “When we worked in rice fields, Japanese came and took our girls and boys.” In the end, he even demanded, “Send a truck to North Korea. Give us 1 million yen to buy a truck. I began shaking in the winter cold while I was looking for the right time to leave the office.

Finally, after I was released from the mean clerk and went out, I thought it was the last place I would visit again and wondered if Takeshi was really in such a horrible country. Later, however, I would visit that horrible country many times.

By the time Toyoko received the second letter from Sotoo, I got a letter from Takeshi. It was mostly written in Hangul, but partly in his broken Japanese.

“Mother, I hope you can use this to confirm it’s me. There was a bus stop at the cooperative office, I got off the bus and climbed a hill. In front of a house, there was Grandma’s rice field. There were four persimmon trees, two of them were sweet persimmons, and there was a loquat tree (following omitted).”

Two sweet persimmons and a loquat tree: Takeshi described my parents’ home in Mikohara, where he spent one year with his grandma. That proved the letter was truly from him.

Once I knew Takeshi was alive, I could no longer contain my desire to see him. However, how could I visit North Korea? How could I manage the travel expense?

One day, my mother visited me and gave me money. She said, “You worked hard when you were young. I couldn’t afford your bridal arrangements. This is what your pa and I saved. You can use it as you please.” That was big money, 1 million yen.

I started visiting members of the Diet and the local municipal assembly. They hesitated when they heard the word “North Korea.” I also visited a labor union office, but they showed no interest, either. However, when I visited a politician of the then-Socialist Party, Yuzuru Shimazaki, I felt as if I had found

an oasis in the desert.

Mr. Shimazaki, a member of the Japan-North Korea Amicable Diet Association, told me that he would try to arrange my trip to North Korea in May. He said the Socialist Party's delegation to North Korea, the Japan-North Korea Friendship House, would leave Niigata in July. However, as the month approached, he began telling me not to embark on that ship. This time he said, a "Peace in Asia" group would go to North Korea in August and he would put me on the ship. But when the time came, he again told me not to go on that ship. I told him how eager I was to see Takeshi. Finally, it was arranged for me to take a ship to North Korea in late August.

Mr. Shimazaki later published a booklet titled "Seeing Them Again" about that visit to North Korea. The booklet noted that the three were rescued while drifting after their ship was wrecked and that they eventually settled in North Korea. The description in the booklet was criticized as it acknowledged North Korea's claim. But Mr. Shimazaki of the Socialist Party was the only person I could depend upon to carry out a trip to North Korea.

No member of the Terakoshi family in Shika-cho volunteered to go to North Korea, saying they were scared. "We can't come back if we go to such a horrible country." Even if somebody offered to go, someone else would oppose to him. Finally, my husband, Tazaemon, and I decided to go. The Terakoshis prepared 200,000 yen for Sotoo and I the same amount for Takeshi. I used part of the money my mother gave me. I put into my suitcase as many items as possible such as clothes, watches, and umbrellas, etc.

It was 5 in the evening on August 31, 1987, when my husband and I arrived in North Korea via China. The sun was still high in the summer sky. Although I expected to see him soon after arrival, there was no hint of Takeshi.

We were taken on a city tour the following day and stayed in Panmunjon that night. Regarding those welcoming itineraries, which totally ignored our desire to see Sotoo and Takeshi as soon as possible, Mr. Shimazaki wrote in his booklet that it must have been done out of "North Korean consideration to first allow them to get used to the city and then let them see their family." He was again the spokesman for North Korea.

On September 3rd, I became inpatient and asked the interpreter when we could see Sotoo and Takeshi. He answered that we would be allowed to see them when we return to Pyongyang. "Really? Are they really bringing Takeshi? They may bring in someone else." I was excited and headed to Koryo

Hotel. I was led to a room, without knowing which floor I was on or in which room.

There they were! Sotoo and Takeshi with their wives and children.

“Takeshi!” I shrieked, but I could not believe nor move. I was skeptical. North Koreans did not allow us to see Takeshi for three days after our arrival. Why? It might have been to fabricate someone else as Takeshi. The last time I saw Takeshi, he was only 13. After 24 years, he was now 37. His face and voice were so different from those 24 years ago. As for Sotoo, he was almost 50 years old.

“Sis!” When Sotoo suddenly hugged me, I recognized his voice. I cried with Sotoo. If Sotoo was the person himself, then that one must be really Takeshi, although he carried no trace of his face when he was 13. When I wrote a letter to Takeshi, I enclosed my picture taken with my grandchild and a few strands of my hair wrapped in tissue paper.

Later Takeshi told me that he had received only my picture, not the letter. Takeshi thought “This must be my mom. Strange. Who is this child? Mom’s? Was she divorced and married again and had a child? No, she was sickly and could not have another child.”

Later Takeshi told me that he didn’t show the picture to anyone and looked at it when there was no one else around him. Because of the picture Takeshi could recognize my face that day after 24 years.

I decided to ask Takeshi. “Do you have a scar on the forehead?” Takeshi had a scar from being hit by his friend’s bat when he was playing baseball in his elementary school days. I found it when he pulled up his hair. I thought it was very long before I could confirm the man as my son, but actually it was only five minutes.

Once I was sure it was Takeshi, I was inundated with love for him. I was deeply shaken with emotion, and could not even call him “Takeshi!”

Recently when I told him about how I felt when I saw him for the first time in 24 years, Takeshi confessed, “I was not allowed to meet with you soon after your arrival, but I saw you the day after you arrived in Pyongyang.” Takeshi was working as a lathe operator in an inland city, Kusung, and made a trip to Pyongyang the same day as we arrived there. The next day he found out what time I was visiting Chuche Sasan Tower and he watched me secretly there. He could not call out his mother whom he saw for the first time in 24 years even though he was just around the corner, secretly watching her.

Thinking how he felt then, I was filled with mixed emotions. I was not allowed to spend the night with him. I saw him for only four hours during our 7-day visit. The night before going back to Japan, I cried myself to sleep beside my husband.

On the final day of our visit, tears welled up again when I saw him at the airport. Takeshi! I cried and hugged him tight for the first time.

I visited North Korea 17 times from the first visit until March 2003. Each time I took gifts such as money, clothes, and small electric appliances. To earn money for the visit, I worked as a cleaning lady and saved my annuities. Visiting my son was my only purpose in life.

Although there were no diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea, circumstances were beginning to change. On September 24, 1990, when I visited Pyongyang for the first time, a group headed by politician Shin Kanamaru visited there. During their visit, captain Isamu Beniko and chief engineer Yoshio Kuriura of No. 18 Fuji-maru, were released from North Korean prison and came home. They had been in prison for 6 years and 11 months for allegedly providing illegal transportation for North Korean military personnel to Japan.

In October 1992, I made my second visit to see Takeshi. In 1994, North Korean leader Kim Il-sung passed away. On September 5, 1994, Sotoo died of lung cancer at his home in Kusung. He was 55. In April 1995, I made my third trip. On September 18, 1996, a North Korean submarine penetrated the waters off South Korea's east coast. In February 1996, the defection of Hwang Jang-yup, the secretary of the North Korean Workers' Party, to South Korea made big news.

In 1997, the term "abduction by North Korea" began drawing attention. On April 15th, Diet members of the Liberal Democratic Party formed the Abduction Rescue Federation of the Diet Members. Invited to its first meeting, daughter Masae and I went to Tokyo. I was introduced to Sakie Yokota, the mother of Megumi, who had been missing since she was age 13, the same age as Takeshi.

Sakie and others organized the Abductee Family Association that year. I was invited to join. On May 30, 1997, I turned in a petition requesting deletion of Takeshi's death to Ninth Coast Guard in Kanazawa. On June 27th, the General Assembly of Ishikawa Prefecture passed a motion unanimously to

revive Takeshi's family register and to request his temporary homecoming. "Group to Support the Terakoshis" was formed to collect signatures. On July 31st, I visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with 10,000 signatures to request its help bringing Takeshi home. On October 16th, I submitted 130,000 signatures to Prime Minister Keizo Kobuchi.

It was the testimony by the former North Korean agent An Myoung-jin that encouraged me to join the Abductee Family Association. He testified that a spy boat abducted three crewmembers near a place called "Noto." His testimony read that the agents killed on the boat one of the crew who resisted hard, and that they gagged the boy and confined him in the engine room since he cried hard.

When I visited Takeshi in March 1997, I asked him about the testimony by An Myoung-jin. By then Takeshi had been promoted to vice chairman of the Pyongyang Career Federation and moved from Kusung to Pyongyang.

"This is the true story," he said, and he began telling me what happened that night. "I don't remember anything from the dawn of May 12th to May 15th. We were accommodated in a dormitory, not a hospital. All three were in the same room, and treated not bad, provided with food, liquor, and tobacco." "Uncle Shoji was not in the hospital when he died, but in the dormitory bed." When I asked him what had taken them to North Korea, he gave the same response, "I don't know since I was sleeping."

In the fall of 1997, responding to the questions from Japanese media visiting Pyongyang, Takeshi clearly denied he had been abducted. In light of his denial, I decided to leave the Abductee Family Association.

In November 8, 1997, the first group of "Japanese wives" who were married to North Korean returned home, but Takeshi's return was never realized. Accordingly, I repeated my visits. Especially after he moved to Pyongyang, I frequently visited him. Sakie Yokota in her memorandum published in 1999 wrote, "Even if he was not rescued but abducted, the mother must have mixed feelings when she sees her son under their observation."

I think that in our hearts, we support each other as mothers who lost their children at age 13. However, the two mothers are now walking separate roads.

Kim Jong-il acknowledged the abduction and apologized on September 17, 2002, when Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited North Korea. From

that day on, the Abductee Family Association resumed its contact with me, but I stubbornly kept refusing to join them. I was proud that I had kept working hard, and alone, to get my son back for 40 years. I realized it on October 3, 2002, when he came home for the first time in 39 years.

He finally made it home as a member of a North Korean visiting delegation. However, there was nobody from the Japanese government at the airport. That morning I called the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and asked them to arrange a car with a national flag on to pick him up at the airport. My request was denied. We had to drive back to downtown Tokyo in a Chosen Soren car. I was sad. We were not Korean, nor a Korean Japanese. What a cold country it is when a citizen returns home after 39 years.

It had been like this for 40 years. Nobody helped me to rescue Takeshi. When I was trying to obtain signatures, nobody offered help. Who could believe this country?

In North Korea, without enough supply of food, people kept fleeing from the country. In such poor conditions, Takeshi was promoted to a leading position in the Workers' Party and was able to send his children to college. His son has become a company commander and leads over 100 soldiers. Takeshi's condo in a 13-story condominium complex in Pyongyang has ten rooms with two bathrooms. He was only 13 years old, and he made his way alone for forty years in North Korea. He married, had children and a grandchild. Those were the results of his own efforts.

Takeshi wrote a composition at elementary school. "Trees put out buds and keep growing even after they are cut down. I would like to grow strong like a tree." Takeshi survived a tough life in North Korea as he described in his composition. I thought he was a man among men, though I knew it might sound funny if his parent said so.

When asked if Takeshi was "abducted," or was "rescued" while drifting at sea as he claimed, I would answer, "Whatever you choose to think." At least Takeshi looks "happy" in North Korea. If I voice up that he was abducted, it may affect his current life there. As his mother, I can never interfere with his happiness.

However, my worries mount when I return to Japan after visiting Takeshi. "How's he doing? Is he doing well? Has he been sent to 'the mountain'?" I am quite aware that in North Korea people could be sent to 'the mountain' at anytime.

“Takeshi, do you want to stay here? What do you want?” I asked him, forcing a smile, when Takeshi came home after 39 years. Takeshi answered, “When I went to North Korea at 13, I really missed Mom and Dad. Now I have my own children. I cannot cause them to suffer from the same pains I experienced. I cannot abandon them.”

I lost, I thought when I heard his response. Whether to choose his parent or his children? He chose his children. You cannot abandon children. I knew that was what parents do. Actually, I wanted to scream, “Takeshi, don’t go back!” But I swallowed my screams and forced a smile. It must have been hard to see whether I was crying or smiling.

When it was time to go back to North Korea, he said, “Mom, I’ll visit you every year.” But I told him not to. “If you come to Japan, people will call you a spy or speak ill of us. You don’t have to visit me. Instead, I will go to North Korea no matter how often I may have to.” I am old. I don’t know how many times I can go see Takeshi. I want to see him as often as possible. For that purpose, I have to go to North Korea. Although old, I’m the only person who can protect him.

There are many complaints I want to make to North Korea. There also are many complaints I want to make to the Japanese government. But I never speak up. This is not a matter between two countries. This is a matter between mother and son, and of families. I understand how the Yokotas feel. Takeshi disappeared at 13, the same age as Megumi did. I understand the Hasuikes and Chimuras. After they came home, they enjoyed hot springs and delicious food, but I know they feel empty. They still have children in North Korea. We all are the victims of the two countries. Takeshi was taken to North Korea at age 13. After 40 years, he no longer has a place to return to in Japan.

“Give me back Takeshi,” mother Tomoe said for many years, but now she remains tight-lipped. She doesn’t care if people call her a North Korean “billboard” or a “spy.” “What we say and what we think,” Tomoe says, “are two different matters.”

We wonder why “Japan” could not rescue mother and son. Is it too late to rescue them?