

5

Kidnapped 13-year-old Girl, Miss YOKOTA Megumi

■ On November 15, 1977, more than 40 years ago, a 13-year-old girl suddenly vanished from a town in Niigata Prefecture, which faces the Sea of Japan.

That morning, as usual, Miss YOKOTA Megumi had busily eaten breakfast with her father, mother, and her twin younger brothers and then went off to her junior high school. That was to become the last time Megumi's family saw her.

Megumi didn't come home!

On that evening, Megumi didn't come home at her usual time, although she was supposed to come home after finishing badminton practice, which was the club she belonged to at school. Her family was worried and desperately searched for her. The police also conducted a search and an investigation assuming a variety of scenarios, such as a kidnapping, accident, runaway, or suicide. However, they found no eyewitnesses nor any items left behind.

On that night, Megumi was...

According to testimony heard much later, during that time when Megumi's father and mother were desperately searching to find her, she had been kidnapped by North Korean agents and was confined in the pitch-dark and cold hold of a boat heading to North Korea. She cried out "Mom! Mom!" and scratched everywhere on the door and walls so desperately that when she arrived in North Korea it was said that her finger nails had almost come off and were covered with blood.

Bright and cheerful Megumi

Megumi was a bright and cheerful girl. She was like the sun to the members of her family. She liked to sing and draw pictures, and she practiced Japanese calligraphy and classical ballet.

November 14, the day before she disappeared, was her father's birthday. She gave her father a comb as a gift, with the words "Please take good care of your appearance from now on."

Days of sorrow for the family

From the day that Megumi disappeared, the life of her family changed completely. For their lively dinner table, it was as if the fire had gone out.

Her father left the house a little early every morning and searched along the shore. When her mother finished her housework, she would walk to many different places in town and along the shore for several kilometers while calling Megumi's name.

At night, her father cried in the bath. Her mother cried when alone so that the other members of the family would not know it. They both thought, "Why do we have to go through such a sad experience? I just want to die already."

However, while the family was experiencing such sorrow and pain, time went by without finding any clue.



■ Then 20 years later, January 21, 1997

Megumi is alive!

The family then heard the information that Megumi was alive in Pyongyang. Her father Shigeru and mother Sakie had made the name "YOKOTA Megumi" known to the public. And so newspapers and magazines simultaneously reported the news, and her case was raised in the National Diet.

Japan-North Korea summit meeting

On September 17, 2002, then Prime Minister Koizumi visited North Korea and had the first summit meeting with then National Defense Commission Chairman Kim Jong-Il. Both Shigeru and Sakie had high expectations of finally seeing Megumi. On that very day, then National Defense Commission Chairman Kim Jong-Il admitted the abduction and apologized.

However, the information given by North Korea had the shocking claim that YOKOTA Megumi was deceased (among those that North Korea has claimed as the 5 alive, 8 deceased, and 2 no entry).

Unconvincing explanation from North Korea

However, the claim about Megumi was only what North Korea has claimed unilaterally. North Korea has not yet provided any convincing explanation or evidence of this claim. In November 2004, Pyongyang provided what they claimed were Megumi's remains, but forensic analysis on part of the remains has detected that DNA is not Megumi's.

We will never give up! Until we take you back!

The abductees, including Megumi, have been robbed of their lives, which are irreplaceable. The families are still awaiting the return of these most important persons in their lives in intense grief.

These abductions by North Korea are a serious human rights violation and an infringement of national sovereignty. We must rescue the abductees as soon as possible.

Sakie speaks in this way: "I want to take Megumi into a very natural place when she returns because I believe that she is living now by doing her best not to make any mistakes, while being afraid of wiretaps and hidden cameras in North Korea. I want her to lie spread out on open ground, like on a ranch in Hokkaido, and let her say 'I'm Free!!'"

Over 40 years have passed since her disappearance, but Megumi still remains abducted by North Korea.

