

琉球大学学術リポジトリ

沖縄におけるアメラジアン你的生活権・教育権保障

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3. As a Parent of an Amerasian

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1. Parting from a husband and a father

When I came back to Okinawa with my son Clayton, he was just over three years old. The town where we lived, Havelock, is a small town in North Carolina with a population of about fifteen thousand. Its economy relies heavily on the Cherry Point Marine Corp Air Station, the biggest Marine Corps Air Station on the U.S. east coast. On this base, the same notice board can be found as on the Kadena Air Base in Okinawa. It says, "Pardon our noise, it's for your freedom."

Then it hit us out of the blue. One day in August 1991, my husband said to me, "I love our child, but not you anymore. We should get a divorce."

His words were quite harsh. I had trusted him for about four years in a strange place, and I found myself obviously betrayed. Our child, Clayton, was still a toddler. I was devastated by his sudden announcement and within a week, I had lost 22 pounds, such was my distress. Even though I was told we had to separate, I didn't know what to do. I had to talk to my in-laws. My mother-in-law kindly told me, "You can stay with us as long as you need." So, from my husband's house in North Carolina, we moved to their house in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in the Midwestern part of the U.S.

Soon after, I called my mother in Okinawa. I had gotten married despite my parents' strong opposition, so we hadn't heard from each other for several years. But, when I told my mother my situation, she told me to come back to Okinawa with Clayton as soon as possible. After that, she made a call to the International Welfare Office in Ginowan City about my problem. She was told that it would be better for me to come back to Okinawa with the separation agreement.

In the U.S., laws generally vary from state to state. Similarly divorce laws are totally different in North Carolina and Iowa. One after another, I contacted attorneys who specialized in divorce, using the telephone directory, and I found a lawyer who offered a 30-minute free consultation. At the visit, I learned that divorce laws in North Carolina favored me, so I called a lawyer in North Carolina and asked him to work on my case, but he ignored my request. I was at a loss.

In the meantime, one of my American friends introduced me to a woman who was from Itoman City in Okinawa. We became friends, and often discussed our problems with each other. She owned a small Japanese restaurant in downtown Cedar Rapids, and Clayton and I went to her restaurant to see her almost every day.

I became acquainted with one of her regular customers, a woman who worked at a welfare

office in the city. Thanks to her arranging social welfare assistance for us, we were able to receive 350 dollars a month and free medical expenses. That was the first public financial assistance we received since we arrived in Iowa. My husband sent no financial support to us, saying that we were staying at his parents' home, and therefore, we were getting assistance from him.

Before returning to Okinawa, I wanted to return to North Carolina to have a separation agreement drawn up. For that purpose, I bought flight tickets with two-months worth of social welfare money.

After arriving in North Carolina, we stayed at my friend's home for two weeks and contacted a lawyer that another friend of mine had introduced, concerning our separation agreement. Then, my husband and I signed the agreement. Up until this time, I had experienced extreme hardships. After all, not only did I have to raise my son almost by myself, but also had to deal with the divorce procedure as well as the pain caused by my husband's betrayal and anxiety I felt for my son's future. Looking back, it's amazing that I weathered such difficulties without going insane. Fortunately, as in the agreement, he agreed to pay child support, having it deducted from his salary, and he voluntarily reported to the court for the necessary legal procedures.

In March 1992, Clayton and I arrived at Naha Airport from Charlotte Airport in North Carolina. About five years had passed since I moved to the U.S. My mother came to the airport to meet us. She immediately recognized her grandson, her first and only grandson, and held him in her arms. She said, "We are family! He recognizes me too."

That was 8 years ago. Now, both my ex-husband and I are remarried and enjoying new lives with new partners. He regularly sends child-support payments to help bring up our son.

As long as we have been in Okinawa, Clayton has never been teased or bullied because of the way he looks. This is probably because he has a similar appearance with black hair and brown eyes. He is often told by others "You look pretty, like a half-Japanese and a half-American."

I was very surprised at his language ability, because he was speaking only in Japanese just three months after we'd returned to Okinawa. In America, he hadn't been able to speak Japanese at all. At the same time, it worried me. Although I had divorced my American husband, there was no doubt he was Clayton's father. I realized that if Clayton had no way to communicate with his father, they could no longer have family ties. I regarded my ex-husband, for whatever reason, to be Clayton's father, so it was very important for my son to acquire English proficiency to keep their relationship.

Because of this, I often told him to speak English to me at home. Whenever he talked to me in Japanese, I pretended not to hear him. Seeing that, he began to realize that his mother was an English speaker. He talked to me in English, but to other family members in Japanese. He became bilingual, using both Japanese and English. One day, when I asked

him, "Clayton, who do you think I am, Japanese or American?" he replied "You are an American." He thought I was an "American," because I talked to him in English. As I mentioned earlier, I was very concerned about my son's English education, primarily because I wanted to maintain the relationship between my son and his father living in America. As long as he lives in Japan, there is no other way but to go to an American school to acquire native English speaking skills, because he has no chances to talk to native English speakers at home. Attending American school classes is also the best way for him to actually acquire English as a mother tongue.

2. Clayton's nationality issues

Clayton was born in a naval hospital at the Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station in North Carolina on January 9th 1989. Approximately 50 Japanese women like me, who married American men and moved from Japan, lived around this base. Such Japanese mothers often met with each other, ate Japanese meals, went shopping, and tried to forget their loneliness. One of our fellow members told me that if you give a birth to a baby in America and want the baby to acquire Japanese nationality, you must have the birth registered with the Japanese Embassy within three months after the birth.

At that time, Clayton was already a little bit over 6 months old.

I paid little attention to this issue, thinking, "He doesn't need Japanese nationality, because we will not return to Japan."

However, I noticed one thing when I was getting ready to leave for home. In order to go back to Japan, my son had to acquire a U.S. passport and apply for an entry visa to Japan. I wondered why he possessed no Japanese nationality.

When Clayton became five years old, I made a call to the department of nationality in the Regional Legal Affairs Bureau. The official told me to come to the office for an explanation about the procedures to acquire Japanese nationality for my son. He sounded very kind and polite.

However, when I went to the office, I was taken to a small room and questioned me. He said, "It is difficult to acquire Japanese nationality. By the way, do you have any boyfriends now?" I answered, "Yes, I do." "Is he a foreigner or a Japanese?" "Why do you ask me such a private question?" "Because if you remarry a foreigner, it is meaningless for your son to get Japanese nationality."

I couldn't believe my ears.

"Whoever I choose to marry, there is no doubt he is my son and a Japanese. He definitely has the right to acquire Japanese nationality."

"You didn't have his birth registered with the Japanese Embassy after he was born. This means that you abandoned his right for Japanese nationality."

There was nothing I could say.

While I filled out the papers, I was repeatedly told that it would be very difficult to acquire Japanese nationality, or if it were possible, they wouldn't know how long it would take. Only a week later, though, I was informed that our application was approved by the department. I was disgusted at having been subjected to such insulting treatment while *simply* trying to acquire Japanese nationality for my son. Also, I discovered that Japanese "officials" are the kinds of people who insult ordinary citizens like me, according to their whims by exercising their authority arbitrarily and giving no consideration to people's feelings.

After getting involved in the education rights protection movement for Amerasians, I had the opportunity to listen to the lectures of Mr. Hiroshi Tanaka, a former professor at Hitotsubashi University who specializes in the issues of Koreans living in Japan. I talked to him about the process of acquiring my son's Japanese nationality. He told me, "Originally, a birth certificate is nothing but a "notification," not a duty for "application." Therefore, even if you don't submit such a "notification" within three months after one's birth abroad, you don't have to start with "application for approval." He also informed me that even though I had failed to submit a notification in America, Clayton would not lose his right to acquire Japanese nationality. Hearing that, I had another feeling of outrage toward the official I had spoken to (I still remember his name).

After getting the official notification, I went to the department again and completed the necessary procedure. Clayton acquired Japanese nationality. I was told to give him a Japanese name for the family register. I talked to my mother, and we decided to name him "Kento" in Japanese. Clayton first told us that he didn't like that name, but he later got used to it saying, "now I have two names-Clayton Andrew Young and Kento Shimoji (Shimoji changed to Yonamine after my remarriage.)"

3. Amerasians in OCSI

I was hired as a clerical worker at Okinawa Christian School International (OCSI) on March 16th 1992, just two weeks after I left for Japan with my three-year-old son Clayton. I was mentally and physically exhausted during the six months after our separation. However, I was willing to return to my hometown in Okinawa to start life anew. I asked my mother to take care of my son, who didn't speak Japanese, and went for a job interview. In response to the question, "How long would you work here?" on the application form, I wrote "20 years," which I still remember now. My son will be able to enter this school from the age of four, and I thought I would work there until he graduates from high school. After a written test of easy English-Japanese translation and an interview in English, I was soon employed. My major job description included coordinating school buses, translating school documents and interpreting for my American school principal and my fellow faculty members. Besides these duties, what was regarded as most important was that I was a Christian. OCSI was founded in 1958 as a private mission American school for disciples of American

missionaries, originally located in Minatokawa, Urasoe City. Before Okinawa was returned to Japan, there were two other such schools, but they have since closed.

OCSI provides integrated education for about 350 students, ranging from four-year-olds to 12th grade students. Their nationalities varied, such as Americans and Japanese, however regardless of nationality, Amerasian students were in the majority.

Our school principal was an American, and the board of directors consisted of Protestant missionaries, chaplains living in Okinawa and others. The education provided was standard American style, along with Christian education. All the faculty members were supposed to be Protestant Christians.

I think the four years that I worked for this school gave me valuable experience. In fact it spurred me to take a teacher's employment test, 15 years after I had acquired a teacher's license in my school days. I am deeply thankful for OCSI, because it gave me an opportunity to evaluate my Amerasian son's education when I had many difficulties after returning from America.

I learned a lot working at OCSI, such as interpreting, translating, business English, understanding the systems of American schools. However, I was concerned with the complex family backgrounds that can be found particularly among families of Amerasian students. Many such students are raised by single mothers, who in turn often have to work long hours to pay the high tuition. In my own case, my salary at OCSI was 120 thousand yen per month, which was rather low, but my son's tuition was free because I was an OCSI worker. Also, we lived with my parents for about two years after returning to Japan. In reality, if I had had to pay all the expenses myself, such as rent, utilities, food and tuition, I could not have sent my son to OCSI.

I was very busy all year long in interpreting at meetings between students' parents and teachers, between our school's principal and Okinawa prefectural administrative officials and private corporate officials, and any private meeting that required the presence of an interpreter. Countless requests were made of me, such as:

"I am planning to take my students to A as part of our class. Please contact the person concerned to arrange the schedule."

"I want to visit this place. So, please ask them the details of the address."

"There is something wrong with my car. Please explain the problem for me at a repair shop."

Each time such a request came to me, I remembered what my predecessor had told me:

"Interpreters must see to the requests of customers."

Also, I was asked to interpret when a parent was asked to report to the school because of their child's misbehavior. Through interpreting at such meetings, I found that many students that get into trouble are Amerasians living only with Japanese mothers. Many such mothers had to work hard to make a living and pay the expensive tuition, so they could not paid sufficient attention to their children's education. Many Amerasian students, who grew up obediently until they were in elementary school, had difficulties in school as juveniles. When I

interpreted at meetings between the principal and the students and their mothers, I sometimes cried hearing about their plight.

When I began to work at OCSI, I thought that OCSI was not only a mission school, but also a multiethnic school. Later, I discovered that this school ranked all students. First priority was given to the children of OCSI faculty members, then to the children of foreign missionaries, and third the children of families with high social status, including Japanese. (Actually, a large number of Japanese families with high social status, who emphasized English education, sent their children to OCSI.)

I once read a notification from the government of Okinawa prefecture. It was made when this school was approved as an incorporated foundation in 1972. It contained a conditional clause stating that admission of children with Japanese nationality was not allowed. After that notification was officially issued, OCSI was not officially approved to admit children with only Japanese nationality.

4. My disappointment with OCSI

I resigned from my job at OCSI as of October 1st 1996. There were many reasons for doing so, and I planned to leave my post after a successor took over my position. However, one day, the principal and I had an argument about a problem. He bellowed at me, "I am the principal of this school. Don't talk back to me." A week after this incident, I quit my job. Although I received a letter of apology from him later, I tore it up and threw it away.

This was not the first case that had irritated me. When N school, a private American school in the middle of Okinawa, was closed, and the students started attending OCSI, I began to feel frustrated.

OCSI was originally instructed not to admit children with Japanese nationality of school age. Therefore, many students, who couldn't continue attending at OCSI elementary school department after graduating from the OCSI kindergarten, changed to N school.

When the closure of N school was determined, the school principal Mr. F often visited OCSI, and asked the school to receive the children, who could not find another school to go to. OCSI also organized some orientation for the parents of N school students. I was asked to interpret at such meetings.

The OCSI principal said that there were some conditions and regulations for the children's acceptance.

First of all, all applicants are supposed to take an English test. Japanese children of school age of the 2nd grade level and up should be admitted if their English skills meet the required standard. However, OCSI cannot admit children of 1st graders, because their basic English skills are insufficient and they are expected to enter the Japanese public school system.

On the other hand, there are always people who get their way using money and power. OCSI was persuaded by such people to establish some exceptional conditions regarding

admission conditions and regulations, and eventually got their children admitted. It is easier for OCSI to manage the school, by admitting the children of such rich and education-conscious Japanese parents, rather than the Amerasian children with single mothers who do not have such advantages.

I witnessed an incredible case. A Japanese parent acquired a foreign passport for their child after hearing that a child with a foreign nationality could gain admission to OCSI. Although most of the staff members pointed out that it was obviously illegal, the principal of the elementary school department had a different opinion, saying, "Whether if it's illegal or not is not my concern. What concerns me the most is that this child has a passport with foreign nationality." In a sense, this was not surprising to me. When I was an interpreter at a meeting between the principal and this parent, I interpreted her advice to the parent, "You should buy a foreign passport. I heard that some countries conduct such trade."

I thought it was a joke at that time, so I didn't think the parent would follow the principal's advice.

On the other hand, OCSI didn't approve the admission of Amerasian children when they didn't possess any foreign nationality.

"The mother of the child is a single parent, and the child has only Japanese nationality. Also, she cannot teach English to her child at home. Such a child should go to a Japanese public school."

Many teachers said such things quite easily, so this school was far from desirable for Amerasians.

I resigned from the job at OCSI, and from the next January, I began to work as a part-time teacher at an English language school, while studying for the teacher's employment test.

I knew Midori Thayer when I worked at OCSI, and her second son had been in the same class as Clayton since they were four years old. The pharmacy where she worked was so close, five minutes ride by car from my apartment, that I often went to see her.

One Sunday in March 1997, she and I watched a news program on TV. It featured illegal dumping of industrial waste that caused health hazards for neighboring residents, such as nasty smell and dioxin, and their fight to redress the problem. We were both stunned. We were all too familiar with both words, "industrial waste" and "disposal site."

OCSI built a new school building in Zakimi, Yomitan village in June 1996, and relocation was supposed to be completed by September for the new semester. Many people regarded the relocation as important, saying that the existing building in Urasoe was too old and that the school had to be rebuilt, but the plan could not be implemented easily. OCSI purchased the land in Yomitan village through a real estate agency. I translated the document that informed the students' parents of the relocation plan. When I attached the relocation map to the document, I asked the principal.

"Is this the correct location of the new school? It says industrial waste disposal site."

"Yes, that's right."

"Is it O.K.?"

"Of course"

"If you say so I trust you."

I didn't give it any more thought.

However, the new building was far from comfortable. The office on the 1st floor was like a natural sauna, and the floor was so hot that we couldn't walk on it with bare feet. That place was not a working environment. We soon installed an air conditioner in the office, but owing to my sensitive skin I constantly developed a heat rash all over my body because of the intense heat. Also, I had headaches for no apparent reason, and had to take medication every day. In addition to all of this, I found steam coming out of the rock beds near the school building.

Some of the students' parents came to the office and asked what caused the steam and what the effects would be on their children's health. The other staff members and I always told them "That's just steam, please don't worry."

Even after I quit OCSI, I sent Clayton to OCSI and planned to do so in the future. However, watching that news program changed my life, as well as the lives of Midori and our children. Distressing thoughts, one after the other, came flooding into my mind. The relocation, the sign on the road map, the neighboring industrial waste disposal site and incinerators, the steam, the extremely high temperature in the building, the cracking of the cement due to the ground's sinking, not to mention the severe headaches every day.

"Something is definitely wrong!" I thought. I contacted as many parents as I knew, and requested them to take action, expecting that the school officials would set up meetings to address the matter. We wished the school to encourage the administrative organs to work toward improving the poor environment, which could have a serious impact on our health. We also expected the school to recognize that it too was a victim. But, they didn't listen to us and said, "This school was built by the grace of God. Everything will be fine."

I felt that I should do something, and withdrew my son from the school at the end of March. Okinawa has some private American schools other than OCSI. They are all small free schools dedicated to Christianity. One of them is L school, which is managed by Mr. F, the former principal of N school. I decided to send Clayton to the school temporarily. More and more parents of OCSI students had the children leave OCSI.

Midori and I contacted the parents of the ex-OCSI students, and appealed to Okinawa prefecture, college professors who specialized in environmental issues, and lawyers at the Civil Rights Association. We believed that such an action would help OCSI understand the parents' feelings about the safe school environment for children. When we appealed to the prefecture we were deeply disappointed by their curt attitude and often ended up in tears. "We understand your complaint, but will not consider it." However, we didn't give up, and continued to insist that they take action.

In the meantime, Okinawa prefecture took some samples of the soil and steam and had them

analyzed by an environmental health institute. Astoundingly, though, the prefecture declared the area to be safe, based on the sample test results. In those days, terms such as "endocrine disrupter" were unknown and there were no institutes in Okinawa equipped with devices to measure dioxin levels. In addition, only half a year before, when OCSI purchased this land, an agency had been commissioned by the prefecture to conduct a geological test. The agency was the same as that which had provided the analytical results on which the prefecture relied for their declaration of safety.

However, they didn't conduct any dioxin tests, and the safety declaration was issued based on unreliable test results. We were at a loss. Even if we got such a safety declaration, we couldn't send our children back to OCSI, because we knew better than anyone of the poor environmental conditions in the OCSI building. Why was it ok for us to have our children go to a school where they would be exposed to hazardous materials? Or, were our children the same as the waste? We felt betrayed and hurt by not only OCSI, but the government of Okinawa prefecture.

5. A fresh start

I had only one option, which was to keep sending Clayton to L school.

But, the N school building is actually a rebuilt apartment, with a small plaza made of concrete about the size of three parking spaces. The L school principal was thinking of relocation, and some of our ex-OCSI school parents began to lobby local governments and private organizations to give L school financial support. We had to take effective action; it was essential for our children's safe growth. We formed the "Educational Study Group for International Children," with the cooperation of about ten members, and created a mission statement.

In the meantime, we met with the principal of A school, which is a "talent school"(a school that trains pop singers). He was "the man of the hour," and drew much public attention. We agreed with his way of thinking, and we were very glad to hear of his plan of opening an international school. We thought, "We can cooperate with this man, and bring up our children safely." The study group, which Mr. A invested in, owned our office.

However, as we had some meetings and exchanged our opinions, we found that there were distinct differences between Mr. A's concept of managing schools and ours. We wanted to simply consider the future of our children, so that they could acquire basic knowledge and culture to be independent as future adults. Mr. A said to us, "If a child excels in any field, it is enough to hone that ability. Basic scholarship is unnecessary, and books and texts are superfluous." This was a major gap in our thinking. Some of the parents in our group agreed with his thinking, but Midori and I couldn't accept such an idea, and ended up leaving the group. This educational study group fell apart only a few months after being founded and our children and we were again on our own.

We were thinking of giving L school assistance and having our children continue the schooling there. However, the curriculum was American home schooling in which Christian educational curriculum is bought and foreign teachers give lessons using such curriculum. Christian education is characterized by excluding the teaching of "improper" things in terms of religion, such as the theory of evolution and so on. Although I myself am a Christian, I want my child to learn any idea or theory as necessary knowledge and culture aside from his own creed and seek his own way of living. As a result of my experience at OCSI I do not wish to confine his education to "Christian education". In the U.S., there are many home schooling curriculums other than Christian education. I heard that an American woman living in Okinawa does home schooling with her two daughters. I looked at it like this, "If we employ a teacher and buy such a curriculum, we can have our children receive English education." Then, our new challenge began.

Midori and I asked a home schooling company in the U.S. to send some materials, and we began to look for a proper teacher. In response, more parents increasingly expressed their desire to have their children get English education like us. By continuing our requests for assistance to administrative organs, we found a room to rent in a building called the "Workers' Center" in Ginowan City, and employed an American teacher. We expected to start giving "Temple-style" education (private, informal education) right away.

On June 1st 1998, we held a modest school opening ceremony.

"Welcome to the AmerAsian School in Okinawa where children share a common bond of mixed racial ancestry. A place where these qualities make you special. Here you will learn to respect each other and all good people, no matter who or where they come from. Remember, it is important to be good world citizens. Your parents, with help from other caring citizens, have joined together to create this new school. This school is an English and Japanese multicultural educational school with a learning environment designed for you. A place free from prejudice. A place where your confidence grows. A place where you can receive a quality education. A place for you and your parents to be proud of. So as you begin your first day of class, remember this is your school. Your parents made this possible. Now it's up to you to help make it a success. "

Just hearing those words, I began crying spontaneously.

The AmerAsian School in Okinawa had taken the first step.

In the classroom within the office building, the class started with 13 students. However, such a small classroom didn't allow teachers to stock instructional materials, or the children to run about or carry on during break time. The grown-up workers in the same building complained, saying things like "They use the washroom improperly" and "They are annoying." The place we had provided for our children was becoming an uncomfortable space for them.

We began thinking, "This environment is awful...poor children! We should look for another place."

"What about the empty house near your apartment?" Midori asked.

"Oh, that house has been vacant for two years, and the yard is full of weeds." I responded.

"But, there are no other good places. We should call the owner." She said to me and we immediately took action.

The lot area of that place was approximately 900 square meters, 830 square meters of which was covered with 2-meter-high weeds. It was a small two story concrete house, but until several years ago, the place had been used as a nursery school. The cost up front for the lease would come to 600 thousand yen.

Five mothers came up with 500 thousand yen, but we were still 100 thousand yen short. Then someone kindly contributed the money, expressing a desire to help us out. It was Mr. Seigen Nagayoshi, a lawyer from the Civil Rights Association who had helped us tackle the environmental issues at OCSI.

We finally paid the contract money, and next had to prepare the new school building for the new semester in September. First, we cut the grass, and cleaned the inside of the building. We asked numerous people and companies to donate the necessary equipment. The textbooks, bookshelves, chairs and desks were all used, but we were very happy to have secured a free space for our children to learn.

In September 1998, a self-organized AmerAsian School in Okinawa had started a new semester in a new place.