

旅する布の手紙をカナダの子どもたちから日本の子どもたちへ捧げます

2011年3月、日本の北部を襲った大震災の地震と津波の被害の詳細が、太平洋を隔てる私たちの前に明らかになるにつれて、深い悲しみに包まれました。

世界中から金銭上をはじめとする支援の約束が集まり始めましたが、私たちの中には、被災者の人たち、特に子どもたちの心や精神面の問題を心配する人もいました。大震災は日本時間の午後、子どもたちが学校や幼稚園にいるときに発生したために、家族と離ればなれになったり、家に帰れない人も多数いました。

子どもたちの助けになりたい、世界の子どもたちも自分たちのことを心配している、思いを馳せていると知ってもらいたい。震災翌日、私は考えました。

布に絵を描く、刺繍をするなどで、青少年に自分たちの気持ちや想いを伝えてもらおうと思いつきました。布にしたのは巡回に耐えるものにするため、刺繍や布用ペイントを使うことにしたのは、絵をカラフルに、長持ちさせるためです。日本語や英語が分からなくても大丈夫。絵を通じてなら、誰でも気持ちを伝えることができます。

キルトのピースをひとつ縫い合わせて、コミュニティからコミュニティに送り、大きくしていったのは提案したのは、BC州ピースリバーの人たちです。いつの間にか、カナダ全国の人たちが参加してくれました。子どもたちの力の成果です！

この旅する布の手紙は、カナダ中から集まった手作りのキルトのピースを縫い合わせて完成しました。布の手紙は日本の街から街へと旅をして、子どもたちから子どもたちへの想いを、励ましたいというメッセージを伝えます。

お互いを思い遣る、これが布の手紙の全てです。

リンダ・オオハマ

Message from Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper

"Regarding my visit to the Yuriage Junior High School, I was honoured to be able to pay my respects to the 14 students and more than 20 parents, who lost their lives."

Yuriage, Japan, on April 18th, 2012



Jason Ransom ©2012

“This Travelling Cloth Letter is dedicated to the KIDS in JAPAN from the KIDS in CANADA”

In March 2011, as details of the earthquake and tsunami in northern Japan unfolded before our eyes on this side of the Pacific, a feeling of such deep sadness filled us all.

Promises of money and aid started to pour in from all over the world, but some of us worried about the spirits and hearts of the people, especially the children. The earthquake hit mid-afternoon Japan time when children were in school and kindergarten, and so many were separated from their families and homes.

A day after the earthquake, I dreamt of helping the young people and letting them know that there are other young people in the world who care and think about them. This is how the “Kids for Kids” quilt project begins.

The idea was to have children and youth share their feelings and thoughts by drawing, painting, and embroidering on cloth. Cloth because it is more durable to travel. Embroidery and fabric paint because it makes the drawing colourful and more permanent. No one needed to know Japanese or English. Everyone could share their feelings through images.

Before I knew it, young people across Canada were making hundreds of cloth letters. Someone suggested 'joining' all of them together, by sewing the cloth squares into 'big cloth letter' quilts. These became the 'Canada cloth letters'.

The “Canada Cloth Letters” were delivered to the young people affected by the tsunami/earthquake in Tohoku, Japan. These young people began to paint their own cloth letters and these became the 'Tohoku cloth letters'.

Since October 13, 2011 the 'Canada-Tohoku cloth letters' have been on an exhibition tour, beginning with a 2-month exhibition at the Canadian Embassy's Prince Takamado Gallery in Tokyo. As these cloth letters are seen by young people all over Japan, they are also making their cloth letters. These are the 'Japan cloth letters'.

Together they have become the inspiring and moving 'Canada-Tohoku-Japan Cloth Letters'.

This is what this project is all about. Joining together to express care for each other and the world we share.

Linda Ohama

For an update on when and where to see this exhibition, check the website at www.clothletters.com

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“We Love Japan!”



The Canadian Cloth Letter Tour

*in support of the survivors of the
2011 Earthquake & Tsunami in Tohoku Region*

December 12, 2013 - January 26, 2014

JCCC Gallery@JCCC



Linda Ohama presenting the letters for the very first time at Yuriage Junior High School on Canada Day, July 1, 2011.



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After touring around Japan for almost two years in support of the victims of the 3/11 tsunami in Tohoku, showing in 55 locations, Linda Ohama’s Cloth Letter exhibition is coming back to Canada where it began.

The Canadian cloth letter exhibition tour began in Vancouver B.C., and will be exhibited in Ottawa, Toronto, Mississauga, Whitehorse, Winnipeg, Montreal, Leduc, Peace River, Thunder Bay, Halifax, and Los Angeles.

The following interview was originally published online at DiscoverNikkei.org and in the Nikkei Voice newspaper.

Linda Ohama speaks with Norm Ibuki

By Norm Masaji Ibuki, June 2013

I will never forget the morning of 3/11 when I saw the first unbelievable images on CBC TV coming from familiar places in Tohoku where I had lived for nine years, being wiped out by the tsunami.

It was just a matter of a few days after the disaster when I had first heard of Linda’s fundraising idea that evolved into the successful event at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre in Vancouver with classical pianist Jon Kimura-Parker and a number of other musical groups.

I remember the seed of the idea—Linda wanted to collect cloth squares from school kids from across Canada that would contain messages of support for the victims. They would be sewn together and sent to Japan.

Without any prompting, my students brought in square pieces of cloth, as well as scrap red and black cloth from home. Even though we didn’t have any particular theme in mind at first those squares took on a distinctively Canadian theme as Hala almost subconsciously began cutting out the the first red maple leafs. Then, the other girls, including Viju, Nirali, and Abigail, the artsy ones, and boys, Ateeb and Sanad, followed suit, giving up precious recess time to carefully sew their squares in a quiet circle, in our sweltering portable, listening to “roots rock reggae”.

Even now, on the eve of the Canadian tour, I am reminded that the seed and the subsequent spirit that grew out of a child’s idea is not a uniquely Canadian one.

As a teacher and writer, I was always mindful that many of the families of my students had suffered devastating losses during the December 26, 2004 tsunami that took more than 230,000 lives in 14 southeast Asian countries, and other subsequent global disasters. My students rallied around me when I needed them most.

As part of the Peel District School Board’s 2011 Education Week assembly a month later, my class sang “What the World Needs Now Is Love” by Burt Bacharach. With images of the disaster showing overhead, the entire school of 900 silent, the principal weeping openly, other teachers wiped away tears too. And, for one precious moment, my global community, which includes Toronto, Mississauga, Sendai, Minamisoma, Matsushima, Vancouver, Seattle, Tokyo, and the myriad of other towns and villages in Tohoku that I fondly remember, became one.

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Q: First of all, welcome back. At how many locations were the letters displayed?

From June 2011 to February 2013, the cloth letters have been displayed in over 55 locations in Japan. The project grew from three original Canadian cloth letter quilts to over 30 large quilts, as young people all over Tohoku and Japan joined the project and added their letters.

The cloth letters were first displayed in Japan hanging off the bars of gymnasium windows in Yuriage, Miyagi-ken. The students of Yuriage Junior High School were the first to see our Canadian cloth letters, as we prepared for Canada Day on July 1, 2011, the official launch of this project in Tohoku and Japan.

These students had just lost their own school, fourteen classmates, and their homes to the giant tsunami. In July, these Yuriage teenagers were living in a community center shelter and bussing to a temporary school in a nearby town.

Q: What was the reaction of the students?

I will never forget that first day....As the large cloth letters from Canada unfolded, the students started to smile, then giggle, and finally laughed and clapped louder and louder as

they saw more. What a magical moment to share with them. Seeing their happiness made me realize that something special was in these cloth letters — the care and love from other kids.

In that summer of 2011, the Canadian cloth letters would travel to young people throughout the disaster area of Miyagi, Iwate, and Fukushima kens and nine new Tohoku cloth letters quilts joined the project.

Q: Any names and organizations that deserve special recognition?

This grassroots project has been so successful because so many individuals, cities, and groups joined together to make it happen.

Some of the key supporters include: Canadian Fishing Company (Vancouver) who helped ship the original cloth letters to Japan, and the students from York House School (Vancouver) who fundraised to help purchase painting supplies for over 700 students to make their Tohoku cloth letters.

Our Japan co-ordinator was Misaki Nagao of Onomichi, Hiroshima and our coordinator for the Tohoku area was Tsutomu Nambu of Sendai. Both of these volunteers were invaluable in moving this project around Japan so successfully.

Q: Any reflections on what the cloth letter tour meant to the Japanese?

It always surprised me how moved the Japanese were to see the cloth letters. It seemed to help them feel that they are not alone or forgotten, that someone cared. And it became a way for the Japanese to express themselves too. A simple idea that fit.

Q: Why do you want to bring the letters back to Canada now?

The first cloth letter was made on March 12, 2011 by my granddaughter in Vancouver. From there, it spread across Canada to Halifax, Toronto, Mississauga, Montreal, Winnipeg, Whitehorse, Peace River, Nanaimo, Steveston, Bowen Island, etc.

And, now, 24 months and thousands of letters later, the cloth letters return to where they began!

Q: What are your hopes for this Canadian tour?

My hope is that many Canadians, in many different cities and regions, have the opportunity to see these special and moving messages from the young people.

Q: What are the people in Tohoku still going through two years after 3/11?

Over two years after 3/11, it is estimated that over 320,000 displaced people are still living in cramped temporary housing in Tohoku. People whose homes, businesses, and all their belongings were suddenly lost in one afternoon in 2011.

Nuclear waste from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant continues to contaminate our earth. The largest number of people living in temporary housing is in Fukushima-ken.

Some of the young people who live about 20 km away from the Fukushima nuclear plant have written cloth letters. They tell us about their fears and dreams in the very moving “Minamisoma, Fukushima Cloth Letters.” The young people from Minamata in Kyushu have joined them.

Q: What is happening on a more personal/family level to the people of Tohoku?

Tohoku can be overwhelming for everyone.

It is a place where simple things give comfort and simple things stress people out.

One day a father, widowed and left with two young school aged children, suddenly broke down in utter defeat. He gave up! Why? Because he didn’t know how to iron his children’s clothes and his kids go to school looking messy. That was the final straw that broke his back.

Generally speaking, the Japanese outwardly seem to be very resilient, diligent, uncomplaining, and patient. This has certainly helped them cope with the disaster con-

ditions, but it has also caused emotional problems and extreme stress over time. People laugh and say they can’t even have a good argument with their husbands or kids anymore, because the walls of their temporary housing are paper thin. One woman smiled and said: “But there is still comfort to say or hear, ‘tadaima’, I’m home.”

Q: What kinds of feelings are the survivors sharing with you?

Often the process of making a documentary film is as, or more important than, the finished film itself. I believe this is the case with “Tohoku no Shingetsu”. It has given so many people the opportunity to talk about their feelings and experiences, sometimes for the first time since 3/11. Often they say thank you for the chance to do this, when it should be the other way around with me thanking them. A rewarding part of making this film is witnessing people get energized just from talking and sharing their experiences.

One example is an elderly samurai that I met in Minamisoma, 20 km from the Fukushima nuclear plant. The “Namaoi” is the most important cultural event for the area and people have said it is “their soul connection” to life here.

I asked the samurai if he would don his traditional samurai armor and walk down the mainstreet of the deserted town of Odaka. At the beginning he was limping down the empty street, but as he walked further and further, some type of “power” filled his body and he became a samurai warrior again. Even his eyes were filled with a wild strength in the end. He said he felt the change too.

Q: Helping the people of Tohoku has been a remarkable effort on your part ever since 3/11. Any thoughts about why this cause means so much to you?

There is no one answer to this. Maybe it’s because I am just a “Prairie girl” who grew up in a place where the community was built on people helping others who needed help. No questions asked, nothing expected in return. You just did what you could.

Maybe it’s because I am a mother and grandmother. Or a teacher and humanitarian responding to a place and people that have given me so much over the years. Maybe it’s because something inside me could not ignore of the horrors of the earthquake and tsunami and nuclear accident that I viewed on different media. It is also a harsh reminder that we in Vancouver and our own families could face a similar disaster one day.

There is comfort when Tohoku people, even little children, say, “If Vancouver has an earthquake, I will come to help.” Maybe it’s because once you go to Tohoku and experience the Tohoku people, you cannot walk away so easily. It is all the above and more, that maybe even I am really not aware of.”



People in Minami soma, Fukushima join the cloth letter project. Their community has also been affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster that contiunues to affect the entire region.