

Japan Rescued Polish Orphans from Siberia at the end of World War One



This is the story of when Japan rescued Polish orphans from Siberia at the end of World War One. I translated it from Japanese to English from the YouTube with the help of my Japanese friend Yoko Ishikawa:

The untold story of why Poland is friends with Japan!

Praise to the non-discriminatory Japanese nurse for her help and support.

This is a heart moving true story.

In 1989, Poland changed significantly due to democratization from the former communist bloc which resulted in its rapid economic growth. In 21 consecutive years, Poland's GNP has the only positive growth in Europe. It has maintained this growth in spite of the euro crisis and the collapse of Lehman Brothers.

Poland has a surprisingly warm friendly relationship with Japan. A popular department of the prestigious University of Warsaw is the Japan Department of Japanese martial arts boom such as kendo.

In 1920, after the First World War, during the civil war of the Russian Revolution, many Polish citizens were detained in Siberia. They could not use the land route of the Trans-Siberian Railway during the war to escape from Russia, and even if they did manage to return to Poland, their house was gone.

The Polish people were dying one after another in a land of extreme cold. Poland in an effort to save just the children who lost their parents, issued a letter, a life-saving petition to the United States and the United Kingdom. The petition asked for transportation and the assistance of orphans, but due to the tension of international relations, the reaction of the nations to Poland's request was indifferent and callous.

Poland then turned to Japan for help as its last hope.

The Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a prompt decision toward the relief of the orphans.

In late July, 1920, 56 orphans from Vladivostok arrived in Tokyo via Tsuruga, and were housed in a dormitory. At the time Japan had no formal diplomatic relations with Poland, and moreover, to comply with a request that was a costly and effort-consuming attempt to aid civilians in Siberia who were separated from their homeland was unusual.

And, from 1920 to 1922, a total of 5 times, 765 orphans from one year old to 16 years old were brought to Japan by ship, and they received a surprisingly warm hospitality. Orphans with lice on their heads or those who suffered from typhus and other bad health conditions and those who were starving were treated immediately after arrival by hard working Japanese Red Cross nurses.

News of the orphans was broadcast throughout Japan. As a result donations, toys, candy etc. were sent to the orphans. Volunteers provided dental treatment, hairdressing, entertainment, and consolation.

Entertaining and comforting the orphans was offered one after another. Also, Japanese children who were brought by adults to visit the Polish orphans, without hesitation gave them the clothes they were wearing and their hair ornaments. In addition, there was also the following episode.

A young Japanese nurse, Ms. Fumi Matsuzawa, who cared for a child with typhoid fever, said she wanted at the very least, for the child to die while holding the child in her arms. She continued to nurse the child without leaving him even for a moment.

Her effort was worth it and the child miraculously recovered, but Ms. Fumi herself was infected with typhoid fever, and eventually died from it. In addition, there is also a similar recollection of another child. "I had been suffering from a terrible skin disease, and medicine was applied all over my body. Then I was wrapped in a white cloth as mummy, and was taken to bed by the nurse.

When the nurse put me on the bed, she smiled and kissed my nose which was the only part of my face out of the cloth. I got the courage to live because of this kiss, and burst into tears.

The orphan children were thus touched by the warm hearts of the Japanese. They were pale skinned and skinny children when they first came to Japan, but by the time they left they were all healthy and became like a different person.

This was of course a wonderful thing, but it also meant that the day was approaching when the children would go back to their homeland.

Everyone was hoping that they would stay in Japan, the nation where the sun is pretty, a nation with beautiful summers, with a sea, where flowers are always in bloom.

When the orphans departed Japan, bananas and sweets were given to them. With sadness of heart, the Japanese who cared for them said goodbye, and the

children's eyes were full of tears.

The orphans yelled out from the deck of the ship, "arigato" (thank you) to the Japanese on shore. They also sang Japanese songs and showed much gratitude for the care they received.

The Japanese captain of the ship went to the orphans' quarters every night, and went to each bed, each child, and made sure the child was covered with a blanket up to his neck. He stroked the child's forehead to make sure the child did not have a fever.

Father's hand was surely so big, and warm, the child thought. They waited with half closed eyes for the captain to come around and see them.

After the children returned to Poland, they were housed in an orphanage. They grew up and went about their individual lives, but they knew it was the affection that was poured out to them in a foreign country that gave them the power to live.

This story has been buried in the vortex of history in Japan, and most of the Japanese have forgotten the event with the orphans from Poland. However, the Polish people themselves did not forget.

In 1980, a movement of democratization began in Poland. Mr. Lech Walensa who became the driving force behind it selected Japan for his first foreign visit destination. He visited Japan in May 1981. He found Japan to be a nation of peace and full of great potential. When Mr. Walensa returned home, he made a slogan calling Poland to become the second Japan.

In 1989, Poland was liberated from Communism and became the Republic of Poland.

Mr. Nagao Hyodo who served as the Polish ambassador from 1993, began to wonder why Poland is so pro-Japanese. He decided to determine the cause and spread the reason why.

In October 1995, eight of the Siberia orphans officially visited Japan.

Though the orphans were all older than 80 years old, their memories were still vivid, and they shared their feelings of gratitude. And, Mr. Nagao Hyodo until the last year of his term of office, piled up information of the exchanges with the orphans.

The Vice Chairman of the Far Eastern Commission, Mr Jozef, Yakubukebitchi, sent a thank-you letter to the Japanese government.

Polish nationals are a noble people, a nation that does not forget the kindness showed it. I would like the Japanese people to know that fact about Poland.

The Polish people have the deepest respect, the most warm friendship and affection for Japan. I want to tell the world about this.

An event to prove this took place in 1995. When the people of Poland heard news of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, they moved toward the relief of the affected area as soon as the very next day.

And, children who became orphans after the earthquake were invited to Poland where they received comfort and compassion.

Poland's local governments, companies, wealthy individuals, and artists, sent donations and gave support and aid.

At the end of the second visit, the earthquake orphans had a face-to-face meeting with the original Siberia orphans. They talked about the past and deepened their friendship. In 2006, the last of the Polish orphans, Ms. Antonina Lilo, died at the age of 90.

Before she had her last breath, she left a kind word. "Japan was like heaven on earth."

I hope many people will see this video.

If you wish to support this message, it would be greatly appreciated if you would click the like button.

Thank you for viewing this till the end.