

## *Letters from Japan*

*Kazuko Golden*

*This a letter that I sent to my former co-workers at All Kids Count(AKC) and The Taskforce for Child Survival and Development(TFCSD). Both of these organizations equalize and improve the standards of healthcare for children across the globe. They began as programs of The President Jimmy Carter Center and eventually branched out with The World Bank, the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization(WHO) the Rockefeller Organization and other healthcare organizations to build an independent entity. Now, they are closely working with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for Children on more extensive projects for children.*

*Many of my former co-workers were Peace Corp volunteers before working within the TFCSD. They spent many years working with children first hand. They firmly believe that creating higher standards of healthcare for children is the route to fighting for world peace. The projects of the TFCSD include fighting for the global eradication of Polio; improving vaccine supply and increase immunization levels in Eastern Europe and middle and low income countries; augmenting measles control and and addressing the world's priority health challenges. AKC advocates immunization registries and their goal is to ensure that all public and private providers use them.*

*The TFCSD and AKC'S work entails rigourous amounts of research, policy advocacy and the search for funding. Since they are no longer working out in the field, they are unable to experience instantaneous gratification for the results of their hard work. This is a letter that I wrote to share how people are currently in need of their expertise. I was fortunate enough to be able to enwrap Hiroshima into my story.*

*A question that is I am frequently asked is why I came to teach at Japan. One reason that I wanted to come to Japan is because my family is from Hiroshima and I've always wanted to visit and learn about how the city was able to rebuild after a nuclear war. In addition, I have worked extensively with children from many worn torn countries. Their disadvantages are determined by the situation and political atmosphere of their country. Their fate is often predetermined. I wanted to share those experiences with children in Japan and being of half Japanese ancestry I wanted to learn about the cultural traditions that Japanese children are growing up and respecting. My experiences so far have been very interesting.*

*“Let us become increasingly bold. . .  
Let us spread the word about what works. . .  
believing that we will make the difference  
for the children of the world, believing  
that we are guardians of not only their health  
but also their dreams  
because we most certainly are.”*

*William H. Foege, MD, MPH, Executive Director of the TFCSO 1984- 1999*

*January 18, 2001*

*The Taskforce for Child Survival and Development  
All Kids Count  
750 Commerce Drive  
Suite 400  
Decatur, Georgia 30030*

*Dear All Kids Count:*

*Hello, from Japan! Did you and your families celebrate the holidays? The New Year arrived quickly. It's hard for me to believe that I am in my fifth month teaching in Ashikaga-Shi, Tochigi-Ken, Japan.*

*I live an hour and a half outside of Tokyo city and I spent the New Year there. Traditionally, Japanese families might celebrate the New Year by eating soba (buckwheat) noodles and drinking sake (rice wine). Another common tradition is to eat a delicious food called mochi (Japanese rice cakes). Many families spend the entire day cleaning their houses. This is called soji and is comparable to spring cleaning in America. On New Year's Day, many people go to the local shrine where they pray for the New Year.*

*A few days after spending the New Year in Tokyo, I traveled to Hiroshima city. I spent five days there. I took the local train overnight from Ashikaga to Hiroshima. It was an adventurous 20-hour trek!*

*Hiroshima was an amazing city. I am so fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience it. Shortly after I arrived, I took a brief walk around Hiroshima's Peace Dome, the Peace Museum, Sadako's Peace Memorial, and Hiroshima's busy shopping district. In the days following, I saw Kintai Bridge (Hiroshima's Rainbow Bridge) and Iwakuni Castle, and the Itsukushima Shrine on Miyajima Island. I was awstruck by the beautiful ancient structures still exist on the outskirts of Hiroshima. Their beauty remains as landmarks to what existed before the Atom Bomb hit.*

*I ended my trip in Hiroshima by visiting the Peace Museum and Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park. It was a moving experience. I was amazed to learn about the series of events that followed the use of the first nuclear bomb. It was devastating to see both the remains, and the depiction of the Atom Bomb's effects on Hiroshima and its people.*

*The Peace Museum's exhibits on the main floor described the historical events that led up to the dropping of the Atom Bomb. On the second floor, some exhibits described the physics of nuclear weapons, the countries that are currently testing and creating nuclear weapons, and the effects of nuclear weapons on humans. Other exhibits displayed the remains of clothing and told the individual stories of children who were identified from their remains after the bomb exploded, the effects of the bomb on buildings in Hiroshima, and the efforts today of people protesting against nuclear arms.*

*As I walked around the Museum I noticed a woman who was probably my age holding the arm of a woman about the age of my mother. I couldn't help but wonder if they were mother and daughter and if they were survivors of the bomb. I also found myself walking among young, U.S. military soldiers, old and young people from America, Germany, Pakistan, India, Brazil, and other countries throughout the world. All were drawn to the Museum to witness how the nuclear bomb affected Hiroshima city, and the threat to us of its possible use today.*

*From the more than 200,000 people that disappeared in Hiroshima in August 1946 remain survivors who daily bear the effects of the bomb. There are still many people (called Hibakusha - Japanese for survivors of the bomb) who currently suffer from cancer, melanoma, leukemia, or birth defects. There is a large hospital in the center of the city dedicated to caring for the survivors. Many survivors passed genetic defects to their fetuses, and the illness lies dormant to be discovered at birth or later. Even today, when Hiroshima's citizens and children get sick, they have to wonder whether or not the sickness is temporary or if it is the start of a long-term illness that is a result of the bomb.*

*Near the Peace Museum's exit, you can read the comments and thoughts of other visitors. Included*

*amongst the millions of people who have walked through the Museum were comments from famous politicians, authors, and people from countries throughout the world. Many of them left behind a poetic sentiment. Their comments will remain as testimony to the effects of the Atom Bomb. I will never forget my trip to Hiroshima. My experiences there will always be inscribed in my memories.*

*On my return to Ashikaga I decided to save some time so I took the Shinkansen (bullet) train for part of my journey. The Type 500 Shinkansen is the fastest train in Japan. It travels at a maximum speed of 300 km/hour. It is mainly used between Tokyo and Hakata. I took the Type 700 Max Shinkansen train. It travels at a maximum speed of 285 km/hour and is used by travelers a majority of the time. It looks like a pelican but the funny shape helps reduce the noise created from the Shinkansen's fast speed.*

*During my five months in Japan I have learned a lot. It has been a great experience thus far. I hope you are all doing well. The work that you and the Task Force are committed to is often rigorous and demanding, but the most humane in nature. Your efforts perpetuate the advancement of better health care, and in the process you help to fight against great injustices. I will always value my experiences at the Carter Center, the Task Force, and AKC. I appreciate having had the opportunity to work with people doing amazing work.*

*Please keep in touch and have a wonderful holiday season. For you and your families, I wish you the best of health and I hope each year is more adventurous than your last. It is the beginning of a new century- Gunbatte kudasai!!!! (Keep Fighting!) Keep up the good work!*

*With the best of wishes,*

*Kazuko*