

Lost to the land of the rising sun

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Richmond school teacher Murray Wood kissed his two young children and waved goodbye as they boarded a plane to Japan.

Four months later, that image still haunts him.

His children, Takara, 10, and seven-year-old Manami were to visit their grandparents in Saitama, Japan but it was a ruse by Wood's ex-wife, Ayako Wood. On a cold November day last year, 37-year-old Ayako, – the noncustodial parent – abducted them.

Wood had sought and was granted full custody of both children in February 2004. An order was issued in B.C. Supreme Court instructing Ayako, to ensure the children were returned safely on Dec. 9.

"I waived my fears for the need for my children to have a relationship with their grandparents," said the distraught father during an interview at Errington elementary. "I didn't look into the depths of Japanese laws. I knew their grandparents, and I thought I could still get them back if anything happened."

His first inkling that something was terribly wrong was when Ayako's child support payment cheque bounced. Within days, Wood learned that Ayako, had vacated her home, left a trail of debt behind, and had taken a six-month leave from her job as a flight attendant at Air Canada.

"It is clear that she abducted the children to Japan in an attempt to escape the consequences of her behaviour here in Canada," said Wood.

Wood has placed a number of calls to his ex-in-laws but they always tell him the children are out.

"I spoke to their grandmother and she said she felt badly but she was more concerned about her husband's health (he's been ill for months) than in my getting the children back."

Wood spoke to the Richmond News in hopes of sparing other people his sadness and despair.

"Its been incredibly difficult. I have a lawyer here and in Japan and we are trying to get a hearing in front of a Japanese judge to have him apply Canadian law and set a precedent," he said. "I have since found out that there are lots of people who have experienced this same thing and there's never been a documented case of (abducted) children returned to Canada from Japan."

Wood wants parents to be aware of the growing problem of international parental abductions.

The federal government's SubCommittee on Human Rights and International Development put out a summary of findings in 1998 called *Issues for Reform* as well as a valuable *Manual for Parents*. Both are available online.

Meanwhile, local teachers and administrators have established a trust fund at the Broadmoor branch of Coast Capital Savings to help Wood with his mounting legal bills. Donations can be made electronically at branch #19140809, account number 021000508267. There is also a fundraiser planned at the Richmond Winter Club, 5540 Hollybridge Way on Wednesday, April 6 from 4 to 7 p.m. Tickets are \$15 for a drink and snack. For more information, phone 604-668-6699. If you or anyone you know has any information which could help Wood get his children back contact the National Missing Children's Service at the RCMP at 613-993-1525 or toll free 1-877-3183576.