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## Gabriolans rally for return of children abducted to Japan

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It is heart-breaking and a violation of basic human rights. But is it enough for the prime ministers of Canada and Japan, and others who have the power to put an end to what is increasingly a haven for international parental child abduction?

At a time when the world is awash in events beyond our control, in fact, spinning out of control, some Gabriolans are trying to do something positive, adding their voices to the chorus that is demanding the return of Takara and Manami Maniwa-Wood to their home and native land.

*Sounder* readers are familiar with the story of the father and legal custodian Murray Wood's fight to have his children returned after their abduction by their non-custodial mother, resulting in a complete loss of contact and communication. The grandparent's, Gabriola residents, Marilyn and Ian Wood are also actively involved on a daily basis.

Among more than 25 locals who have written compelling letters of support are: children's author Sandy Duncan, novelist, Fellow, Royal Society of Canada and Professor Emeritus, McGill University, Georges Szanto, and his wife, Alison (Kit) Szanto and Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta, Gary Prideaux.

However, it is the letters written by cousins Keegan Richter (age 10) and his sister Mairi (12) that spell out the reality in large letters and eloquent, unmistakable language.

"Right now we are near the ocean on Gabriola Island at our grandparents and it is high tide," Keegan wrote Prime Minister Stephen Harper. "I wish Taka and Mana were here to swim and play in the water... I can only remember what they look like because we have pictures. They have missed two Christmas times, two Easters and we have not seen each other on our birthdays. I will be in Grade 5 next year. I was in Grade 3 when I last saw them.

"Please will you help get our cousins back? If you have kids, you will know how we feel about them. I miss them and love them lots."

This from Mairi to our PM: "I don't think anyone can imagine how hard it is on our family, on their family... one of our dogs Galena is 14 years old, almost 90 in dog years... she was there when we are all little babies... and if Taka and Mana don't come back soon they might not be able to say goodbye when she dies and leaves this earth. I miss them beyond imagination and want them to come back to their native home."

Duncan worries about their psychological health with obvious justification. So does Kit Szanto who wrote: "The longer the children we know remain with their (unfortunately emotionally unstable) mother the harder it will be to grow up as happy well adjusted kids. Their future is at stake - and it is frustrating to wait, knowing this while the wheels of international diplomacy and justice


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work their slow way through the issue.”

George Szanto notes that Japan has “rightly taken a strong stand against Korean abductions of Japanese youth,” and quotes a high-ranking Japanese official who said, “the abductions issue should be resolved from the standpoint of human rights.”

A member of the wealthy Group of Seven countries, Japan alone has not signed the 1980 Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

The convention, ratified by 75 other countries, clearly and unequivocally specifies that any child removed by one parent without the permission of the other must be returned, and that custody issues be resolved in the original country.

Prideaux who taught in Japanese universities and “loves the country and people very much,” wrote to the Ambassador of Japan asking him to do the “right and honourable thing. Return the children to Canada and to their father.

“Failure to do so will fuel the growing, but apparently accurate, perception that Japan holds itself above international law.”

The letters were written in the hope that Harper would raise the issue during the visit of Prime Minister Koizumi to Ottawa late last month and again at the recent G-8, where the agenda was unexpectedly taken up with events in the Middle East.

After the earlier meeting, Harper urged Japan to sign the convention, “an agreement that provides concrete and effective civil remedies to child abduction. Koizumi said: “we would like to engage in consultations with the Government of Canada and cooperate as much as possible on this matter.”

There are 23 such cases in Canada, more than 70 in the US and many in the UK, Australia and other places.

“We can win this thing; we can get the kids back, but we need support,” say Ian and Marilyn Wood.

How? You could E-mail the Japanese Ambassador to Canada: [sadaaki.numata@mofa.go.jp](mailto:sadaaki.numata@mofa.go.jp), write MPs, MLAs, the PM, Ministers of Justice and Foreign Affairs to take action.

Or you could simply drop by Artworks and sign the petition that is now available there. And be sure to take your children and grandchildren along.

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