

Mari Takada on Miki Sawada

Miki Sawada is known as a mother of two thousand children. She founded Elizabeth Thunder's Home, an orphanage and school to many racially mixed children, particularly of American decent, who were born between American military servicemen residing in Japan and Japanese women after the Second World War. Racially mixed children were regarded as shame and many were thrown away in streets and rivers. She raised the children as her own, and also put them to many foster homes. In later years, having realized the indefinite reality and prejudice in Japan, she moves to Brazil and purchases land to establish a farm to enhance independence of the children. Until the day she dies, she kept in contact with as many of her children as possible, after they left her home, traveling outside the country to visit them, and dedicated her life to continue working for children.

Miki was born in 1901, a granddaughter to Yataro Iwasaki, founder of the Mitsubishi group, a major conglomerate in Japan. She was a very active girl in her youth, surrounded by three older brothers and two younger sisters. She studied at the most prestigious womens university, but later decides to drop out and learn English from Umeko Tsuda, founder of Tsuda Womens University and a woman who dedicated her life to women's education. She married Renzo Sawada, a diplomat, at the age of 20 and converts to Christianity. As the diplomat's wife, she moves around the world, to such places as Argentina, Beijing, London, Paris and New York. With her skills in English and her open character, she easily blends in with the "high" society and broadens her network that would affect her later life. At the same time, she starts feeling empty, questioning the meaning of her life, and how it was affecting others for the better.

Soon after, she returns to Japan and the Second World War breaks out. She lost one of her youngest sons in that war, the Mitsubishi dynasty is torn apart, and her family loses everything that they had built. And in that time of despair, an incident occurs that changes her life forever. She was riding a train, when a parcel drops in front of her. As she was trying to put it back to its place, a police officer comes by and demands to see what was inside. It was a racially mixed baby, dead. As mentioned previously, this was a time when many racially mixed babies were thrown away. She gets accused of trying to dispose a baby with "the enemy's blood", but firmly denies, willing to get examined by a doctor to see whether she had recently given birth. Her accusation is cleared, but she considers this a calling from god, and decides to devote her life to help the orphans.

Though she had the understanding and support from her husband and family, all family assets were taken away. She was told to buy back the family's second home, for 4 million yen. She sells what she could of her possession, and with a general donation from Elizabeth Thunder, whom the facility is named after, she builds the orphanage and school. Her facility becomes a target of criticism, from both Japanese and American governments, as well as the locals. But she never gave in, and in total, she took in and raised two thousand children.

She was a very religious woman, and underlining her actions were her devotion to Christianity. Her beliefs lead her to save many lives that would have been lost otherwise. She was also a woman with many privileges. Born into the Mitsubishi family, she received the best education possible, and was given access to many resources and connections. She married a man who opened her world in a different level. It was in London when she first visited an orphanage that would give her the idea to start her own. She was able to use all of it to the fullest, in order to fulfill her goals, which helped others. Many of those whom she befriended during her time abroad with her husband adopted children she had taken into her care. She was able to bring her beliefs, people, and a dream together to accomplish something that affected lives of many.

Many people see her story as one about a strong woman, who had enough money to build a home and school for the children who were abandoned. But in between all that she accomplished, she was a very vulnerable person, who would cry herself to sleep in fear of the threats that she had been receiving from the society and constantly worrying about what would become of the children that grow up in her care, when they go out into

the real world, a world full of prejudice and discrimination. But with the support of those around her, she was able to accomplish what she aimed to do. This always reminds me that when there is a belief and idea one strongly believes in, when asking the right people, there will be a way to achieve it. Also, though it was not successful and many children were opposed to the idea, she had the courage to move to Brazil, for everyone's best interests. I applied and came into this class, with hopes in trying to deal with the social pressure I feel when I go back home. Though obviously very different in terms of scale, I would like to keep in mind that staying and trying to change may not always be the optimal solution.

Reference:

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"Yoshiaki was born and died in war", Miki Sawada, 2001