

2022 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Children's Category – 3rd Prize】

Values We Must Not Change

(Original in Japanese)

Mayu Someya

(Age 14, Japan)

Joso Gakuin Junior High School, Ibaraki

During the May holiday week, I took a walk with my grandmother. The rice paddies were filled with water, which shimmered as it reflected the May sky and the fresh greenery. The cool breeze felt good. As I passed by the elementary school, I remembered the large stone monument that stood in front of it. I had gone there every day for six years, but this was the first time I really noticed it. I asked my grandmother what the monument was for. With a slightly gloomy look on her face, she told me that this monument was built as a shrine for the souls of those who died in the war.

My grandmother invited me to go up and take a closer look. It was an impressive stone monument, nearly three meters tall. On it was written: “*Chūkōhi* (monument to the faithful who died in battle).” There was a light green moss growing on the monument, as though it had been there for a long time.

“It’s so big,” I said spontaneously. After a short pause, my grandmother said, “If they didn’t put up this monument, the parents who lost their children in the war wouldn’t have been able to feel at peace. Even now, the pain and grief for those who died still has not gone away. This area lost a great many people in the war.”

There was another stone monument next to it, with the names of many people who died in the war. Each name represented a life. In my history lessons on the war, I had learned that many people died in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in the Tokyo air raids. But I was surprised to find that there were still scars from the war right in my own neighborhood.

My grandmother told me that even after the war was over, many people's lives did not return to normal. For years after the war, people who had lost their homes, their families, and everything lived on the streets, and came to her house almost every day to ask for *onigiri* (rice balls).

"I'm sure they wanted to live longer, and wanted to do more." My grandmother gently stroked the monument with her hand. I put my own hand on it, too. It was a little rough, but warm. Then, without saying a word, we put our hands together in prayer.

When I got back home, I looked up "*chūkōhi*" on the internet. I was amazed to see how many such monuments there were — maps came up completely filled with little markers. When I saw this, I couldn't help but look away. *Could there really be so many? No way...* In the city of Joso, where my elementary school was, there were 18 sites, and in neighboring Tsukuba there were nearly 50. All over Japan, there were so many scars from the war. They were silent scars, yet they had not vanished. The war was not that long ago. And peace is not absolute.

Day after day, the TV shows news from Ukraine. There have been reports of nonresistant civilians being killed, with their hands and feet tied. It is frightening to me. Those Ukrainian people have done nothing wrong, and even now, they should be living a happy life, no different from ours. The war took that away. It pains my heart to see those unbelievably cruel news reports.

Even though we learn in school about the Sustainable Development Goals, I feel helpless because I am unable to do anything. Every moment, precious lives are being snatched away. My grandmother says that what is happening in Ukraine seems to overlap with her own experiences.

It's said that in the Meiji period, a bag of rice cost two yen, and a thousand yen was enough to build a house. Now, we can't build a house with even 10,000 yen. The value of money has changed. The value of money and goods will change, but there are some values that should not change. The importance of human life and peace should be our most cherished values. But

in reality, the interests of the country are sometimes placed above human life. I strongly believe that we must do all we can to uphold our most essential values.