
OBON SOCIETY

Connecting Families..... Healing Hearts



This long-overdue newsletter was delayed because OBON SOCIETY staff became overwhelmed by the response they received from their appearance on CBS Sunday Morning.

This following account will give you more details about these busy past several months.

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~ OBON on CBS ~

Last November a New York producer from CBS SUNDAY MORNING contacted OBON SOCIETY. They wanted to tell our story. First we needed to find two families who were willing to be interviewed in front of a camera. We knew this wouldn't be easy; fortunately CBS was very patient.



Our staff and scholars worked day and night searching for the relatives in Japan who belonged to the *Yosegaki Hinomaru* we had been sent. They found many families, but we could not find anyone willing to express their feelings on camera. By April, after six months of intensive work, we were growing frustrated and weary. It seemed like the CBS program might never happen.

Suddenly, out of the blue, the White House announced that President Obama would be visiting Hiroshima. This would mark the first time a President of the United States visited the site where America dropped an atomic bomb. It was a short notice; the visit would happen in a couple weeks.



This historic reconciliation between the United States and Japan, in many ways, was remarkably similar to the work being done by OBON SOCIETY. However, instead of merely connecting world leaders, we connect the actual families who have been directly impacted by the war.

CBS Sunday Morning producers saw this as a perfect moment to tell the OBON SOCIETY story.

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~ OBON on CBS ~

An urgent call from New York announced the production would be "fast tracked" to coincide with the President's visit to Hiroshima. Mr. Lee Cowan, who hosted the production, was scheduled to fly up from Los Angeles to Astoria; the film crew would meet him there in a couple days.

The producer requested names, background information, historic photographs, and connections to Japanese television stations who had stock footage. The weekend passed in a blink. By Monday night the OBON SOCIETY staff was completely exhausted; interviews were scheduled for early the next morning.



The Columbia River Maritime Museum opened their doors early so the film crew could set up to interview Rex and Kieko Ziak prior to the arrival of the visitors.



The crew next flew to Las Vegas to interview Terry Stockdale. Another crew, headquartered in Tokyo, interviewed the son and daughter of the Mr. Yoshigusu Kishi. The footage was sent to New York where editors and producers worked to rapidly pull the production together. The OBON SOCIETY interview aired on May 29th, the first Sunday after President Obama's visit to Hiroshima.

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~ OBON on CBS ~

This is a link to the broadcast!

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-flags-of-their-fathers/>



*At 6:50 A.M. on Sunday the first email arrived. Many others soon followed.
This is a sampling of a few of the messages sent to OBON SOCIETY.*

Subject: Japanese Flag

Message

I have a flag my father brought back from the Pacific. He was in the 4th Marine Division, on Iwo Jima, Saipan and Tinian. He was awarded the Bronze Star and Silver Star. I think I would like to return this flag. Please advise as to the process to do so. Thank you.

Subject: World War II Japanese Flag

Message

My dad gave me a flag he obtained during WWII. It appears to be made of silk and is still in very good condition. I would like to send some pictures to get some idea of whether you think it could possibly be returned to the appropriate survivor(s). Please send email address and I will send pictures with as much history of the flag and how my dad came into possession as I have. Thanks.

Subject: My Father's Flag

Message

Good Grief I am so touched by your extremely valuable work. I just found you thanks to the CBS program that aired a few moments ago. I hope that you are prepared for the deluge of flags that is about to come your way; that deluge will include a flag that my Father brought home with him. I will search for it now and be in touch very soon.

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Within two days the packages containing flags began to arrive. At first we carried the envelopes home in our arms; within a week the post office workers handed us plastic crates overflowing with envelopes.



The process of documenting the contents of each envelope is meticulous work requiring scanning, photography, cataloging and entering this information and images into a retrievable data base, then putting the items into archival storage.



Hundreds of hours were spent carefully documenting these arrivals. The weeks passed very quickly...soon the months of June, July and August had passed.

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The flags came at us in a seemingly endless stream. The design and composition of each flag represented the unique creativity of every individual family. Along with the flags came the stories from the Americans of how and where they were obtained. The stories were as varied and unique as each flag.

Subject: The Japanese War Trophy flag

Message

I have such a flag, it was my uncle's, from the Island of Pelelieu, December, 1944. My uncle was 24 at the time and a lieutenant, beach commander of several men, most of whom died. . He died in 1991 and I discovered it among his possessions in a red laquer Japanese cabinet by his bed. He had never mentioned it. To him the atrocities of that war were unspeakable, he died too young, but we have his letter from that Christmas. "Bury me here with my men". I'll copy this flag and send it to you.



Subject: Flag

Message

I just watched your segment on CBS Sunday Morning. My dad fought in WW II. He was in the Phillippines, New Guinea and Japan. I have one flag that he brought back. I do not know where he got the flag. My dad passed in 1975. The flag has some writing and possibly bloodstains. I will mail you the flag. Thank you for what you are doing. Richard.



Subject: Japanese Flag

Message

I have a flag my father recovered on either the Island of Roi-Namur, Tinian, Saipan, OR Iwo Jima. My father was a US Marine that was in all 4 battle campaigns. We do not know which one island he recovered this from, as he is deceased. I saw your segment on CBS Sunday morning news, and this inspired me to return this item to bring closure to families, I have struggled with this thought for years and it has come to me to do the right thing.

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~ The Spooner & Soma families ~

Mr. Chris Spooner sent OBON SOCIETY an envelope containing two flags and a descriptive note. One of the flags had been severely damaged; the other appeared rather typical. Along with the flags was a letter, reproduced below with the kind permission of the author.

1. The two enclosed Flags were brought home by my father Clifford Spooner. He was either a Lieutenant or a Captain in the Army, 1st Cavalry Division. His unit was in or near Tacloben, Luzon, Philippines from April through November 1945. We also believe he was in Tokyo during September 1945. We have a envelope he wrote to his Mom, that was postmarked Sep 3, 1945 NAVY. We understand he spent some time on the USS Missoula



We saw the segment about the Obon Society on the Sunday Morning program. We knew we had a flag stored that was from my father. We had no idea what these flags meant or that there were so many of them. When we looked for the flag we found two flags. Neither are in as good shape as the ones we saw on the program. We are so sorry these flags were not returned sooner. We just didn't know... We sincerely hope you will be able to return these flags to the rightful families.

Sincerely,

Chris Spooner

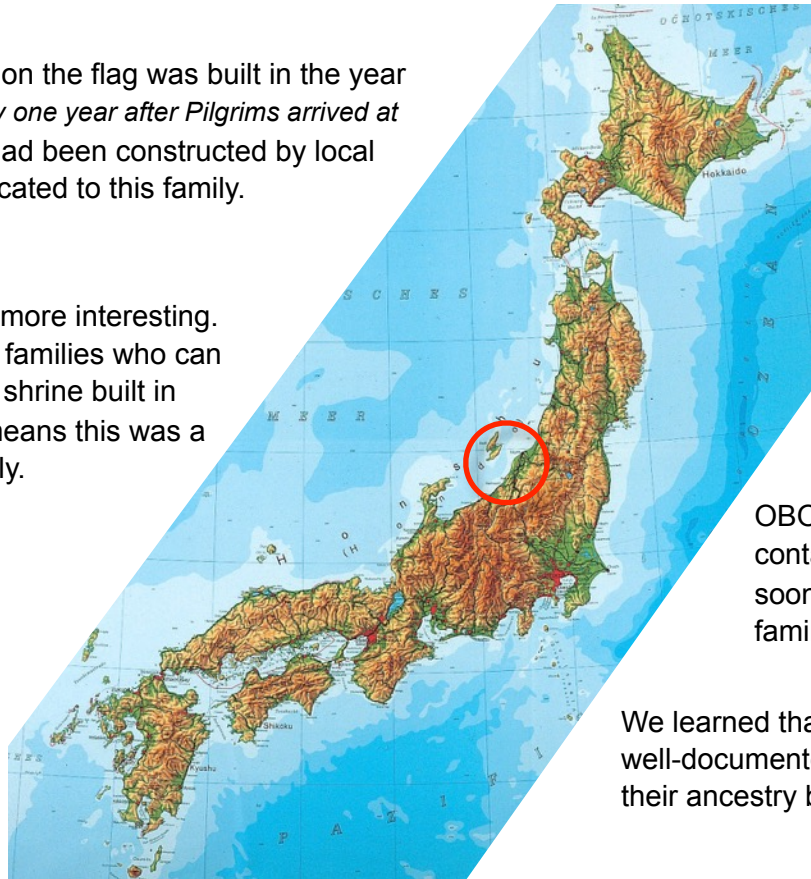
On one of the flags (*above left*) the Japanese family had written the name of a specific shrine. This precise detail gave our scholars all they needed to quickly pinpoint of origin of the flag, which led us to a rural region of Japan several hundred miles north of Tokyo.

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~ The Spooner & Soma families ~

The shrine named on the flag was built in the year 1621 (approximately one year after Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth Rock.) It had been constructed by local residents and dedicated to this family.

Now the story grew more interesting. There are not many families who can claim to have had a shrine built in their honor, which means this was a very significant family.



OBON SOCIETY staff made contact with local officials who soon were in touch with the family.

We learned that this family had a long, well-documented history...they traced their ancestry back for 35 generations.

The news of the existence of this family heirloom caught the family off-guard. They could not imagine how, after so many years, this miracle could happen. They wanted to receive this heirloom of their missing relative.

Chris Spooner wrote a letter to the family which OBON SOCIETY staff translated into Japanese and sent with the flag back to Japan. This family-to-family connection is often requested by the people who contact us.

The return of a missing family member of this old and prominent family was very big news. Television and newspaper reporters converged on this remote region to cover the story; government officials arrived to take part in the return. The soldier's younger brother (88 years old) and sister (79) continue to live in that same area where their family has resided for more than 1,000 years.



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~ The Spooner & Soma families ~



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~ The Spooner & Soma families ~

The elderly brother of the soldier, who still vividly remembers the day his brother left home, wrote a letter expressing his gratitude.

August 10, 2016

Dear Mr. Chris Spooner and OBON Society:

My brother, Shigeharu's personal belonging; Japanese flag came home yesterday, 71 years after the end of the war.

I must say thank you from bottom of my heart to you, who maintained the flag such a long time with care, and to OBON Society, who made a tremendous effort for the return.

I never had any of my brother's personal belongings but this flag is indeed not only his memento but also it is his soul. I now recall feeling proud and ecstatic the time when my brother went off to war, and at the same time I deeply think about the preciousness of peace.

Thank you again and I am wishing you, Mr. Spooner and OBON Society, to have much continued good fortune and good health.

Sincerely,

Sadaharu Soma



クリス・スプーナー 様

OBON・SOCIETY 様

昨日、戦後71年経って兄繁治の遺品である「日章旗」が私ども遺族のもとに帰って来ました。

これまで長い間、丁寧に持ってくださった貴方様始め、返還にお力添え下さった「OBON・SOCIETY」の皆様にご心より感謝申し上げます。

これまで兄の遺品は何一つありませんでしたがこの日章旗は唯一の形見であり、魂そのものであります。兄が戦争へ出征した頃を思い出し感懐ひとしおであります。そして平和の尊さを改めて考えさせられます。

本当にありがとうございました。貴方様のご健康とご多幸をそして「OBON・SOCIETY」ご活躍をお祈り申し上げます。

2016年8月10日

日本国秋田県大仙市神宮寺字八石56
相馬貞治

Dear Rex & Keiko and Staff:

Thank you isn't enough to say. Yesterday when we received your "Final Report" we were tearful and speechless. We are so thankful we saw the program which told us of the importance of these precious flags. The picture you included of Mr Soma's brother receiving the flag brought tears to our eyes. We feel a connection to these people we will never meet.

Most Sincerely,
Chris and Pat Spooner

Contact OBON SOCIETY

If you have a flag, or know someone who does, please contact OBON SOCIETY. We will return it to its proper family in Japan and happily answer any questions you might have.

OBON SOCIETY
P.O. Box 282
Astoria, Oregon 97103
contact@obonsociety.org

Urgent support needed! Can you help us move forward?

The OBON SOCIETY outgrew its former home. We have found the perfect office space and as soon as we can purchase the equipment, furniture and shelving for storage, we will be ready to move in. This larger office will allow us to process the flags in a timely and more efficient way.



**Supporting us could not be easier,
and it's tax deductible!**

We have a PayPal account all set up that accepts major credit cards.

<http://obonsociety.org/donate/>

Or, you can send a check directly to our post office.

OBON SOCIETY
P.O. Box 282
Astoria, Oregon 97103

**The OBON SOCIETY is a charitable gift-dependent initiate.
If you would like help us continue our work, this is the time to contribute.
*Thank you for your support!***

OBON SOCIETY is a project of Astoria Visual Arts, Inc.,
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Contributions to OBON SOCIETY are tax deductible
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