

~ AUTUMN/WINTER - 2017 ~

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# OBON SOCIETY

*Connecting Families..... Healing Hearts*

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Marvin Strombo becomes acquainted with Endo,  
OBON SOCIETY's representative in Japan

## **The Marvin Strombo Story** **Part II**

The holiday season is a good time for us to pause,  
take a look back at a very busy year for OBON SOCIETY  
and one remarkable story whose message traveled around the world.

## August 11th

Japanese television journalists were awaiting Marvin's arrival at the Tokyo airport. On the bus ride from the airport to the hotel Keiko explains to Marvin the upcoming itinerary. We had made a gentle schedule so he would not become exhausted, but this later proved to have been unnecessary. We were over cautious. Marvin had a lot of energy, and he was prepared for any adventure.



We expected Marvin to immediately go to bed and have a long sleep, but he wasn't tired. Despite the fact he had been awake for more than 22 hours straight, Marvin joined the family for a large dinner and happily became familiar with Sake, for the second time.

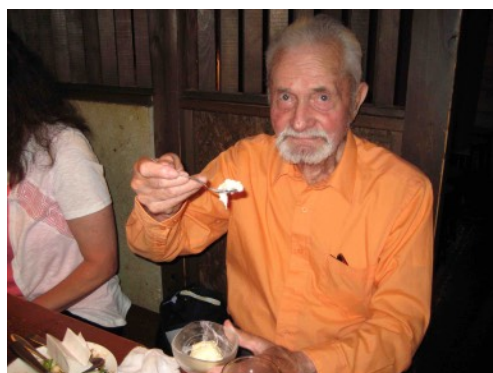
Sake is a mildly alcoholic drink made primarily from rice and water which Marvin first discovered back in 1945. Now, seated with his family and OBON SOCIETY staff over a plate of asian food Marvin quickly became reacquainted. *"I liked it then and I like it now"* he declared. *"I haven't had Sake since I was in Nagasaki.....hey...this sort of sounds good,"* Marvin exclaimed. *"Sake in Nagasaki!"*

## August 12th

Bright and early the next morning Marvin was up for a hearty breakfast with his family, followed by another television interview.



We thought Marvin would want an afternoon nap but instead he went out exploring the city and looked forward to another dinner and dessert with his family, and another glass of Sake.



## August 13th

Marvin's knowledge of WWII did not come from something he had read in a book; he had fought the Japanese hand to hand. Marvin expressed respect for the Japanese soldier's valor; he called them "warriors." Marvin learned that Japan did not have a national cemetery for their veterans, but instead there was a shrine where the spirits of soldiers reside. He said he would like to visit the famous Yasukuni Shrine.



From there it was a short distance to Japan's military museum, which includes a display from the war for the Pacific. He paused with Brenda, Emily and Sandra in front of a Japanese Zero and rolled through the exhibits, examining the portraits to the soldiers Japan has sent to fight against the America, and other displays.



Marvin's stamina was incredible. After the visit to the shrine and museum he entered directly into a press conference. Despite being a Sunday afternoon a large number of journalist were waiting to hear Marvin's story.



The idea of a WWII veteran traveling 5,000 miles to return a battlefield souvenir directly to the family was beginning to enthrall the media.

**August 14th**

The following day we packed up and departed Tokyo. Our group had to reposition ourselves closer to the village in the mountains of Gifu Prefecture. Marvin eagerly faced the five hour journey with enthusiasm. The first leg was aboard the ultra-modern, high-speed Shinkansen (bullet train).



That afternoon we arrived in Takayama City and checked into a hotel. But there was no time to relax; Marvin had people waiting for him.



Marvin had been invited to meet the city mayor of Takayama. In the main conference room his daughters looked on with pride from the side of the massive conference table.

OBON SOCIETY provided Marvin with a simultaneous translator from the first day he arrived so he would understand everything said, and be able to easily reply. Kieko was at his side from morning until night and helped him get the fullest out of this experience.



Mr. Tanaka, the Shinto Priest who assisted OBON SOCIETY in their search for the family, greeted Marvin at the train station. Later that afternoon we visited Hida Gokoku Shrine, where Mr. Tanaka offered a prayer over the flag Marvin would return the following day.



## August 15th

Early the next morning we began the final leg of our journey. After a couple hours of train ride and a half hour of bus, Marvin finally reached the rural village where the family lives. A gentle, warm rain was falling.

Marvin had captured this flag in late June of 1944, and for more than 73 years it had been in his possession. On this day he would return it to the family.

All that was known was that Marvin would be meeting the soldier's 93 year old sister, an 89 year old brother and an 82 year old younger sister.



Upon arriving Marvin was greeted by Tatsuya Yasue. The two men connected immediately, held hands and had their arms around each other as if they themselves were long-lost brothers.



The local government informed us they were expecting five journalists. Little did anyone realize that this story had gone global and the cameramen followed Marvin and Tatsuya like swarm of bees.



Later at the ceremony, after several speeches had been delivered, it was time for Marvin to return the flag. He handed it to Tatsuya who unfurled it and immediately pressed the heirloom to his face, later explaining he was trying to smell the scent of his brother, which he claims he can still remember after all these years. Then it was given to the 93 year old sister for her to hold.



Marvin stood at the podium and told the story about that day on Saipan when he encountered this deceased soldier.

Sentence by sentence Marvin's story was translated in Japanese. You could have heard a pin drop; the family and everyone there hung onto every word of Marvin's story.



Then Tatsuya stood and expressed his gratitude for Marvin's efforts. The family was very grateful to finally to know where and when their brother died, and also that he had perished bravely on the frontline of battle.



Marvin was busy being interviewed by journalists representing AP, the Washington Post, Stars and Stripes, The Military Times, NHK and a host of other news agencies. This was followed by another press conference and more photographs.

Tatsuya invited Marvin and his family to visit his family home which had been constructed in the early 1600's. This was the family home where the *Yosegaki Hinomaru* had originated more than seven decades earlier. The media was already there awaiting Marvin's arrival.



The *Yosegaki Hinomaru* was respectfully placed at the family shrine where the brother's portrait rested.



Then Marvin's family sat down with Tatsuya's family and enjoyed a conversation and cup of tea that had been harvested from the tea plants grown locally.



Marvin's mission was complete. This family heirloom had finally returned home, they had learned about the fate of their missing brother and a powerful, healing message of reconciliation had been carried throughout Japan, across America and around the world.

Before returning back to the United States Marvin Strombo, along with daughters Sandra Williamson, Brenda Strombo, Emily Williamson and Joseph Tachovsky, paused for a portrait with some of the OBON SOCIETY staff and volunteers who helped plan, organize and document this journey to Japan.



**OBON SOCIETY's mission is to connects families who've suffered from war,  
and provide closure, healing and reconciliation  
through returning *Yosegaki Hinomaru* (Good Luck Flags).**

We receive requests for assistance many times every day  
and work hard to keep up with the sincere demand.

If you would like to be a part of this peaceful effort...  
to help us serve more families,  
we certainly welcome your support and contributions.

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P.O. Box 282  
Astoria, Oregon 97103**

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**OBON SOCIETY is a 501(c)(3) non-profit.**

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