



**An Interview with Mr.Keizo Shiokawa,
Director of “Conquering the Darkness – The Fight Against Memories of Abuse”
Winner of the 2006 ABU CASBAA UNICEF Child Rights Award**

*Keizo Shiokawa, the **Director of Conquering the Darkness – The Fight Against Memories of Abuse**, answers questions on his award winning documentary. Produced by Kansai Telecasting Corporation, the feature length documentary, nationally broadcast in Japan, has initiated a debate on child abuse throughout the country. The documentary follows Aya, a 33-year-old mother who suffered abuse as a child and subsequently abused her own children. This documentary is the result of a year-long reportage of a parent’s personal struggle to end the cycle of child abuse in the family.*

Keizo Shiokawa is honored that the documentary won this year’s Child Rights Award. He hopes that by receiving this award, other broadcasters might air the programme and increase pressure for legislation and action against child abuse.

How did you develop the idea for the documentary? How did you find the character whose story you tell?

Kansai Telecasting Corporation first broadcast a documentary on the reality of child abuse in Japan 18 years ago. From then, the Corporation has been involved with supporting the establishment of a non-government organization called The Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse. We always felt that it was our responsibility as a media company to raise questions by using visual images about the situation and revealing the feelings of children being abused daily in their own homes, but no one was willing to cooperate in our filming. Two years ago, we met a mother who continually abused her children. She accepted our request for an interview. After that first meeting, we were able to build a mutual trust between ourselves and the mother and her children, and our cameras were allowed into their daily lives.

What were the challenges in telling such an intimate story and tackling such a sensitive issue?

Children have the “right not to be filmed” and the “right not to be broadcast” and so the responsibility of the children’s futures after a broadcast lies with the television station. The 13 and 14 year old brothers understood the meaning of being filmed for television. If they didn’t want to be filmed, they would tell the cameraman to stop, and there was mutual understanding in our filming. However trying to explain to the youngest brother, aged eight, was often more difficult. Our staff reaffirmed the principle of not filming or broadcasting anything that could be harmful to children.

What has been the reaction from audiences after watching the film? Has it generated debate on the subject of child abuse?

After the programme was broadcast, we received 60 emails and 20 faxes: a total of 80 correspondences both with comments of approval and disapproval. Many wrote that they also

had been abused as a child and described the pain they still suffered. There were also criticisms of the mother, and calls for more help for the children. Let me share one with you. *"I am a single mother aged 37. I was also badly abused by my mother. When I was in junior high school the psychological stress seems to have made me physically ill, causing stomach pains and asthma. The abuse from my mother escalated when I was in 3^d year junior high and was bullied by my classmates. When I was 27 and unmarried, I gave birth to my son who is now 10 years old. It was when he was 3 years old that I was told he had Asperger's syndrome and pollen allergy. It's still hard to raise him. When my son's behavior takes a turn for the worst, I can't help hitting him. I'm afraid one day I'll kill him!"*

Why do you think it is important to make films like this on sensitive but often taboo child rights issues?

Today in Japan, it is estimated that one child dies every three days of causes suspected to be related to abuse. The Japanese Government signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994, after it was adopted by the United Nations in 1989. Japan seems like an advanced nation, and yet as a society, awareness of child abuse is low. This is also reflected in the government budget. The budget for the elderly is seven times that for children. Child counseling centres cannot adequately care for cases of abuse. We need to illustrate this reality using actual examples to let other countries know about the reality of Japanese welfare. Hopefully this increased awareness can help other children in Asia and lead to the improvement of child rights throughout the world.

Are you working on another documentary project now?

I am currently working on a programme to widen knowledge of and to support developmental disorders. According to a government survey, there are 680,000 children in Japan with development disorders. Unlike conventional intellectual disabilities, children with Aspergers' syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities (LD), look normal but have extremely poor communication skills. This autumn I directed a documentary about the process of accepting disabilities, and eventually conquering these disabilities. It focuses on a 15 year old boy whose family could no longer take care of him, the family's anguish of how they dealt with his case, and the questions: what have we learned from professional care? What should the family learn? The programme also introduces means of support. I hope the documentary raises more understanding of developmental disorders within our society. I believe this can lead to a better and more humane society.
