

Hanako's Future

OITA National College of Technology

Hello everyone. We are from Oita National College of Technology. My name is Miura Nozomi. My name is Koishi Mayuko. And my name is Hosoi Takami. We are going to talk about pedal sewing machines and our volunteer activity. OK, let's get started. I'd like to introduce Hanako to you. We received a letter from an old lady in Oita city. She is 80 years old. Her letter was full of a mother's affection about Hanako.

"To my dear Hanako. You came to my house 60 years ago. I don't want to part with you, but I will be 80 years old soon and my eyesight has been too poor to look after you. So I have been thinking of burying you on our mountain before I die. But now I want you to leave here and help people again just like you've helped me for these 60 years: this time, not in Japan but in Thailand. Thank you for living with me, Hanako!"

This letter was attached to an old pedal sewing machine which was sent to us from Mrs. IKENAGA. We've collected and repaired obsolete pedal sewing machines since 2003 to send them to poor people in Southeast Asian countries. Also, we've visited their countries and taught them how to repair and use pedal sewing machines because they don't have such skills. This volunteer activity of ours was so extensively reported by the local media that we received many telephone calls from viewers offering to donate their machines to us.

This is how we met Hanako. The old lady who sent Hanako to us had no daughters. For her, the sewing machine named HANAKO was like her real daughter. The letter was full of a mother's affection. Until we received the letter, we'd never thought about the past life of a sewing machine. We realized that Hanako, the pedal sewing machine we were repairing, had its own unforgettable past as well as its brilliant future. We began to cherish all the good memories of an obsolete pedal sewing machine when we repaired it.

Here, let me explain how we started our volunteer program. Our college received a proposal from the Oita International Youth Exchange Organization in 2003. The proposal said that we could repair obsolete pedal sewing machines and send them to Thailand so that poor children in the countryside could study and develop valuable sewing skills. Since our college accepted the proposal, 16 students have volunteered for the repair activity once a week together with staff members at the Technical Center of our college.

Oita Kosen students first went to Thailand in 2005. In December two years ago, we visited Thailand again. The purpose was to hand-deliver the machines to the village people. We wanted to do this to learn about village life.

When we visited Thailand, we stayed in Chiang Mai. Chiang Mai is the second largest city in Thailand, but when we moved only a few kilometers away from the city, we found roads not well-maintained, and in a village we visited, we saw doors of several houses blown off. People in the village were so poor that they were reusing rainwater and children had no notebooks for studying.

In this village, fathers often work away from their homes. They provide the main income for their families, but it's not enough. Mothers, left in the village, earn a small amount of money by making hand-woven products. Mothers are making the products by spinning thread and weaving cloth by hand. It's a painful process. If only they could use a pedal sewing machine! That's why we had decided to send these machines to those mothers in the village. It's a great advantage that these machines require no electricity!

In the village, we found several broken pedal sewing machines left unattended. They had been donated many years ago, but nobody in the village had ever been able to repair them. Therefore, we also started to teach the village people how to repair the broken machines.

We tried teaching the process of repairing to the village people all day, although we had difficulty in communicating with each other. We did our best to try to convey our strong message that if they mastered the repairing skills, the machines could last forever.

On the last day of our stay in Thailand, one villager was able to repair the broken machine without our help. Then one of the villagers said to us, "You've kindly helped us to repair the broken machines. We will thank you! And we will convey the skills of repairing the machines to more village people. If possible, I'll open a sewing machine repair shop and help the village people." Those words made us so happy and provided us with a strong sense of accomplishment. We truly believed we had done the right thing.

Soon after we finished repairing all the sewing machines, the village people gave a dinner party for us. We enjoyed eating Thai meals and seeing traditional dancing by the village people. We felt Hanako and other machines were also enjoying the party with us. Then, we spent a wonderful time chatting with the village people. Of course, we had much difficulty understanding each other because few people could speak English, but we communicated our feelings and intentions with gestures and body language. And we did understand each other. We had heart-to-heart understanding between each other even though we didn't have a common language. If you have a strong wish to share your thoughts and a wish to understand someone's mind, then you can communicate.

In Thailand, we were happy to see the local people smiling happily when they touched the newborn Hanako. Hanako cannot speak language, but we were sure Hanako was also happy with her new family, and she would continue to be happy

forever in Thailand.

We thought that volunteer work was doing something to make someone else happy. But now we know that it helps us to develop. We gain knowledge, experience, and a sense of fulfillment through volunteering.

Through our volunteer work repairing pedal sewing machines, we've grown and we've met many new friends, both at home and abroad. We are sure you can have the same wonderful chance in your life. Don't lose sight of the possibilities in front of you. Volunteering will make others happy and it will also make you happy! We'll work for sustainable development. Change brings hope!

Thank you for your kind attention.