# **Introduction: Going Home to Okinawa**

Nearly 10 years ago, I got a job as a university lecturer and returned to Okinawa, where I was born and raised. The position was in a department for training teachers. Alongside my university role, I started taking on advisory roles in relation to juvenile victims of violence, sometimes privately and sometimes as an official supervisor. On any given day, I receive communications from schools and other organizations. ‘Could you please advise us about a matter.’

- - We have a child who is being verbally abused by their parents but the child welfare center says that it does not meet the threshold for child protection. We heard she is engaging in *enjo-kōsai* (compensated dating). How do we talk to her about it? It seems a student has been raped. How should we respond? All of the children in this family are failing to attend school. We know that the eldest girl is looking after her siblings. What should we do?

When I receive a notification about abuse, under-age prostitution, or neglect leading to non-attendance at school, there are things that must be quickly attended to. I verify what evidence needs to be retained, make referrals to the child welfare center and/or medical facility, and most importantly, I provide advice on how to talk to the child and to their caregivers. I must make plans for the short-term, the next day or so, and the long-term, six months ahead. The appropriate course of action differs depending on what has occurred. Regardless, understanding what it means to be subjected to violence is essential to establishing long-term, sustained support.

From the moment we are born, we develop as our bodies are cleaned, stroked, and touched. The body therefore retains the memory of that person’s existence as a blessing. Violence is done when that body is pinned down, or beaten, and when it doesn’t stop even when you beg or scream. That’s why being subjected to violence annihilates a person’s feeling of care for themselves. Even so, many people do not understand the feelings of a person who has fled from such violence, trembling with fear. Nor do they understand what follows in days filled with self-repudiation. That is precisely why we must stand by those who have been subjected to violence. If we do not, then we cannot continue to support them.

Most children who experience harm are raised in families that are impoverished and isolated. Living in poverty makes it extremely difficult to live a normal life. People who live like that are placed in a situation where their self-esteem is fragile. Violence erupts from even the most trivial incidents. Violence takes many forms, and it shows itself by targeting the bodies of the weak. Violence is cyclical and it is passed down through the generations. To know one thing about what is going on is like peeling off a single layer; further information comes to light. Inside that family, the strong were violent towards the weak. Those who had violence done to them, did violence to those who were weaker than them. When the children reached an age where they could run away, they started running away from it. Those who couldn’t run away remained.

Sometimes while uncovering a litany of violence, the person who came seeking advice becomes overwhelmed. The person who apparently wanted to help the child starts saying things like: the child will not change, that family is lazy, it’s all too hard, etcetera. When this happens, we discuss once again what happens when one is subject to violence. We talk about how it is not just this body here and now that is being destroyed but also the memory of having been cared for and the feeling of self-regard; that behind the victim’s careless words and deeds lies a deep loneliness and regret.

When they have understood things in this way, the person once again tries to stand by the child. It isn’t easy. Nevertheless, they pull themselves together.
Someone must do it. But I wonder, how many people like that are there?

[omitted]

It was in 2011 that I decided to start researching women who work in the adult entertainment industry in Okinawa. I had heard rumors that of women in the adult entertainment industry in Okinawan who had started working when they were minors. If we can understand the kinds of families in which these girls, forced out into the nightlife district at such a young age, are raised, and the kind of lives they lead, then it might help us to talk about the lives of children who become victims of violence and think about how to support them. To undertake a study that involves frequent dealings with the adult entertainment industry, I decided I must collaborate with Masayuki Uchikoshi. Covering almost all the young people in Okinawa’s motorcycle gangs, with whom he rode together on Okinawa’s main arterial National Route 58, Uchikoshi’s research was prodigious. I have always believed that it is his rare talent as a field worker, able to hang out with just about anyone while appearing totally relaxed, that makes this kind of research possible. At just the same time, Uchikoshi got in touch with me and in the spring of 2012 our application for funding was successful.

In the summer of 2012, we started our research. Most of the women and girls we spoke to were in their teens or twenties and worked in hostess clubs and brothels. Most of them had children. They had had children as teenagers and after separating from their partners were working in the entertainment industry to raise their children as single parents. As I started wandering in the nightlife district, I started to remember things from my past. The first thing I remembered was the palm of my friend’s hand. Next, I remembered hair shimmering beside me. Both were of people close to me when I was a middle school student. All the women and girls whom I interviewed shared a resemblance with friends from my middle school days.

[omitted]

Our city incubates violence. And that violence rains down on girls. As I was about to start my third year of middle school, I longed to leave my hometown. To go as far away as possible and leave the smell of cigarettes and paint thinner far behind. The children whose parents were public servants or teachers go to higher schools far away from their hometowns. It couldn’t be so bad migrate like that and create a new life among strangers. I had had enough of seeing the faces of tired out girls. On my own, I found a cram school and started attending. For one year I studied hard and passed the entrance exam for my first choice of high school. When I was 15, I abandoned my hometown.

**1**

After that I became a high school student, a college student, a graduate student, and began to make my living by thinking about education. In Tokyo, all I did was conduct surveys. I employed disparate methods, from school ethnographies where I collected data during repeated visits to a single class in a girls’ high school or elementary school, to continuous interviews and statistical surveys of the lifestyles of children and school students that I conducted after graduating from high school. In all this research, my themes were girls’ relationships with their friends and their transition to adulthood. In Tokyo, too, I couldn’t help but become involved in their conflicts with their families and lovers, with domestic violence, and crime. I listened to their worries about pregnancy and abortion, whether at McDonalds after the interview was over, or while standing in front of a vending machine, or in phone calls and messages I received after returning home, or in the child’s room while I was staying with them. I think that my following the process whereby girls become adults is because of those girls back home. If I had stayed in my hometown, who would my friends be? Who would I have tried to live life with? Why is it that girls, while trying to make plans for their own futures, end up being forced into situations they did not choose? While I have been living a life that lets me postpone the transition to adulthood as often as I want, I have at the same time been thinking about girls who grow up too fast.

The research conducted in Okinawa is an extension of the research I have conducted so far. There is little difference in the things I asked about or in my method of building relationships with the girls I met while undertaking the research. However, previously I did not get too involved in the serious things about which they sought advice from me or act together with them. In this research, we decided to provide direct support or intervene when we thought it was necessary. Perhaps the reason I became so involved is because my experience in research, has enabled me to predict the next crisis they are likely to encounter. No, that’s not true. It’s that I felt strongly that I never wanted to lose sight again of another person from my hometown.

For the interviews, I went to their workplaces or familiar establishments they chose, and asked them about childhood events, work, relationships with family and partners, and how they raise their children, using an audio recorder to record the conversations. After creating a transcript of the whole interview, I met with them again and get them to check the record comprehensively. I use the data from field notes, email and letters with their permission. With many, though not all, of the participants, I read the completed manuscript out loud and asked for their opinions and impressions. In addition, we came up with the pseudonyms together and decided on any deletions or changes that were needed to protect their privacy. My method of maintaining contact with them depends on the person and includes communication via LINE, email, or if requested Facebook; if I received letters by post from a participant then I would do the same and exchange letters with them by post. I also met their family, children, lovers, friends, and co-workers, and sometimes interviewed them too.

I went home to the city I sought to abandon when I was 15 years old. This time, I want to stay put and record these girls’ lives. This is the story of the girls in my city who grow up subjected to violence from their families, lovers, and unknown men, and flee from it alone to create their own place. It is a record of four years of research conducted between the summer of 2012 and the summer of 2016.

# **Becoming a Cabaret Girl**

I got to know Yuka during the Obon holiday in the summer of 2012.[[1]](#footnote-1) When I first met Yuka, she was 20 years old. She was in and out of hostess clubs, working for a few days on a trial basis to make some money before quitting. When her money ran out, she would go and work at another club. She referred to herself as a ‘Super-NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training)’ and barely thought of herself as a cabaret girl. She told me that because she was living at home, she didn’t need much money.

There were six people in Yuka’s family: her father who worked in construction, her mother who worked in cleaning, her older brother, sister-in-law and their child, and Yuka. This family of six was living in a 2DK apartment, but Yuka was rarely at home.[[2]](#footnote-2) Her way of life involved moving in immediately if she met a man she liked and returning home after they broke up. She did this again and again. When she went home she passed the time wrapped in a blanket in the corner of the apartment playing with her phone. When I asked her, ‘Hey Yuka, didn’t you have your own place?’, she told me, ‘The place where I sleep with my mum and dad, that’s my place. But anyway, wherever I am, I can sleep there.’ Of her current life she said, ‘every day is free and easy.’

Once, Yuka had a child. She fell pregnant at 16, got married, and gave birth to a son on her own when she was 17. After the child was born, her husband would throw the meals she cooked in the trash in front of her. When she washed his work uniform, he would tut-tut and make her wash it all over again. One day she tried to stab him with a kitchen knife, and he divorced her. Yuka ought to have had custody of the child, whom she had been caring for on her own. But her husband’s mother came, bringing with her a relative who was a *yuta* (a priest in the Okinawan folk religion). They said there was a divine revelation that if a child was in Yuka’s home, it would bring trouble to her family. They took away Yuka’s child, who had just turned eight months old. Yuka returned to her parents’ apartment alone. That was when Yuka was 18 years old.

Over the course of several meetings, Yuka began to tell me bit by bit about her upbringing and marriage. About how she was in a street racing team with her cousins and the pleasure she took in it. About how she had always been together with these cousins since she was a child and how she never had any girlfriends since she was in elementary school. About how when she got home from school, she would put down her *randoseru* backpack and go straight away to her cousin Shun’ya’s house in the neighborhood. About how after the first time she had sex, she told her cousin Reito about it. About how when she was 16 and thought she might be pregnant, she went to Reito for advice first of course. About how when she did a pregnancy test and found out she was pregnant it was decided that she would marry. About how she began her newly married life in her husband’s grandparents’ home. About how his grandfather, who was a drunkard, would come and peep on her when she was in the bath. About how she had complained of how she hated that house, and it was decided to rent an apartment where she would live together with her husband. About how the rent on the apartment where they started living together was 36,000 yen per month and that it had two rooms. About how he had been present at the birth but had done nothing to help raise the child. About how she had named the child Mizuki. About how Mizuki cried in the night so she always slept with him perched on her stomach. About how she saw Mizuki as a girl and so she always dressed him in pink Hello Kitty clothes.

When I went with Yuka to the obstetrics and gynecology department, Yuka, who I thought was standing right next to me, disappeared. When I went looking, I found her standing stock-still, gaping at the neonatal unit. ‘Yuka,’ I called, and in front of all those newborn babies on the other side of the glass Yuka muttered, ‘Oh my, they’re so cute. I want to take one home.’ When, after a moment’s hesitation, I asked, ‘Was Mizuki little?’ Yuka pointed to one of the babies, saying, ‘When he was born, he was about that big.’ It was in the fall that a tearful Yuka told me about her child. Uchikoshi was back in Okinawa, so the three of us got together. At the restaurant where we had lunch together, Yuka suddenly started talking. ‘Last week was Mizuki’s birthday.’ ‘When I woke up, my mother-in-law was there saying, today is Mizuki’s birthday party. You come too.’ She invited Yuka to the birthday party and then started lecturing her.

[omitted]

In the spring of 2013, Yuka had a new lover. The new boyfriend’s name was Tatsuki. He was a divorced scaffolder five years older than her. I was pleased to hear Yuka happily report that ‘Tatsuki told his friends about me,’ but turned cold when her boasting turned to talk of how she had changed her brand of cigarettes to Tatsuki’s brand, and that Tatsuki imposed severe restrictions on her; lately even telling her what to wear and how she should do her hair. I told Yuka, ‘Yuka, guys like this have a tendency to turn violent. I’d like to meet him, just in case.’ ‘Hmm,’ Yuka said, muttering, ‘he put his last wife in the hospital twice.’ I drove Yuka to Tatsuki’s parents’ house located in A, stopping to purchase a gift along the way. Greeting Tatsuki, I found out where he was working and the name of the company. I drove off thinking about where I would report it if something happened to Yuka.

It was in Golden Week that Yuka called me late one night.[[3]](#footnote-3) Though she had called me before, it was never late. I met up with Yuka, prepared for the possibility that Tatsuki had assaulted her and that she was contacting me because she didn’t know where else to turn to. Rendezvousing with Yuka in a drugstore carpark, I was relieved to see that at least she was not injured. Yuka said that she wanted to go someplace quiet because she had something she wanted to talk about but nowhere was open, so we ended up in a noisy izakaya bar. When she ordered cigarettes from the waiter, the thousand yen bill she drew out of her wallet was folded up small in the very bottom of her purse, like she was trying to hide it. Seeing me staring at the money Yuka laughed, ‘Surprised?’ ‘That Tatsuki, he pilfers my money,’ she said and opened the packet of cigarettes. Smoking constantly, Yuka relays the events of Golden Week in dribs and drabs. Tatsuki’s relatives were visiting, so she had been hiding in Tatsuki’s room alone when something horrible happened, Yuka began. One of the relatives’ kids had come into the room uninvited, saying he wanted to make the stag beetles duel.[[4]](#footnote-4) When he made them duel it made a mess. There was dirt everywhere. Then her boyfriend came back and yelled at her to ‘clean up the room’ and she had cleaned it up by herself.

- - Even though it wasn’t you that dirtied it?

Yeah. ... The stag beetles, one of them was already *shinigataa* (nearly dead), they made them duel.[[5]](#footnote-5)

- - What about these beetles?

My father gave them to me. The other day, when I went home, we were having dinner and I said, ‘I’m going to A again.’ Then dad gave them to me and said, ‘Take some stag beetles’ ... I didn’t know what it meant. Do you?

- - Your father, he knows that Tatsuki assaulted his ex-wife, doesn’t he?

Yes, I think so. My big brother told him.

- - Your father, he knows that even if he says, ‘don’t go to Tatsuki’s place’, you won’t listen. Maybe, not knowing what else to do, he gave you the stag beetles to take in his place.

I wonder.

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　 (May 5, 2013)

Of course, idiot, I said to Yuka.

I was angry.

To make stag beetles duel, first you must prod their heads relentlessly to make them angry. After that, a beetle placed in a confined space will attack another beetle that it wouldn’t normally attack. The weaker beetle gets pulled back in front of the stronger beetle no matter how hard it tries to run away. The weaker beetle gradually weakens and dies. Men who work in the construction industry know which trees have lots of stag beetles. In summer they get up early and take their children there. Among them are men who don’t make them duel but cherish the beetles they have gathered with their children. In the homes of such men there are always small creatures. In Yuka’s parents’ apartment Yuka’s father keeps many stag beetles, goldfish, and Japanese White-eyes and they are all plump and well looked after. Yuka’s father knows that the man his daughter lives with is a serial offender with domestic violence. But Yuka’s father has neither the financial resources nor the personal connections to stop his daughter from going there. The best he can do is to place the stag beetles he has raised beside his daughter, who might receive a beating at any time.

I was angry. With the boy I hadn’t met who had made the beetles fight, with Tatsuki who beats women, and with Yuka who was unable to break up with that man. When we parted in the carpark, I noticed that Yuka was a bit teary-eyed but I waved, said see you, and bye-bye, and took off. As I passed the highway interchange, I started to calm down. Then I started thinking things over again from the beginning. There was something off about Yuka today. The place Yuka had chosen for us to meet was a drugstore. Maybe it was a drugstore with an external toilet because she had wanted to buy a pregnancy test and check it together. Perhaps there was something about me today, something that meant she couldn’t broach the subject, and Yuka couldn’t tell me. I needed to start again. I thought it would be better to wait until tomorrow before doing anything and went to bed a little earlier than usual.

The next morning, I received an email not from Yuka, but from Yuka’s relative Aoi. It said that Yuka had caused a hit-and-run accident the day before yesterday, and that she had contacted me last night to talk about it, but hadn’t been able to bring it up. When I called Aoi, I asked her where Yuka was right now. In A. Aoi told me she hadn’t received a reply to her emails since that morning. I called Yuka’s phone, are you OK? I’m sorry I wasn’t paying more attention yesterday. I got a message from Aoi. When I messaged her saying I wanted her to contact me, I received a reply from Yuka. I couldn’t tell you yesterday, I want you to come with me to the police station. I sent an email saying I’ll pick you up in A, I’ll be there in an hour. And then I drove to Tatsuki’s place.

At Tatsuki’s place, all his relatives were gathered for a barbecue. In the small park next to Tatsuki’s house, nearly 20 adults were drinking beer and small children were running around merrily among the adults. When I rang her phone in that bright sunshine, Yuka came out of the house, wearing a black sweatsuit with her hair wet and tied back and no sign of makeup, and got into the car.

- - What could you eat? ... Nothing, ... You can have whatever you want.

-- You haven’t eaten? I haven’t eaten for 2 days.

-- First, let’s go somewhere to eat. Is drive through from *Endaa* (A&W) OK?

Yeah.

-- I want you to drink something warm.

I’m fine, orange (juice) will do.

-- Hey, come on.

After getting something to eat from the fast-food joint, I moved the car to a parking lot in a roofed building. I stopped the car and put a cup of hot coffee in Yuka’s hand. As Yuka’s face softened on contact with the warm drink, I spoke to her in the quietest voice possible.

- Yuka, take your time and tell me what happened.

On Thursday, I went to see one of my old seniors from school at the hospital. She’d had a baby. That senior had an abortion before, you see. After I showed my face, I was heading home to A. But I hadn’t slept for a week. He didn’t come home so I was waiting for him, not sleeping. A new road’s been built in A, you know. It’s a straight road with a clear view. I went that way because if you go that way you can take a shortcut, but because I hadn’t slept for so long, I think I zoned out. … I was merging from the left when I hit a motorbike. …it went flying, the motorbike and the person but I was scared, so scared, and I drove off. …… When I close my eyes, I can see it in front of me like a scene from a movie. I can’t sleep. I think I must go to the police don’t I (omitted).

- - If we go to the police, can you tell them again what you’ve just told me?

Yeah.

- - If we go to the police and they hold you (in the cells), what should I tell them? Tatsuki and your father and mother?

I want to tell them myself. Both Tatsuki and my father. It’s Tatsuki’s car after all, that’s why. I need to tell them and apologize.

- - Okay, we’ll ask the police to let you. But if that doesn’t work, can I tell them? I’ll meet with your father, and I’ll bring the stag beetles back from Tatsuki’s place to your father’s. I’ll ask your father to take care of that beetle, he’s injured now but I’ll ask him to nurse him better.

Yeah. Yeah.

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　 (May 6, 2013)

In the car on the way to the police station, we went over her story again from the beginning. When we arrived, she took the time to tell them all about what had happened. Finally, when the interview was over and her statement was written up, we learned what had happened to the other party. ‘He has been admitted to hospital but his injuries are superficial and there haven’t been any serious complications. He had trained himself and managed to protect his body as he came off so there were no broken bones,’ they informed us and we felt some relief. However, Yuka went pale when the police officer said, ‘Now we will inspect the scene of the crime. We will conduct the inspection after we go to A, where the car is, and check the car.’ ‘Excuse me, can I ask you to please delay for today. Her boyfriend’s name is Tatsuki. He lives in A. The police are aware of his violent assault on his ex-wife, aren’t you? Right now, all his relatives are gathered at the house for a barbecue. If the police conduct an inspection while his relatives are there, then tonight she will surely receive a beating. I will bring her back here tomorrow so I hope that for today, you can let me take her home.’ After a long silence the police officer left the room, saying he needed to seek confirmation. When he returned, ‘Understood. We want to inspect the scene at 10 o’clock tomorrow, is that suitable? Yuka, tonight can you tell your boyfriend yourself about what happened? You have surrendered yourself at 4:23. You must come in tomorrow,’ he said.

After leaving the police station, we went to Yuka’s parents’ house. I called ahead to her father and then parked the car in the vacant lot near their home. Yuka’s father came running out and I stood beside them as Yuka and her father spoke. After listening to what Yuka had to say, her father said, ‘When you do something wrong, you must apologize. Let’s go together tomorrow,’ he said kindly. Yuka squatted down, crying and crying, saying ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry.’ After the three of us had finished discussing what would happen tomorrow and Yuka’s father had gone home, Yuka still stared vacantly. She must have been tired from not sleeping and from all those tears. I shoved the discarded cigarette butts that out of the way and kicked a stone to Yuka. Yuka kicked it back to me. From the vacant lot, you can see Yuka’s parent’s apartment. Next to the field with the large papaya tree is her cousin Toshiya’s house, the place Yuka had gone every day. When Yuka was little, she must have grown up going back and forth along this road countless times.

- - Who’s looking after the field now?

My dad a little ... but not really. The grass is getting long.

- - There’s a papaya (tree), huh. ... You spent some time here, didn’t you Yuka?

I spent a lot of time here. I was always going to Shun’ya’s house.

- - Using the staircase to your grandpa’s field?

That’s broken … the boards are rotten. …you go around the road here. …to get to Shun’ya’s house.

- - It take about two minutes?

More like one minute, if you run.

- - Everyone can see you, can’t they?

Yeah … there was a slide and a swing over there.

- - There’s nothing there (laughs).

My dad threw them out. Me, all the kids, we went off the rails *usumasa* (badly).

- - Ahahaha.

My dad went and threw it away...

- - That’s it. If you want to show your daughter a good time, put her on the swing (laughs).

We smoked cigarettes (laughs). … Whenever we’d get together we’d be up to no good.

I was always *kurusareteta* (badly beaten) by that person.

- - That person?

My big brother. ... Since I left home. Since I got scared and ran away from home ... He knows people all over Okinawa. … In Nago, Itoman, everywhere. You know that’s DV, that’s an abusive man.

－－Yeah.

Running, always running. You’re going to get caught. And beaten up again. I was afraid and ran away again.

－－Yeah.

I would ran away from home; even when I run away and move in with some guy, my big brother finds me and beats me up. That makes me scared and so I run again. I’m always running. Always. Get scared and run away. Run away and get beaten up. …why do I always run away…?

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It seems that Yuka’s older brother, who lives with their parents, behaved violently towards his wife, and even beat Yuka’s mother. After he beat his mother, Yuka’s father drove her older brother out of the house, but he returned and now he still lives with them together in their small apartment. From a young age, Yuka grew up trying to gauge when the violence would occur. When her brother got angry, she would grab her clothes and rush out of the apartment. Running away from the scene as soon as possible is the method Yuka taught herself to escape violence. Terrified after the accident, Yuka ran away from the scene just as she always did. That’s how the hit-and-run accident occurred.

By the time I took Yuka to Tatsuki’s house, it was already dark. Thinking that if we spoke inside it would be impossible to protect Yuka from being beaten by Tatsuki, I called Tatsuki and asked him to come to the parking lot, where we could be seen. Even so, the conversation with Tatsuki broke down. When Yuka told him that she had been to the police and told them what happened, Tatsuki started abusing Yuka right in front of me, ‘Huh! *Yaa* (you’re) the culprit!’ ‘I heard that guy’s bike was wrecked. Huh?’ ‘Don’t you feel bad for him, *furaa* (you idiot)!’In the parking lot outside the house, Tatsuki kept blaming and yelling at Yuka. He made no mention of how he had not returned home and made Yuka feel uneasy. I took Yuka back to her parents’ home immediately. Despite living with Tatsuki for 2 months, all she had to pack were some clothes, shampoo, conditioner, and the stag beetles.

After the police had inspected the scene the next day, Yuka returned home to her parents’ place without being detained. Because the other party had withdrawn the complaint and Yuka had turned herself in, she was told just to wait for a notification from the court. Yuka rode in my car when she returned home from the police station, not her father’s. The wallpaper on Yuka’s mobile phone had changed from a photograph of Yuka and Tatsuki together to Hello Kitty. The two of us probably wouldn’t meet again. I thought about how good it would be if Yuka’s days of being terrified by Tatsuki’s violence were over for now and she could slowly heal. But about a week later, I received an email from Yuka stating that she was pregnant. Yuka must have thought this meant she and Tatsuki could start over. Yuka returned once again to the city where Tatsuki lived. After returning to Tatsuki’s place, Yuka shut herself away in her room, waiting until morning for Tatsuki, who never came home, unable to keep anything down without vomiting. Yuka sometimes went back to her parents’ house, but when her older brother learned that Yuka was pregnant, he went and told the family ‘Yuka’s pregnant!’ Her mother was angry when she heard and stopped speaking to Yuka. I took Yuka out a number of times and suggested she break up with Tatsuki. ‘But tomorrow he might smile at me,’ Yuka would say. ‘A man who didn’t smile today won’t smile tomorrow,’ I said. ‘But,’ Yuka would say, and our conversation would go back and forth like this, over and over again. One day Yuka said, ‘If we have a child, I won’t have to wait for him to come home any longer. To say nothing of the one that was taken away.’ When I heard that, I thought, oh well, what more can I say. We don’t know what the outome might be. I didn’t want to see Yuka’s belly, where she had placed Mizuki when he cried through the night, emptied through an abortion. So I said, ‘Okay. I’ll support you.’

After her six-month check-up, I received a message from Yuka reporting that her baby was growing well and that she had decided to return home to her parents’ place. It said that Tatsuki had not come home and that while she was alone in her room Tatsuki’s father had been complaining about her. Her savings had finally run out and in preparation for the birth, she was going to start working again at a hostess club. The next night, I received an email from Yuka asking, ‘How much would it would cost to have an abortion at six months?’ Yuka uses words like that when something really sad has happened and she cannot really digest what is going on. She tries to communicate what is happening to her in words stripped of all emotion. I emailed here, ‘It would cost 300,000 yen.’ ‘But it’s not just the money, its a mid-term abortion so the equipment needed is the same as giving birth. You can’t do it at your current clinic.’ ‘Yuka, what happened?’ After a while, I got a call from Yuka.

She had received a LINE message from Tatsuki saying, ‘I don’t have any money and we’re not likely to be happy so go get an abortion.’ She sent a LINE saying, ‘If I’m going to have an abortion it looks like it will cost 300,000 yen,’ she got a LINE back saying ‘Woman, your trying to cheat me.’ ‘I won’t pay more than 100,000.’ ‘Half of what happened is *yaa* (your) fault.’

---- Yuka, where are you right now?

I’m at the club.

---- Are you crying?

All I can do is cry.

---- Can you cry at the club?

There aren’t any customers at the moment, so I’m talking to the owner who’s letting me have a cry. … It looks like Tatsuki’s got a woman.

---- How do you know?

The owner. But then it came up on Facebook too. She’s pregnant. It’s hopeless … It seems like he was working as a waiter in a hostess club. He stole money from the club and from his *moai* and took off.[[6]](#footnote-6) The story is going round.

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　 (August 28, 2013)

Oh, I thought, after all this now Tatsuki takes off.

[omitted]

Yuka, with her delicate body and belly that barely showed, kept working at the club right up to the final month of her pregnancy. The owner, who knew about Yuka’s situation, gave permission for her to work without drinking alcohol. He sat Yuka where she could mix the drinks for the other hostesses, who sat with the customers. They created a persona for Yuka as the good girl. ‘I don’t have the stomach for alcohol,’ she told the customers while quickly mixing their drinks. Sitting there silently Yuka looked sweet and she started attracting her own regulars. When they declared, ‘Its good that you can’t drink alcohol’, it made us all laugh.

After they had a big fight right in front of me, Yuka and her mother made up. Yuka reported that she had apologized to her mother, asking politely for her help and support in the future. Then Yuka told me how every Sunday she goes shopping during the morning sale at the supermarket with her father and mother and nephew, as if it was something special. Yuka obtained Tatsuki’s new girlfriend’s phone number through the hostess club network but she did not make contact. Her reason was, ‘I feel sorry for her, with the other woman being pregnant and all. If it was me, I wouldn’t want to get such a call.’ She had also heard a rumor that one of Tatsuki’s seniors back home had beaten Tatsuki half to death after he took off with his money. I said to Yuka, ‘*Iibaa yasa* (serves him right!)’ After that, Tatsuki apologized to Yuka’s older brother. He gave him 50,000 yen saying, ‘this is all I can pay right now.’ Yuka’s older brother, who was violent towards Yuka, was Tatsuki’s senior back in high school. In other words, for Tatsuki, the person he needed to apologize to was not Yuka, whom he had gotten pregnant and then driven away, or to their child whom she was expecting, but to Yuka’s brother.

At dawn a few days after the scheduled date, Yuka gave birth to a baby boy with her mother by her side. I slipped away from work in the afternoon and went to the hospital, where I found Yuka fast asleep in the middle of a private room with the TV on. In order not to wake her, I sat down quietly in the chair beside her and looked at her face. Yuka suddenly opened her eyes. I asked, ‘Did you fall asleep watching the TV?’ and Yuka said, ‘I’m used to noise so if its too quiet I can’t sleep.’ I had stopped to buy snacks and a magazine at the convenience store on my way there but all the parenting magazines were full of married couples raising children. There wasn’t a single magazine with which Yuka could pass the time peacefully. At a loss, I bought a fashion magazine that had a nail set attachment. When I handed it to Yuka, she gave a little smile and said, ‘I wonder when I’ll be able to do this.’

Yuka sought advice from those close to her about a name for the child but in the end she chose the name Haru herself. I went to Yuka’s parents’ house every week, gave Haru a cuddle, and massaged Yuka’s shoulders. Yuka was saving 100 yen each day to take a commemorative photograph when Haru reached 100 days. I made an occasional contribution. Yuka was worried, ‘what will I do at the elementary school sports carnival when he has no father.’ But we were all in stitches when her cousin, who is covered head to toe in tattoos, said, ‘I’ll run in the parents’ relay for you,’ and she said, ‘isn’t it worse to have an old man covered in tatts run?’ One time Yuka’s mother, who is a great cook, told me she had made me something to eat, so I was standing in the kitchen with her. Stuck on the refrigerator in Yuka’s parents’ house was a photograph of a smiling child sitting plonked on the floor with its hands stretching up to the sky. When I took a breath and asked, ‘Is that Miki?’ Yuka’s mother said, ‘he looks so cute I haven’t taken down the photo.’ Then she muttered, ‘he was just starting to crawl.’ That’s when it finally clicked that three years ago, Yuka had returned to a house without Mizuki where there was a refrigerator with Mizuki’s picture stuck to it. From then on, she had been going from place to place with the men she was dating. With Haru having been born and the whirlwind surrounding Yuka dying down, I hoped that this moment would last even just a little bit longer. On that day I ate a meal with them.

When Haru was about six months old, Yuka returned to work at the hostess club that had employed her when she was pregnant. Yuka’s mother was cross. She hates the entertainment industry. But Yuka told me how, when Haru cried, her brother in the room next door, separated only by a screen, complained and lately, her nephew was becoming violent like her brother, so she was saving money to move out of her parents’ house.

A housing complex or an apartment; anywhere would do. When Haru turned one year old, Yuka left her parents’ home and rented a place about five minutes away by car. Yuka’s new place was in a brand-new condominium and had two bedrooms and a large living room. When everything was arranged for the move, Yuka came to my office for a chat and said, ‘I had a dream that I wanted to call my friends and have a *nabepa* (hot pot party) or something.’ And then she told me, ‘I’ve got a job at a new club. On the days I’m working, mum and dad will take care of Haru.’ Haru’s bib had ‘Gramps I love you’ printed on it. ‘They saw you coming,’ I said, and she laughed saying, ‘I found it at *Donki* (the Don Quixote variety chain).’

The four years that elapsed before Yuka settled into a job were not what I would have expected. Yuka, who had grown up exposed to violence since childhood, did not move away from her family or from her old neighbourhood, even when she became an adult. Yuka got pregnant, got married, and got divorced when her child was eight months old, and then her child was taken away. After that, Yuka continued to be exposed to violence from her brother and lovers, and once again gave birth to a child by herself. Yuka, who was only working out a trial period at different clubs when we met and did not get acquainted with other women, now works four or five days a week at a single club and spends time with other women from work. Lately, Yuka has also become more respectful of how busy I am and started using polite language in her emails. ‘Well, Ms. Yuka what is your occupation?’ I asked her jokingly, like it was our first interview. ‘A bar. I’m working in a hostess club,’ Yuka said. When I teased her saying, ‘Madam, I thought you were a super-NEET?’ Yuka laughed, heeheehee.

Yuka will soon be 24 years old. Yuka lives in a 2LDK condominium with a large veranda.[[7]](#footnote-7) Sometimes she has a boyfriend, sometimes not. Yuka is raising the child named Haru on her own. Today, there is probably still a photo of Mizuki stuck to the refrigerator in Yuka’s parents’ house. Yuka is currently a cabaret girl.

1. Obon is a Buddhist holiday period, generally observed in mid-August, when people commemorate their ancestors. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2DK means 2 bedrooms and a separate kitchen-dining space. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Golden Week is a series of four national holidays that occur in a seven day period between the end of April and the beginning of May. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Stag beetles have characteristic stag-like antlers protruding from their heads. They are often kept as pets. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Words in the Okinawan dialect that appear in the interviews are indicated in italics, with the English translation in parentheses. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A *moai* is an Okinawan self-help group. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 2LDK means 2 bedrooms with separate lounge and kitchen-dining areas. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)