

## **Grasp the Truth, Accept the Tears**

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We hear a lot about serious crimes nowadays, and those crimes are always happening somewhere inside the TV, not here. We never really understand what it means to be a victim or a surviving family. However, once you are involved in a crime, your recognition will dramatically change. December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000: a stranger intentionally ran over my father with a truck and killed him. Today, I am here to talk about crime victims' desire to know the truth and a way to reduce their pain.

One of the hardest things my family had to go through was the criminal trial. We thought that the trial would be the place to find out the truth and give the defendant, that is the criminal, a punishment, so we were happy to cooperate in the police's investigation. But, the reality was quite different. We had to sit in the auditorium with others, had no right to question the defendant, and couldn't even hear what the defendant was saying. It was my mother's husband that was killed. It was my father that was murdered. But even so, we were completely out of the picture. Aren't victims the ones that need to know the truth more than anyone else? Why cannot we be inside the court with judges and prosecutors? Why cannot the trial be for us as well?

To find an answer to this question, we need to reconsider how the criminal law was established in the first place. In the old days when there weren't any laws, it was possible that one retaliate upon the murderer. Then, as our society developed into an advanced society, retaliation or lynching has become to be prohibited. Humans have found a system to separate our

emotions from reason. Thus the criminal law was established, and thus victims, who're thought to be emotional, were debarred from the trial.

However, as a matter of fact, victims and surviving families are NOT that emotional. They long for the right to be inside the court not because they demand a heavier sentence, but because they want to know the truth – what happened and why they have to be the ones to get hurt. You may doubt if this is really true. Frankly speaking, I was also afraid that some victims might be beside themselves with anger and disturb the trial. But, if we turn our eyes to Germany and France, where people decided to allow victims in the court, we will know that our fear is groundless. According to the report by National Association of Crime Victims and Surviving Families, there hasn't been a single problem of victims disturbing the trial in these two countries. With the support of lawyers and counselors, I truly believe that we can find a way to accept victims in criminal courts here in Japan as well.

Spending hours sitting in the auditorium without understanding what's going on in the court, without the right to simply say: "could you please speak up?" victims and surviving families will only receive irritation. What is a trial without the truth for the victims? What is a law without regard for its people? Trials and laws are there to make a society better. A society can never be better if its people are suffering from its trials or laws. Victims and surviving families should not be left in this painful, distressful situation.

Actually, there have been some movements to put victims inside the court from a couple of years ago, such as the one by National Association of Victims and Surviving Families. However, they still haven't enough power.

The main reason for this is that victims and surviving families are playing the main role. In most cases, they are physically, mentally and financially driven into a tight corner, so they cannot fully spend time on the activities. We lack the support from people who aren't involved in a crime. I understand your having a strange confidence that you'll never be a victim or a surviving family. But, a crime can most suddenly happen to anyone, like it happened to my father. It would be too late when you are involved in a crime yourself. There's no need to do anything special. You can participate by simply giving your signature. You may wonder how much power it has, but not only does it affect the judiciary, but also the victims. Your name that you write on a sheet of paper encourages us so much. Although my father isn't here anymore, each signature tells me that I am not alone.

The man that had killed my father committed suicide in prison last year. Now, my family has lost all hope to know what had happened to our beloved father. The truth has gone somewhere very far and we will never ever have that truth in our hand. I do not want any more people to go through the same tragedy we experienced.

Each day, there are more victims that are hurt, there are more surviving families that cry for their beloved's death. It is the trial's natural duty to assist them in getting over their tragedy. It is our natural right to be inside the court and grasp the truth with our own hands. And, only in that way could we accept the sorrowful reality and our tears.