

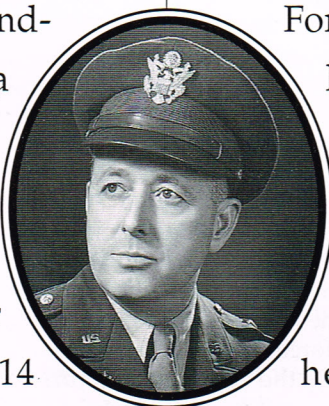


A BOND WAR COULD NOT BREAK

A FRIENDSHIP BEGUN AT EARLHAM IN 1914
HELPED TWO NATIONS MAKE PEACE.

by Coppelia Liebenthal

This is the story of a friendship formed between a female visiting Japanese student and an Illinois Quaker farm boy. This is the story of Yuri Watanabe and Bonner Fellers who met at Earlham in 1914 when Fellers was only a freshman and Watanabe was a ^{Junior} senior. He was under her care as a new student, and the two of them became immediate friends, both being compassionate people.



For Fellers, this friendship made a large impact on his life as Watanabe was the first Japanese person that he had ever met. Fellers' daughter, Nancy Gillespie '52, tells that her father "was absolutely enchanted with her, and they became very good friends. He had never seen any Japanese and she was a very charming and lovely woman with whom he stayed in touch his whole life."

Fellers had asked Watanabe about her country, and she recommended to him the books of Lafcadio Hearn, whom she considered to be the authoritative Western source on Japan. "He fell in love with Japan through her," said Gillespie, who lives in Washington, D.C.

Watanabe graduated from Earlham in 1916 and returned to Japan where she eventually founded a Christian girls school on the outskirts of Tokyo. When Watanabe departed, Fellers left Earlham, too. He joined the Army and was soon awarded an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Asked why her father entered military service, Gillespie said, "This is the silliest thing that you ever heard in your life, but he wanted to see the ocean." From growing up in the Midwest, the sea had always seemed like a distant dream.

Fellers' ocean was to be the embattled southwest Pacific of World War II. Because of his extensive knowledge of Japan and the Japanese, Gen. Douglas MacArthur appointed Fellers, now a brigadier general, chief of psychological warfare. Among other duties, he was responsible for tons of leaflets thrown out from airplanes that tried to persuade the Japanese people to surrender. He insisted that every word of information about the war's progress and American intentions be true.

Fellers was cut from a different cloth from most other officers in the Army, his daughter said. "He was perhaps the strangest Army officer ever. My father was totally a product of Earlham, a person accepting of all mankind."

Fellers had kept in touch with Watanabe through the years leading to the war; they even managed to visit each other with their families, but with the war's outbreak in 1941 all correspondence stopped. Although they found themselves on opposite sides during the war, their friendship endured.

Watanabe's daughter, Yoshiko Isshiki, remembers today what life for her family was like during the war. "It was a strange feeling when the American airplanes were over us and bombing us. We would be in the air raid shed thinking all the time of when the Americans will come, and knowing that our friend Fellers would be think-

ing of us because we were thinking of him. It was a real close feeling, real friendship and love."

After her return to Japan, Watanabe had become a teacher and worked with her friend Michi Kawai, who had been a one of her teachers before Watanabe had left to enter college in the United States. In 1929 Watanabe and Kawai started the all-girls school. The school, later known as the Keisen School, was founded on three basic principles, those of Christianity, international understanding, and gardening (communing with nature).

Days after the last American bomb was dropped on Tokyo, MacArthur landed at Atsugi Airfield to take charge



of defeated Japan. On board the plane with him was Gen. Bonner Fellers. Almost immediately, Fellers set out to search for Watanabe and her family.

"Bonner knew where we were," Yoshiko Isshiki said. "He was looking to see whether we were safe." Fortunately the family home had not been damaged.

It was an emotional reunion, filled with expressions of joy, sorrow, and relief. In the days and weeks to come, Fellers and Watanabe talked many times, often about the future of Japan. On one visit he asked Yuri what she thought about putting the emperor on trial as a war criminal. Watanabe predicted dire consequences for the Japanese and the American occupation forces if that happened.

After the visit, Fellers returned to his headquarters and wrote a one-page memorandum to MacArthur urging the general to leave Hirohito on the emperor's throne and abandon thoughts of bringing charges against him. Because the emperor was considered godlike, Fellers reasoned, putting him on trial would be viewed by the Japanese as desecrating their religion.

"For days MacArthur would pull this

memo out of his drawer and read it again," Gillespie said, adding that the general insisted that his staff officers confine all memos to a single page.

Fellers would meet with Kawai, Watanabe, and her family every Sunday night for dinner at the American Embassy.

"They were too proud to take the regular food handouts from the Americans," Gillespie said, "but they would wear their kimonos to the Sunday dinners and stuff rolls in their sleeves. My father would just order more rolls." Once when Watanabe's husband fell sick "my father got medicine for his illness. They accepted that, but they were too proud to take other help."

Fellers occasionally shared with MacArthur some of Watanabe and Kawai's advice on the constructive treatment of the Japanese people and their defeated nation. MacArthur apparently began to place some value on their suggestions, according to Gillespie, for now and then he asked Fellers to check some contemplated action with the two women before he made a decision.

One day, MacArthur asked Fellers what he could do for these women in return for their advice. Fellers relayed the question to Watanabe and Kawai. They told him that there was a building in central Tokyo where they wanted to resume their girls school, which had been damaged in the bombing.

When MacArthur heard the request he told Fellers, "Give it to them." And so it was done. Eventually, Watanabe and Kawai sold the building and used the money to build a campus for the present Keisen School outside of Tokyo. Today, years after her mother's death, Yoshiko Isshiki operates the school as its director and principal. Earlham College maintains a special arrangement with the Keisen School, admitting one or two of its graduates each year.

Of her mother's friendship with Fellers, Isshiki remarked, "Their relationship was one of friends. They were very typical friends, just ordinary." In a century of ceaseless war and divided loyalties among nations, their "ordinary" friendship was more than enough to stand the test of time and faith. ■