

Caring For Ōtsuchi Town After the Great East Japan Earthquake

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Kōryūzan Kichijōji Temple

Translated by Beth Cary

Editors' note: Rev. Takahashi is abbot of Kōryūzan Kichijōji temple in the coastal town of Ōtsuchi in northern Japan. In this essay he shares his experiences of providing spiritual care to the town's residents in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. His work demonstrates how Buddhist ideas, practices, and institutions have helped provide support of various kinds to disaster survivors, in addition to care for the deceased. In this respect, it contributes to studies on Buddhist disaster care in contemporary Japan.¹ For Kichijōji temple this included material support, memorial services, and other forms of emotional and spiritual support. Further, this essay bears witness to the impact of collective crisis on spiritual caregivers and shares Buddhist approaches to ministry and self-care drawn from the author's Sōtō Zen training.

Together with its appendix, this essay highlights memorial-making as a significant activity for chaplains and other spiritual caregivers. As detailed below, Rev. Takahashi collaborated on Testimonies of Life in Ōtsuchi

1. See for example Jonathan S. Watts, *This Precious Life: Buddhist Tsunami Relief and Anti-Nuclear Activism in Post 3/11 Japan* (The International Buddhist Exchange Center, 2012); Tim Graf, "Buddhist Responses to the 3.11 Disasters in Japan," in *Disasters and Social Crisis in Contemporary Japan: Political, Religious, and Sociocultural Responses*, ed. Mark R. Mullins and Koichi Nakano (Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 156–181; Levi McLaughlin, "Religious Responses to the 2011 Tsunami in Japan," *Oxford Handbooks Online* (Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.013.29>; essays by Reverend Hitoshi Jin, Nathan Jishin Michon, and Taniyama Yōzō in *Refuge in the Storm: Buddhist Voices in Crisis Care*, ed. Nathan Jishin Michon (North Atlantic Books, 2023); and KIGOSHI Yasushi's contribution to this journal issue.

Town, a two-volume publication memorializing the lives of 621 earthquake victims through interviews with their family members.² The introduction to the volumes, together with twelve entries selected by Rev. Takahashi, have been translated and appended to this essay. By making these entries available for the first time in English, we hope to raise awareness about forms of spiritual care practiced in Japan and to share a resource for developing intercultural approaches to chaplaincy. As Rev. Takahashi articulates below, as a member of the Buddhist clergy his “aim is to think of the dead, to live for those who wanted to live but could not, to not lose hope in the lives of those who survive, and to draw out the strength and resilience to overcome difficulties that each of us have.” *Testimonies of Life in Ōtsuchi Town* is a moving instantiation of that aim, forged through profound encounters with impermanence, loss, and grief on a wide scale.

Each testimony shares the person’s name and photograph, a brief biography, the person’s circumstances at the time of the earthquake, remembrances from the bereaved family, and a message to the deceased from the bereaved family, sometimes accompanied by a family photograph. A few make explicit references to Buddhism: processing grief in the presence of a Buddhist priest, conversing with their deceased loved one at the family Buddhist shrine, remembering a parent’s years of service as a Buddhist priest. Yet more significantly, the entries collectively offer the kinds of stories and sentiments that Buddhist priests or chaplains receive in Japanese communities and testify to the work of compassionate grief care and community stewardship. As the introduction to the volumes and the selected entries indicate, this publication project supported narrative meaning-making, connection to deceased loved ones, and community healing. Further, it created space for the collective expression and affirmation of values such as kindness, gratitude, diligence, consideration or care for others, friendliness, and connecting to the deceased through dreams, memories, and sacred spaces. We are grateful to Rev. Takahashi and the translators for making this work available to English-reading audiences and to the families of Ōtsuchi town for their willingness to share their heartfelt stories and messages.

March 11, 2011, at 2:46 p.m., was the time of the outbreak of the disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake, which caused great damage. For myself, it was a day that I cannot forget for the rest of my life, and it remains as an indelible memory. It was the

2. Otsuchichō Yakuba Sōgō Seisakubu Kōmin Renkeishitsu and “Ikita Akashi Purejekuto” Suishin Kyōgikai, *Testimonies of Life in Ōtsuchi Town* (Ikita Akashi: Iwate Ken Otsuchi Chō “Ikita Akashi Purojekuto”), 2 vols. (Otsuchichō, 2017).

beginning of days beyond description in which I experienced my own sense of normal values being turned upside down.

Along with expressing my gratitude for being invited to the conference where I presented this material, I would also like to give thanks to the people around the world who have supported us in material and spiritual ways to reach this day. With my feeling of gratitude toward all those who have supported us, I would like to share my experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster.

Ōtsuchi town in the Kamihei district of Iwate Prefecture, where I live, is a scenic area where many people make their living in the fishing industry. The population was 13,000 before the Great East Japan Earthquake, but the tsunami and fire caused by the Tōhoku area Pacific offshore earthquake took the lives of 1,286 people, or about 10% of the population. The town differs from other areas in that some 430 people, or one-third of the victims, are still missing, and the town suffered greatly from the disaster. Disasters can befall us suddenly one day without any forewarning. With the arrival of the tsunami, many people were not able to say farewell to their loved ones; there are still many who remain missing, and many survivors were unable to recover the bodies of their relatives. I spend my days among the remaining family members who were unable to bid farewell to their loved ones who perished in the sudden tragedy.

We opened up my temple, Kichijōji, which is on a hill 60 meters above sea level, as an unofficial refuge and took in 250 evacuees. The days began by supporting people who had no place to go, whose houses were lost in fires, who did not know where their families had gone, or who lost cherished people and property. The force of the tsunami was so fierce that many people lost their precious lives. The makeshift morgues were full of bodies recovered and carried in by the search teams. Most of the bodies were wrapped in blankets or tarps and laid on the floor of the gymnasium for their identities to be confirmed. The many body parts that were only partially recovered, whose identities could not be confirmed, were stored by number. Morgues were set up in five places in Ōtsuchi town. Along with operating the evacuee center at my temple, I went day after day to the morgues to recite sutras for memorial services. My role became that of reciting sutras for the souls of the victims and of protecting the lives of the survivors by drawing

near to them so that they would not lose hope after having been assaulted by the sudden tragedy.

I thought I understood in my mind the concept of impermanence, but I saw with my own eyes hell on earth. Words could not describe the devastation I saw. When I recited the sutras at the morgues, I met many families who came face to face with the bodies of their relatives. Some became upset at the sight of the damaged bodies. There were many times when I felt lost, dressed in boots and my vestments, unable to do anything but offer incense and recite sutras, but it is also true that zazen meditation gave me the strength to face daily challenges.

I held funeral services in order to offer hope to the families who had lost their loved ones. Fifty days after the disaster, we held a joint funeral for 168 of the victims who were lay members of Kichijōji temple. I keenly felt the importance of the funeral ceremony attended by the families. I could feel the gradual calming of the spirits of the bereaved family members each time they went through the rites, seeing the figures of the Buddhist clergy and hearing the voices of the priests reciting the sutras.

I arranged time to listen to the surviving family members in order to prepare for the funeral rites. I heard about the departed when they were alive, their interests, and the precious memories of times spent with them, and I made a record of these stories. This became a valuable experience for the bereaved to calm their feelings by putting into words their memories of their loved ones.

As I listened to the surviving family members, many regretted their relationships with their lost ones and blamed themselves. There were those who carried their pain inside their hearts and said, "It was due to my bad behavior on a daily basis that caused them to become victims of the tsunami," and "Their body can't be found because they disliked me." Amidst these circumstances, I myself began to change. I began to speak about "the world after death," something I never talked about before the earthquake disaster. I told the bereaved families conflicted by the sudden departure of their beloved persons about "the land of the Buddha." When our role and training is over in the human world, I told them, we return to the world of the Buddha. The victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake were those who successfully completed their training and role in the human world. It just so happened that the way they returned to the other world was through the tsunami or fires. Although there are circumstances in which a loved one suddenly dies,

or their body cannot be returned, there are also times when people cannot be there when a person who has been ill for some time takes their last breath. I explained to grieving families that not being able to be with someone at their last moments can be thought of as kindness on the part of the person who died; they might have told us, “I didn’t want to show you how I looked at the end and have you feel sad,” or “I don’t want to see those I love be sad.” I told them, “They returned to the world of the Buddha by showing their kindness to you, whom they love.”

From my experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake, I came to tell the bereaved who lost their loved ones, “When a person’s life runs out, it is not the end.” Death is a new start, and the one who died is now spending time in Buddha’s land praying for the happiness of all people, not only those to whom they were related when they were in the human world. All of us who are living in the human world receive hope for happiness from both those who are living and from those in the world of the Buddha. While the human world is one of impermanence, we are living and bearing the hope for happiness from voices we cannot hear and figures we cannot see. This is the very reason those of us living in the human world continue to call out to the bereaved, to live by valuing the life that is living “now” as we hope to reunite with our loved ones who have gone ahead.

In 2014, three years after the earthquake disaster, we started the project “Testimonies of Life in Ōtsuchi Town.” This began at the request of the mayor of Ōtsuchi town, who wanted to publish a record of the victims of the earthquake. At that time, only three years after the disaster, there were many who were still living in temporary housing, there were still many missing persons among the victims, and there were many remains whose names were unknown who we were holding in the temple. Most of the bereaved families were still unable to accept the death of their beloved family members as they lived with pain and sorrow hidden in their hearts. When the mayor suggested, “We are keeping the record of those beloved family members as their posthumous Buddhist names, but by leaving a record as a booklet, we can pray for the souls of the departed, and the surviving families can extol the individuals without forgetting them as they lived. Those of us who live in this tsunami-prone area that has been affected many times by tsunami can take action to preserve future lives by creating this collection of records. We can protect lives that are as yet unborn,” I agreed to be

in charge of compiling the remembrances of the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Initially, this work did not progress much as many bereaved families considered it shameful that their family members had died in the tsunami. By having family members of the victims participate on the executive committee, we began to make progress in interviewing other bereaved families. Four years of work produced two volumes of retrospectives comprising testimonies of the lives of 545 people and 76 people, respectively. There were unexpected realizations that arose from telling a third party about memories of beloved departed persons. Many of the people realized that in the process of being interviewed for this compilation, in sharing memories of the deceased, they were able to see that they had been precious parts of their lives, which they had not realized before as they were such close presences. Some have even called the published *Testimonies of Life* a “record of love.” We have created a valuable record that can be “a connection to our lives” even after others have left this world and returned to the land of the Buddha. By recording the history of the lives of the victims and detailing the circumstances of their deaths, this work has also become important research material for understanding the evacuation actions taken by those who became victims on the day of the disaster.

What I can do as a member of the Buddhist clergy is to protect the lives of those who have survived and to offer living people some relief through the teachings of the Buddha when faced with difficulties. My aim is to think of the dead, to live for those who wanted to live but could not, to not lose hope in the lives of those who survive, and to draw out strength and resilience to overcome the difficulties that each of us have.

Through the connections made in support activities from the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake, I am deepening exchanges with organizations that provide a place where cancer patients, their families, medical professionals, and others can relax and feel at ease conversing so that they can all lead a life of peace and security. I will continue to share the teachings of the four noble truths and the eightfold path gained from my experience with the Great East Japan Earthquake.

I will carry on the work of imparting the value of life together with the bereaved families who endure their sadness as the days and months pass, because it is we, who have the experience of suddenly losing a beloved person, who can do so. Cherishing the teaching “Do not take life, do not allow life to be taken, do not take one’s own life,” I

will yearn for the day when people around the world can live in peace and aspire to walk the path of Buddhism with all living beings.

**APPENDIX: EXCERPTS FROM
TESTIMONIES OF LIFE IN ŌTSUCHI TOWN³**

Translated by Rev. Gyohei Yokoyama, Rev. Amy Umezu, and Rev. Cynthia Yasaki

INTRODUCTION

Rev. Eigo Takahashi
Chair of Testimonies of Life Project Promotion Committee

Today, there are still moments when I remember that day. It's been six years since the incident, but I still find myself wanting to believe that the tsunami that struck us after the Great East Japan Earthquake was just a dream and wanting to wake up from this nightmare. The most ordinary views of the city and people's ordinary lives were taken away instantly. I thought I understood the meaning of impermanence well intellectually, but what I witnessed was a hell completely beyond words.

I want the people who suddenly disappeared before our eyes to come back saying, "I'm home." All the families are here who couldn't even say goodbye to their loved ones when they were forcibly taken away, and they are wishing to see them again from the bottom of their hearts and facing sorrows every day.

The victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake are alive in our hearts the same way as they were before. Even if we cannot see them appear before our eyes, I believe the memories of all those days we spent together will continue to give hope to us, the families who lost our loved ones, to live another day toward tomorrow. I believe we have a mission to accomplish as those who, just in the nick of time, survived the tsunami caused by the earthquake. The whole experience made us think that the best way to truly commemorate our loved ones is to fully

3. The following text has been slightly altered for the *Pacific World* readership.

live our lives, always keeping in mind the preciousness of the lives of the people who died despite their wish to continue living.

I first became involved in the “Testimony of the Lives” project when I was contacted by the former mayor Yutaka Ikarigawa, who said to me, “Many lives of the residents were lost. I’d like the whole town of Ōtsuchi to commemorate the spirits of the victims. Do you think it’s possible to keep the records of the victims?” I thought this would be such an important project to encourage people to protect the lives of future generations, those not yet born who will have no knowledge of tsunamis, from the threat of tsunami by recording the ways the victims lived, what they were like, and the devastating impact of the tsunami.

In deep reflection on how the myriad memorial stones recording the history of past tsunami were gradually forgotten and failed to encourage people to evacuate, I assumed the role of the chair of the committee to record the testimonies with the belief and hope that documenting as a municipal government the lives of the residents would result in consoling and commemorating the victims’ spirits, encouraging those who survived, and protecting the lives of those yet to be born.

We knew it would be an extremely challenging task but, thanks to the leadership of Mr. Ikarigawa, we were able to initiate this unprecedented project to record testimonies of all the residents who lost their lives.

On March 20, 2014, we had the preparatory meeting of the project committee for the testimonies of the residents in Ōtsuchi town. At this meeting, we discussed various challenges, including how to keep this project sensitive and caring to the residents who had lost their loved ones. The committee determined the main purposes of the project: (1) remembrance, (2) commemoration of the victims, and (3) records of the disasters.

The members of the project committee, the *chōnaikai* (neighborhood association), residents who were well versed in the area, town hall council members, and the staff of the general policy division of Ōtsuchi town cooperated for the project. Thus, this major joint project included both private and public sectors, which officially started on May 20, 2014.

As we began to interview the victims’ families, we faced many challenges. In Ōtsuchi town there were a total of 1,285 people who lost their lives due to the earthquakes and related causes, and 420 people

remained missing. There were many families who hadn't been able to see the bodies of their loved ones or accept their deaths. There were also many who didn't want to bring back the memories of the earthquakes and refused to talk about their experiences.

At that point, Mr. Hide Ueno, Mr. Yoshinari Kemuyama, and Mr. Kazunari Kobayashi were appointed to the committee. They had all lost their families and were able to communicate the significance of this project to the residents. It brought me to tears to watch them dedicate their time explaining the project to the other families and asking them for cooperation.⁴

We have lived to this day through the earthquake disaster and its aftermath all thanks to the support from everyone around the world. I hope the collection of testimonies filled with our gratitude is an

4. As we expected that the interviews would provide us with clues to answering lingering questions, our moral support came from two articles: an article titled "Testimonies of One Hundred Residents of Ōtsuchi Town" from the newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* and another titled "Remember" from the newspaper *Iwate*. We received tremendous support from the journalists, who conducted their research while standing by the families in grief and sorrow. We especially received incredible support from Mr. Masakazu Higashino from the editing committee member of *Asahi Shimbun*. I would also like to extend my deep gratitude to Mr. Yūsuke Hoshino, a journalist from *Asahi Shimbun*, for his support concerning the publication of the books. I would also like to acknowledge the support of Ms. Yukiko Kikuchi, the president of the newspaper Ōtsuchi, who provided us with information. Also, I would like to extend my appreciation to Mr. Satoshi Mugikura from Iwate University for dedicating his time to interview the families of the deceased, as well as writing and proofreading the articles, in addition to Mr. Tadahiro Yoshikawa from the Urban Disaster Prevention Research Institute, Ms. Aya Kubota from Tokyo University, and all those who were involved in the project. I would also like to extend our deep gratitude to Mr. Hiroshi Tadaki on behalf of the entire project team for coordinating with all concerned parties and providing moral support as we moved forward with the project. The testimonies are full of memories from families who volunteered to trace the painful memories of their loved ones. I would like to extend my appreciation to all the families. Also, I would like to thank every person for understanding the significance of the project and supporting us. We are also grateful to Mr. Hiroshi Sado (the art director of the Hyōgo Performing Arts Center), The Lion Standing in the Wind Foundation, and Mr. Masashi Sada for supporting us both physically and mentally.

invitation to reflect on the preciousness of life. It would be my tremendous pleasure if I could share with you the importance of thinking about our loved ones as our gift of gratitude.

Anyone who picks up this book of testimonies may find themselves struggling in life. If you ever encounter such a moment, please pick up this book again and let it give you the strength to live.

Let us extend our prayers from Ōtsuchi town.

May your life be filled with joy and happiness.

Gasshō

MR. KYŌZŌ UENO



May 1, 1941–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 69 years old

21 Shinminato, Ōtsuchi town

Life Journey

Kyōzō Ueno was born in the Ando District and graduated from Ando Elementary School and Ōtsuchi Middle School. In his childhood, Kyōzō studied hard and was an all-around athlete. His younger brother, Masaru, remembers admiring his older brother as cool, good at sumo, and a heavy hitter at baseball.

Kyōzō briefly went to Ōtsuchi High School.⁵ But because he wanted to get a job as quickly as possible to help his family, he ended up transferring to Miyako School for Seamen's Training. After he graduated,

5. In Japan, one is expected to go to school through middle school (ninth grade). High school (tenth to twelfth grades) is optional.

he found employment on the Nissho Steamboat, rode on a tanker boat, and worked until he retired early at 55 years old.

Kyōzō married his wife Hide when he was around thirty-five years old. They had one child, Yoshiko. Hide and Yoshiko went to see him twice when the tanker boat anchored at the Port of Yamaguchi.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

According to a neighbor, Kyōzō was in the neighborhood when the earthquake hit and was told to evacuate, but he didn't want to leave. According to this account, even though there was an earthquake, Kyōzō might have thought the tsunami two days before was hardly anything, so he might have been to the levee near the shore to check the ocean.

In regards to disaster preparedness, he must have had awareness because Hide was always trying to persuade her husband to evacuate in case of disaster. Their friend Masahiko Oguni called just in time for them to evacuate and led Kyōzō. When he looked back when the tsunami arrived, he could not see Kyōzō. Kyōzō was later discovered in the vicinity of a Yakuodō drug store.

From the Bereaved Family

Kyōzō was a quiet person; he didn't have deep conversations with many people. He would help at group events around the neighborhood, but he was never in charge of anything. He would normally not talk, but when he met people, he was known to be a profoundly considerate person.

He Helped Support His Wife's Women's Association Activities

When I would go out to women's association activities, he would support me by dropping me off and picking me up, as I did not have a driver's license. When the meetings would be in the evening, Kyōzō would have to refrain from drinking at home and wait patiently to pick me up. That sweetness of his caught the eye of the women's association, so they discussed making him an honorary member.

When our daughter Yoshiko wanted to take her friends to visit the scenic sights of Sanriku, Kyōzō would take them in the car to see the

sights. When he was asked by his wife or daughter for a favor, Kyōzō was a kind person who would support them.

Hide Ueno (wife)

He Was a Considerate Person

Kyōzō was lively in nature. Gathering Manila clams on the coast and picking mountain vegetables in the mountains were his specialty, and he shared what he gathered with everyone.

Kyōzō was a discreet person; he was strong in *shōgi* (Japanese chess) and *mahjong*. His hobby was horse racing. He was often invited to the Kamaishi off-track betting counter. Kyōzō would use self-restraint to enjoy his hobby in moderation. Again, Kyōzō was such a diligent person that he would polish his rusting bicycle until it shined.

What I Would Like to Pass On

The Kyōzō I see in my dreams says nothing. “Even in my dreams you are quiet, aren’t you, Kyōzō?”

Hide Ueno (wife), Masaru Koshida (younger brother), August/October 2014

MS. YOSHIKO UENO



February 6, 1978–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 33 years old

21 Shinminato-machi, Ōtsuchi town

Life Journey

Yoshiko Ueno was the oldest daughter of father, Kyōzō, and mother, Hide, and was born in Shinminato-machi. After graduating from

Ando Elementary School and Ōtsuchi Middle School, she advanced to Morioka Daisan High School. When Yoshiko was attending high school, she played in the concert band. After Yoshiko graduated high school, she enrolled in Ibaraki University and advanced to graduate school. But her mother, who was worried about her daughter's future, encouraged her to take the Ōtsuchi federal employee examination. Because of this, Yoshiko passed the exam and became a town hall employee. At the time of the earthquake, she was affiliated with the taxation business division.

When the sad news that Yoshiko fell victim to the disaster reached her classmates in Morioka City, they started the Yoshiko Foundation. Every month on the day of her passing, they visit Ōtsuchi and offer incense. The money they gather for the foundation is delivered to the Ōtsuchi Board of Education to help children and students who have activities in music.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

At the time of the earthquake, Hide was working out with the women's association on the third floor of On-Shachi Fure-ai Center, while Yoshiko was on the second floor advising people on how to file their taxes. Hide said to Yoshiko, who came up to the third floor, "A tsunami is coming! We have to run away!"

But Yoshiko had a duty as a town hall employee. It seems that she was expected to be in charge of the Daitoku district of Ando during a disaster; it is thought that when the tsunami arrived, she was at the Ando town hall, busy preparing packages to be taken.

Her remains were found behind the town hall, and her father Kyōzō, who was similarly victimized in Ando, was found on the same day.

From the Bereaved Family

Thank You for Calling Me Back to Ōtsuchi Town

When she first began work at Ōtsuchi Town Hall, there were times when she would complain. But around her fifth year of working she said, "Mom, thank you for calling me back to Ōtsuchi town." At the town hall, she formed a concert band. At North Ōtsuchi Elementary School

she directed musical performances for the brass instruments. She also instructed the concert band at Kamaishi Higashi Middle School.

She Visits Me in My Dreams

I, who lost my husband and only daughter, am alone and overwhelmed with sorrow; I thought with a negative attitude, “Why didn’t you run? Why did you leave me alone?” When I did that, the Buddhist priest told me, “Be thankful that you have lived until today. Please remember the enjoyable times you had with the people who passed away.” I remember that as a child she was interesting and funny, no matter what she was talking about. And I put my hands together in reverence for my husband and daughter.

I am sad when my daughter does not appear in my dreams. About one year after the disaster, I had a dream. My daughter was at my house, and she looked like she was about to return to her home. When I ask, “Are you returning to Tokyo? When is the next time you will you come?” she responds, “Oh, Mom, I will not be returning home,” and she disappears before my eyes. I will forever believe she came to cheer me up as I was mourning. My nephew’s wife is a person who is strong in sensing the supernatural, and when I am feeling down, she visits my house and asks worriedly, “Although Yoshiko appeared in your dream, are you okay?”

What I Would Like to Pass On

You were the daughter I was proud of. Thank you for appearing in my dreams. I am doing well and I will do my best, so please support me.

Hide Ueno (mother), August/October 2014

MS. MAKIKO SASAKI



January 1, 1949–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 62 years old

1 Chome Kirikiri

Life Journey

She was born as the third daughter of a family of three daughters and one son in the town of Yamada in Iwate Prefecture. She grew up in a family with two older sisters in Yamada town and a younger brother in the prefecture of Saitama. The household managed various beauty parlors.

After graduating from high school in Mizusawa City in 1973, she married into the Sasaki family from Kirikiri, and she was blessed with three boys.

Makiko lost her husband about ten years before the earthquake disaster, while single-handedly raising the kids and wanting them to become full-fledged members of society. She modified her house to have a workspace at home. There was a time when she hired workers and did contract work for the Ōtsuchi Clock Factory, and a few years before the disaster she worked for Ando District's Sojitz Food Fishing Industries.

Her personality was that of not being bothered by smaller things, being an “everything will work out” spirited mother. In terms of her physical health as she lived alone, her eldest son and his spouse exchanged the following promise with her: “In the future when you are

older and you cannot move any more, we would like to take care of you, you know.”

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

When the earthquake occurred, Makiko was scheduled to be on her day off, so she was at home. It was confirmed that after the strong swaying stopped, she came out of her house and was talking with her neighbors. Maybe because Makiko experienced the Chile tsunami, she had a strong desire to evacuate her family if necessary; if there was an earthquake in the middle of the night, she thought she would wake the children and evacuate to higher ground. However, the earthquake happened in the middle of the day, and because it was so big, she wanted to take her husband's memorial tablet and then evacuate. She probably briefly went into the house. By the time the next-door neighbors became aware of the tsunami and evacuated, they yelled out to warn everyone, but there was nobody in sight.

After the tsunami settled, the eldest son, Shin, realized there was not enough heavy machinery when he saw people were searching for missing people in the affected area. He then borrowed his company's large backhoe to join the search party, but they were never able to find Makiko, and even today she is still a missing person.

From the Bereaved Family

Filled with a Feeling of Gratitude

My mother did not forget my birthday. The day before the disaster, she called me on the phone. She gave me presents of beer and my favorite dish, dried saury (fish) with sweet rice wine. That was the last time I saw my mom.

She would always scold us when we were young. The words “thank you” are not enough for our mother, who raised three rambunctious boys. We siblings always talk about the time when we had just lost our father in an accident and because of that, we wanted our mother to be on the futon when she died. I truly feel regret. One month after that disaster, I took out my company's machine with the single mind of finding my mother as soon as possible. I feel regret that even with the rubble removal and helping with the search for missing people, we couldn't find her. But several days after the earthquake disaster, my eldest daughter, a fifth grader at Tōji Elementary School, said, “I

had a dream where Grandma was in Cape Nojimazaki eating with her friends,” and so I think she is in heaven with friends. Even now that gives comfort to me.

What I Want to Pass On

My family, my younger brothers, all of us are living healthy lives. My oldest daughter is a junior in high school, my oldest son is a fifth grader in elementary school. My oldest son is learning karate and received amazing marks at the prefectural tournament. He has been doing karate for five years, and the results have made him a better man. I wanted to show his progress to you. It seems you are now with our dearly departed father. I would like you to continue to keep watching us from the other world.

Shin Sasaki (eldest son), March 2017

MR. KATSUYA TATEYAMA



December 27, 1985–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 23 years old⁶

Toida, Jōbōji, Ninohe City

Life Journey

Katsuya was born in Jōbōji town in Ninohe City in Iwate Prefecture to the Tateyama family as the second son of three siblings. When he was small, he would sleep with his grandparents, as he was grandparents’

6. The original document reports his age of death as 23 years old, but according to the birth years provided, the actual age of death should be 25.

child. His grandfather was a *tatami* maker, and Katsuya used to say he would become a *tatami* maker when he grows up.

After graduating from Jōbōji Middle School and Fukuoka High School, he entered Iwate Prefectural University's Software Information Club. When he was twenty-two years old, he started working for the Core Techno Corporation. He was so passionate about curling that when he tried to qualify as an instructor at the Northern Maharoba Curling tournament, he won. He sent the apples⁷ he won to his family. He also interacted with Olympic players. His body was not big, but he was skillful with his fingers.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

On the day of the earthquake disaster, he was at the Komakura Office in Ōtsuchi town working on the digital construction system. From July of the year before this disaster, he lodged at Kamaishi and went to the office in Tōni town. He was transferred to the Ōtsuchi office in November. In March of the year of the disaster he ended his work in Ōtsuchi and was scheduled to return to Sendai.

After the earthquake, at around 3:11 p.m., his mother texted him, "Are you okay?" and he replied, "For now." But after that she tried messaging and calling him, and she couldn't reach him.

At the office, there were six casualties. According to the survivors, a voice called out, "Climb! Climb!" but because everyone came from inland, it is believed they concluded the tsunami would not be able to surpass the levee. The car Katsuya was riding in was found pinned under a telephone pole. Beside him in the car he left his curling equipment, uniform, and a medal.

His parents were able to cross Tatemaru Pass and enter Ōtsuchi on March 13, but they couldn't find the office Katsuya was working at. So, for the time being, they set off for Ōtsuchi High School. They, with local people's help, visited the various local shelters thinking that he might be among the survivors. Many times after that, they went to Ōtsuchi and visited many mortuaries. They even requested DNA matches. But, even today Katsuya is still a missing person. The family comes from

7. The area where the tournament was held is known for apples.

Ninohe City to Ōtsuchi by car on or around the eleventh day of each month to do a memorial service.

From the Bereaved Family

Grandpa and Grandma's Child

He loved his grandfather and grandmother. It was his grandfather's duty to pick him up and drop him off from nursery school. Until he started going to school, he slept with his grandfather. His grandfather liked watching cockfights and would bring Katsuya with him to places around the prefecture. He had a friendly personality and was loved wherever he went.

An Attentive Child

Before the disaster, there had been heavy snowfall on December 31st in Jōbōji, and from the night of the 31st to the night of January 2nd, there was a blackout. Katsuya came all the way home, and the weather was completely horrible. The morning of New Year's, when the snow accumulated on the car so that it was hidden, Katsuya shoveled the snow from the car so that the engine could start and helped us charge our cell phones.

Also during O-bon⁸ and other times when the shop was busy, he would help out at the shop. He would teach the part-time kids very well.

Before he went to nursery school when he was young, when his older brother would go to play, Katsuya would stick by him.

Takako Tateyama (mother)

In the year before the earthquake disaster, on October 30th, Katsuya ended up rear ending the car in front of his, and I ended up driving him to Kamaishi in our family car. But in Tōno, the family car ended up breaking down, and he had to take the train from Tōno to Kamaishi.

8. Annual seasonal holiday during the summer where people remember and honor their ancestors.

Now that I think about it, it was a message telling him, “Don’t go to Kamaishi.”

About the third day after the disaster, I had a dream of Katsuya when he was a kid. When I had asked, “Are you hungry?” He replied crying, “My stomach hurts.”

He was a little late learning to speak, but he would explain things with gestures from his hands, or he would say things like, “Pappaffū” and make original words. I feel like when he started speaking, he became a child who talked a lot.

Kunihiro Tateyama (father)

What I Want to Pass On

I want to bring Katsuya home. I understand the reality of the situation, but I continue to have complex feelings because I cannot be with him. He must have had a lot of things he wanted to do and he could have done. But I am sorry for him so much.

Shortly after the disaster, when I started dozing off, I had a dream that Katsuya was in the living room brushing his teeth while watching TV. It seemed like he was saying, “I am here so you do not have to do my DNA check.”

-Takako Tateyama (mother)

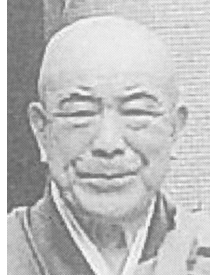
I am thinking he would come out from somewhere, though I know we wouldn’t find him.

Kunihiro Tateyama (father)

I want him to be found and to return home. I am the saddest on the night of the full moon. Katsuya is surely watching us from the sky above.

Tayo Matsumori (grandmother)

Kunihiro Tateyama (father), Takako Tateyama (mother), Jinpachi Matsumori (grandfather), Tayo Matsumori (grandmother), November 2015

MR. SHŪMYŌ ŌGAYŪ

July 30, 1928–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 82 years old

10 Suehiro, Ōtsuchi Town

Life Journey

Shūmyō was born in Suehiro. He was Gogan Temple's twenty-fifth generation chief priest. Originally his surname was Yoshimine, but when his grandfather became the adopted child of the temple in Ōgayu, their name changed. During the war, he was a student of the Naval Pilot Training Academy, and he was in Misawa City at the end of the war.

After the end of the war, he advanced to Komazawa University, but his father fell ill, and he left school after two years to return to Ōtsuchi to help the temple. In order to succeed his father as the chief priest after his father's passing, he needed the qualifications of a priest, so he had to find time to travel to and train at Hōonji temple in Morioka City where he received the qualifications of a head priest and he took over Gogan Temple. In 1954, he married my mother from Kurosawajiri (now Kitakami City) and had two sons and two daughters.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

Shūmyō was in the living room on March 11. His knee was bad, so usually he spent his time in the living room. When the earthquake occurred, he was in the living room with two grandchildren. He told them, "The tsunami will not reach here, so only you guys should leave." He remained at the temple. He was able to walk by himself, but because there was no one to help him and he was unable to run to the

mountain, he probably thought that Gogan Temple would become a shelter, so he didn't run away.

Shūmyō and his grandchild, Hirōmu, are still missing today. His eldest son, Yoshihiro, didn't want to report the two were missing people, but in August he had to file a death acknowledgement in order to change the deed of the temple as a religious corporation. They had not yet had a formal funeral for Shūmyō. They only held an informal one.

From the Bereaved Family

He Disciplined Children

My father was scary when I was a kid. When we did things that we were not supposed to do, my father would scold not only his own kids but other people's kids as well. One time we played on top of piled up lumber, and when the lumber crumbled we were buried under it. He saved us by moving the lumber with his bare hands. After he saved us, he disciplined us. When my friend would call my house, it seemed they would not like it if my father would pick up the phone, so they played "Rock, Paper, Scissors" to see who would call. My father was a strict person to children, but he was in charge of a temple that would naturally gather a lot of various people. Everyone would gather and talk and then drink afterwards. That was a daily occurrence.

My father was not a person to waste money, but I heard he was having a hard time fundraising for the main temple hall and memorial hall.

A Monk Who Wore Yellow Garments After Fifty Years

He looked forward to drinking with his dinner and to his twice-a-year hot spring trips with Mom. He was scheduled to go to the northeastern area of Japan for a week. Among my childhood memories with Dad is the time we went to Ōsaka World Expo as the Gogan Temple tour group when I was a fifth grader. Among all the times that I went out with Dad, this time with Dad was the most fun.

When Dad had been a Buddhist priest for fifty years, he was thinking about retiring; we proposed a qualification request to change the color of his robe. Our request was accepted, and his robe changed to yellow. The next highest rank after yellow is purple. My father received his yellow robes and continued to be the chief priest of the temple until

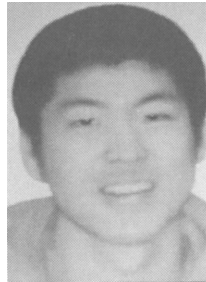
his death. To me he was both a father and a priest, but much more he was a mighty father.

What I Saw In My Dreams

I had two dreams. My father and my daughter were together. I thought my daughter appeared because she was his favorite child. I thought, “Why didn’t you evacuate with your grandchildren?” I miss my family whenever I look at pictures.

Yoshihiro Ōgayū (eldest son), July 2017

MR. HIRŌMI ŌGAYŪ



April 15, 1991–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 19 years old

10 Suehiro, Ōtsuchi Town

Life Journey

Hirōmi was born and raised in Suehiro. He was born as the eldest son of Ōtsuchi’s Gōgan Temple’s deputy chief priest. Among the five siblings, he is the only boy, with three older sisters and one younger sister.

After graduating from Ōtsuchi Middle School, he advanced to Senshū University, affiliated with Kitakami High School. When he was in the lower grades of elementary school he started jūdō, but afterwards he started baseball and played in middle school.

He received a scholarship invitation to enter Sendai Kitakami High because of his skill in baseball. He hesitated, and after he asked for both of his parents’ advice, he decided to enter. He was a regular in

high school, but while he was at school, he was not able to go to the National Tournament at Kōshien Stadium.

It seemed he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. According to his father, he told his son, "Do the things you like." He enrolled in Aichi Gakuin University's religion department in Nagoya. After he enrolled, when his father was traveling to Eihei Temple, he would stop in Nagoya for the day, and they drank sake together as father and son.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

When the earthquake occurred, Hirōmi was with his grandfather, Shūmyō, his cousin, and a classmate in the temple's living room. He yelled to his grandfather, "We should run together," but his grandfather didn't intend to evacuate, so with his cousin and classmate they evacuated to Shiroyama. At that time, when they saw the tsunami coming, he said to his cousin and friend, "Stay here!" and left, descending to the temple. When he was descending, he yelled to his father and those who were evacuating to the temple, "There is a tsunami! Hurry and run! Hurry and climb up!"

When his parents were in the hallway, Hirōmi was in the temple in the room with those who had evacuated. At that moment, the force from the arrival of the tsunami pushed everyone outside and they were pulled by the current forty to fifty meters outside the main temple hall. Shūmyō and Hirōmi are currently missing.

From the Bereaved Family

Memories When He Missed School and Went to a Hot Spring

Hirōmi was a child who even from a young age never disobeyed his parents. I don't remember this, but I was told by Hirōmi, "When I was small, I got kicked by Dad. I was kicked until Mom stopped it." There were times when I raised a hand against someone, but there were clear reasons why I did. It was when I was bullied when I was weaker. I think it must have been a very unpleasant and forgettable experience for me to talk about how I got kicked even when I was older.

For my entire family's sole memory of Hirōmi, we were busy working Saturday and Sunday because of the temple schedule and were not able to go wherever. We decided to take a vacation during the week, so we took him out from school and went to a hot spring. We heard adults

who, upon seeing a child on the weekday, said, “Where did you come from?”

Hirōmi’s hobby was Go⁹, something he learned from his grandfather. I thought of my son as someone with a good personality.

What I Would Like To Say

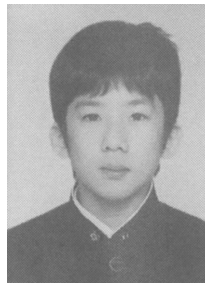
My son has not appeared in my dreams. I talk to the pictures of my eternally nineteen-year-old son. My wife on the 11th and 22nd of every month without fail goes to visit his grave, but I have never been to his gravesite. I am still not ready to accept the reality of the situation.

Having lost three people in our family, I think that at that time, I should have not surfaced. It would have been better if I was swept away.

Even today when my friends visit, they put their hands together in reverence.

Yoshihiro Ōgayū (father), July 2015

MR. YŪMA SASAKI



Jan. 8, 1998–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 13 years old

1 Chome Ogakuchi, Ōtsuchi Town

Life Journey

Yūma Sasaki was born in Ogakuchi as the eldest son of Takanori and Mariko. After completing North Ōtsuchi Elementary School, he entered Ōtsuchi Middle School. At the time of the great earthquake disaster, he was just about to complete his first year at the school. Because it was

9. Japanese game played with black and white stones on a wooden board.

his parents' wish for him to become a person who was calm (yū 悠), and lived life honestly and straightforward (*massugu* 真つ直ぐ), they named him Yūma (悠真). In accordance with his name, Yūma was a child who was affable and gracefully did things at his own pace. In elementary school, he loved swimming, and during sports festivals, he played the trombone. In middle school, he joined the badminton club. He loved school, so he aimed to receive the perfect attendance award; he attended school without any absences. He liked drawing and woodblock printmaking, and he was really good at plastic model making. When he went to the Tsukuba Expo, he developed an interest in making things. He said that in the future, he wanted to go to Tsukuba University and study manufacturing.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

At the time of the occurrence of the great earthquake, Ōtsuchi Middle School was preparing for their graduation ceremony for the following day; students were in their classes only in the morning. At the time of the earthquake, Yūma and his friends were at Mast Shop. Although he quickly took shelter at the central community center, he became worried about his grandparents. It is believed that he went to Suehiro Town where his maternal grandparents' house was. After that, it seems that he took refuge along with his grandfather at Renjō Temple, which had become a shelter. It seems his grandmother had met them on the way to the shelter, coming from a relative's house. It is believed that Yūma fell victim to the earthquake on the temple grounds of Renjō Temple. Yūma's school uniform and name tag that he was wearing was found in mid-April. It is thought that the students were preparing for their graduation ceremony, so they changed from their sports jerseys into their school uniforms, and then they took shelter.

From the Bereaved Family

A Flower Present for Mom

Giving me roses for Mother's Day, etc., he was a thoughtful and kind son. He was a child who would regularly pick wildflowers and bring them home for me.

Mrs. Mariko Sasaki (mother)

Messages Written on the Desk

This was an incident that happened at the former Ōtsuchi Middle School grounds, which I went to for work during the summer of the year of the earthquake. During my work break, I had the idea of seeing the classroom where Yūma learned every day. The schoolhouse was being demolished so no trespassing was allowed, but I wanted to see it one last time, so I entered. I went into the classroom where things were scattered everywhere due to the earthquake. When I found my son's desk, I saw lots of messages written. They said, "Thank you," "I love Yūma," "Thank you for being friendly." The classmates' messages were completely covering the desk's seat. Takanori told his wife that he received permission from the Board of Education to bring the seat home. "Above all, we're happy there are people who thought of our son like that," the two of us said as tears flowed. We were deeply moved that Yūma must also be happy knowing that his friends were people who remembered and mourned his passing. At Ōtsuchi Middle School, whenever it was Sports Day or the graduation ceremony, Yūma's classmates prepared his seat. With his teacher and classmates surrounding the seat, together with them, he graduated from Ōtsuchi Middle School.

Mr. Takanori Sasaki (father)

What We Want to Pass On

We want to tell Yūma, "Thank you," and "We're sorry."

Mrs. Mariko Sasaki & Mr. Takanori Sasaki (parents), April 2015

MRS. KEI AZUMAYA

Oct. 6, 1936–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 74 years old

1 Chome Kirikiri, Ōtsuchi Town

Life Journey

Kei was born in Kirikiri. Her family home was named “Kajiya” (blacksmith) and they served Kirikiri Zenbei.¹⁰ After completing Kirikiri Elementary School and Middle School, Kei studied Western-style dressmaking at Bunka Fashion Academy in Kamaishi. While she was in middle school, she played volleyball to the extent that she even participated in prefectural tournaments. In 1957, she married Mr. Fujiemon Azumaya, who was a fisherman at the time, and they were blessed with three children. They met at a youth club activity. As of March 2011, they had six grandchildren. To the grandchildren, Grandma had an open mind. She was enthusiastic about regional neighborhood watch, and in 1996, from the Iwate Prefectural Police and Prefectural Crime Prevention Association, she was awarded a certificate of commendation.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

At the time of the great earthquake, Kei was at the collection and delivery center near her house sorting communally purchased goods of the co-op. The earthquake hit and she immediately returned home.

10. Kirikiri Zenbei was a famous supplier to the town of Kirikiri in the Edo period.

Her husband Fujiemon was on his way to the Kirikiri Nursery School where he worked as the board chairman. He was going to check the gas line and evacuate the kindergarteners. It is believed that when the husband was leaving the house, he told his wife Kei, "I'm going to the nursery school. Stay at home." By no means did he think that the tsunami was coming. According to a person who happened to see her, it seems that Kei was going in and out of the house. After getting the kindergarteners to safety, Fujiemon immediately went back home where his wife was. However, the path home was overwhelmed with debris to the degree that he could not reach his house.

From the Bereaved Family

She Was a Person with a Deep Heart

My wife was a hardworking person who also overflowed with affection. Other than doing housework and raising kids, she worked in construction. With those earnings, she made me a business suit. I still think she is the best wife in Japan.

She is recognized as a nursery school director, executive liaison, and Red Cross worker. In 1989, while working as the director of the community center, a traditional Japanese harp group (called the Chrysanthemum Group) was established. My wife suggested that we do the activity together. The group became active and, as a couple, we came to participate in the Iwate Prefecture competition, the Tōhoku Block, and the national competition. I edited a commemorative publication, "A History of Sixteen Years." In 2010, we participated as a couple in a conference that was held in Ōshū City. We stayed at a traditional hot spring inn. It will be one of my most precious memories of the two of us.

I Want to Make a Room for a Buddhist Altar for Kei and Others

There are many things that we did together. These are my cherished memories of us as a couple. At the New Year's party that was being held at that time at the Kirikiri Community Center, a traditional harp musical performance was held. Kei was a person who enjoyed feeding everyone with the food that she made.

I apologized to my sons, "I am sorry that I lost your mom." And they followed up with the words, "You shouldn't blame yourself. It was something that couldn't be helped." I have never dreamed about my

wife. Rather, I live as if she is still alive. In the morning and in the evening, I talk to her at the family Buddhist shrine. I say things like, “Good morning,” and “Where will you go today?” When I do that, I feel like I get the response, “Be safe, okay?” I want to rebuild our house. I am going to make a room in the house for the family Buddhist altar for my wife and others who passed away. I want to tell her that this will be her room.

Mr. Fujiemon Azumaya (husband), Sept. 2014

MRS. KIYOMI KAMAISHI



Jul. 16, 1972–March 11, 2011
Age at Death: 38 years old
1 Chome Kirikiri, Ōtsuchi Town

Life Journey

Kiyomi was born in Suehiro Town. After completing North Ōtsuchi Elementary School, Ōtsuchi Middle School, and Ōtsuchi High School, she found employment at a bank in Tokyo. She met Tadashi Kamaishi, her husband-to-be, who was two years her junior, during her high school days. She was entered into his family registry on March 11, 1992, and in 1993 they returned to Ōtsuchi Town. They were blessed with two sons. In Ōtsuchi Town, she served as a temporary employee at the town hall and then worked for a long time as clerical worker at Itō Shōten.¹¹ Her workplace was accommodating in allowing her to balance [her responsibilities of work and] raising her children.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

When the earthquake occurred, Kiyomi was at work at Itō Shōten. After that she went to her family home in Suehiro Town. She was worried

11. A Japanese frozen ramen company.

because she knew that her mother, who was receiving elder care, could not run away by herself. It is believed that she fell victim to the earthquake on her way there. It seems that just about every day, on her way home from work and such, Kiyomi would go to her family home to take care of her mother. For her children, they had difficulty accepting the reality that their mother fell victim to the disaster while taking a risk going to her family home.

It is believed that she fell victim inside her car. Her husband Tadashi says, “We desperately searched because we couldn’t find my wife. Then we found my wife’s car, and inside the car, there was a pile of bone that looked like a skull that seemed like it would crumble into ash if it was touched with too much pressure. The police took it, and they said that it was not my wife, but they couldn’t identify the ashes. It seems they couldn’t get a final confirmation. However, I think they were definitely the remains of my wife, so I put them in a container. My wife’s remains are still unidentified.”

From the Bereaved Family

Her Top Priority Was Raising Her Children

I’ve never heard anyone say anything bad about her; she never thought badly about people, and she never fought with anyone. And cooking was her specialty. She never really went out, except for gatherings related to the children. When she was twenty-four years old, in a response for a magazine interview, she said that her top priority was raising her children. She responded that her dream for the future was that, when her children got bigger, she wanted to travel abroad with the family.

Erecting Her Gravestone

I don’t think there is any wife like her. I think I’ve been able to get this far because I was with Kiyomi. I haven’t built her grave. The resident priest also told me there is no rush. However, while Kiyomi was alive,

she worried and thought about the family. Now, since Kiyomi is gone, I've absolutely wanted to build a grave for her.

Tadashi Kamaishi (husband)

What We Want to Pass On

I dreamt that I was desperately trying to rescue my wife, and I could hear the voice of her screaming for help inside the burning car. When I hated work, she listened to my grumbling. Even when I had stress build up, she listened to me. I continue to think there is no other woman like her.

Tadashi Kamaishi (husband)

I had a dream of Kiyomi saying, "Please take care of the grandchildren for me." In front of the home Buddhist shrine, I tell her everything about the grandchildren, and I give her offerings.

Mrs. Eiko Kamaishi (husband's mother), September 2014

MR. KENGO KURAMOTO



Sept. 1, 1945–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 65 years old

2 Chome Kirikiri, Ōtsuchi Town

Life Journey

Kengo was born as the eldest of six siblings. He attended Kirikiri Elementary School and Middle School. After that, in order to financially help his family, he was an apprentice under his uncle, who was a construction worker. Later, he established Kura Ken Construction. In

1971, he married Mitsuko and they had three children. In recent years, he has worked hard doing things like maintenance on the house that he built.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

On that day, he was at home with his wife Mitsuko. Immediately after the earthquake, while talking to his eldest daughter, Yūko, his second oldest daughter, Hitomi, and others, he said, “The two of us are at home.” After that, he was witnessed talking to his neighbor from across the street in front of his house. The details of what happened after that are not known. On March 13, the remains of Kengo’s wife, Mitsuko, were found, and on March 24, Kengo’s remains were found.

From the Bereaved Family

A Master Carpenter Who Was a Hard Worker

When he was thriving as a master carpenter, he worked while also having apprentices. I have memories of going to his workshop often when I was a child and saw him carving wood and planing wood. Going to the ceremony for the erection of the framework of the house that Dad was building and picking up *mochi* was something I looked forward to. At dawn, he would go to work, fishing and doing farm work and, depending on the season, on his lunch break, he would go to the mountain to pick *matsutake* (mushrooms).... At any rate, he really was a hard worker, you know? He collected sea urchin, abalone, and even seaweed; he fished for flounder, etc., and distributed them to the neighbors or sent them to us. He had diverse hobbies such as fishing, picking mountain vegetables, and growing flowers.

I think he was a rigid parent to us. You know, he rarely praised us. I think because he wasn’t good at expressing it, it caused misunderstandings. Like my mother often said, “Even though he has a bad mouth, deep down he is a gentle person.” He was a warm father whose heart was capable of being attentive towards the smallest details.

The Dream of the Household Shinto Shrine the Day Before, and the Dream of Parents After the Cremation

The day before my two siblings and I were preparing to go look for my father, I had a dream. The dream was that I found the family Shinto shrine that my father made, which he completed before the

earthquake. As I was talking about the dream of the shrine, I received a message saying that my father was found, and we all said, “He was waiting for us to come.” After my father’s cremation was completed, we put my father’s cremated remains alongside Mother’s at the family altar. When my husband was sleeping in the Japanese-style room, he had a dream that my parents gathered and they were in a new house. We all said, “The two of them were able to meet each other in heaven.”

What We Want to Pass On

Dear Dad,

From now on, the siblings and the family will do our best help each other, so you don’t need to worry. Please continue to watch over us.

Ms. Yūko Kawashima (eldest daughter)

I want to tell my dad, “I’ll do my best!” because I think I’m causing you to worry a lot. I think, “Please don’t worry,” but, unintentionally, I can’t help but to wonder, “Why aren’t you here?”

Ms. Hitomi Hattori (second daughter)

*Ms. Yūko Kawashima (eldest daughter), Ms. Hitomi Hattori (second daughter),
December 2014*

MRS. MITSUKO KURAMOTO

March 23, 1947–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 63 years old

2 Chome Kirikiri, Ōtsuchi Town

Life Journey

Mitsuko was born and raised in Kirikiri. She attended Kirikiri Elementary School and Middle School, and after that, she attended Western dressmaking school in Kamaishi City. After graduating, she worked at home as a seamstress of Japanese-style clothes. She married Kengo, who was a carpenter. Before marrying into the family, [the Kuramoto family] was a larger family, with Keigo's parents, grandmother, and younger sisters all living together. Around that same time, her husband was establishing Kuraken Construction. Mitsuko was the successor to the store that her husband's father ran, Kuramoto Tofu Shop. She raised three children while running the household and managing the tofu shop. After that, while doing things like part-time jobs, she cared for her husband's elderly mother at home.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

On that day, she was at home with her husband Kengo. Immediately after the earthquake, Kengo, when speaking to his daughters on the phone, replied that the two of them were at home. It is not clearly known what happened after that. Mitsuko's remains were found on March 13, and her husband Kengo's remains were found on March 24.

*From the Bereaved Family**The Image of a Mother Who Worked with Utmost Effort*

She woke up early in the mornings and made and delivered tofu. I have memories of my mom putting some unpressed tofu in the bowl when I, as a little child, took a bowl and soy sauce to her workplace wanting to eat freshly made unpressed tofu in the morning.

Just like when we were little, she would make beanbag toys, futons, and clothes for dolls for the grandkids. They still play with them even today. They became unique treasures in the world.

Inside the House Full of Flowers

Together as a couple, their hobby was flowers. Planting flowers in the flower bed and gathering flowers, inside our house was full of flowers. She used to say that she really enjoyed when everyone gathered at the house; it was really enjoyable to stay up late, which they didn't do all the time, and chat with everyone. Since the grandchildren were born, they took a lot of pictures of them, and my mother said that it made her really happy to look at them at night. She really enjoyed doing things like that.

Before the earthquake, she was also my grandmother's caregiver, so I think she was rather tired. We couldn't take it anymore. We asked our father, "Can you please place Grandma in the senior home for a short time because we want to give Mom some time." Six months before the disaster, he temporarily placed my grandmother in a senior care home for my mom. So, I kind of wonder if it was able to be a time for just the two of them. It was the very end, but I think it was good.

What We Want to Pass On

My mother was a person who was warm and pleasant, and she wasn't the type to really nag. I definitely think that because she was a big-hearted mother, Dad was able to do what he loved. "Mom, please always look over us. Spend time with Dad in heaven, and I want to meet with you once in a while, even if it's in a dream."

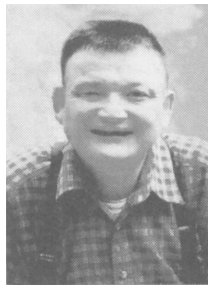
Ms. Yūko Kawashima (eldest daughter)

I often wish my parents were here, but I want to say to them, “Please don’t worry.” Because they probably have things that were left undone, I want them “to do over there the things they couldn’t do here.”

Ms. Hitomi Hattori (second daughter)

*Ms. Yūko Kawashima (eldest daughter), Ms. Hitomi Hattori (second daughter),
December 2014*

MR. YASUHIKO TAKESAWA



July 3, 1963–March 11, 2011

Age at Death: 47 years old

2 Chome Kirikiri, Ōtsuchi Town

Life Journey

Yasuhiko was born in the Kirikiri region to a household whose business was in the fishing industry. He was the oldest of four children, and he had three younger sisters. Yasuhiko had a disability. He graduated from Hanamaki School for Children with Disabilities. After that, he went to the Warabi Academy, a daycare facility in Kozuchi.

He had an interest in pretty, gorgeous things. In particular, he liked teapots, so when he saw an advertisement for teapots, he would cut it out, and when he went shopping with the family, he would pester his parents that he wanted to look for and buy a pretty teapot.

Circumstances During the Earthquake Disaster

When the great earthquake happened, Yasuhiko was at the Warabi Academy. Warabi Academy was about 7 to 8 kilometers from the ocean, separated by the mountain side. There wasn’t any worry about a tsunami. The daycare facility ran a shuttle bus; the people who regularly

attended the Tsūdo Street facility were sent back home. It is thought that when the bus was passing through the area near Koganji Temple, it fell victim to the tsunami. A bus found nearby was also hit by fire.

From the Bereaved Family

The Last Words of “Goodbye”

Every day that was his day to go to the daycare facility, he rode the shuttle bus. When Yasuhiko would get on the bus, the people in the neighborhood would call out to him, “See you later, big brother!” We would go to the bus stop and see him off. On the day of the disaster, we saw him off the same as we always did. Only, on that day, he didn’t say his usual, “I’m off—I’ll be back.” He said, “Bye-bye.” That keeps coming to my mind over and over.

My Child Who Was Raised with Love

He was a loved person who had a friendly personality. No matter how old he was, he was a pure and charming presence. When we were young, both of our households were not well-off and continued to have hardships. We said that our children must not have hardships, so we came to hold familial connections very dear, in particular. When Yasuhiko’s younger sisters would bring their children to the house, Yasuhiko happily interacted with them and had heart-to-heart exchanges with the children, who were his nieces and nephews. When he did crafts at the daycare facility, he would bring home the things he made and he would proudly show them to us.

What We Want to Pass On

Because we lost our son who cannot be replaced, we became completely despondent and so hesitated to even leave the house. However, I was suddenly moved to start making ornaments—such as butterflies decorated with two clam shells as its wings, dragonflies made from bamboo that I cut from the mountain, beads and buttons that are in plastic containers, all sorts of hanging decorations, wall decorations, and various decorative objects. In the blink of an eye, the room, which is also a living room and the altar room where Yasuhiko’s portrait is placed, became colorfully decorated, to the point that one may wonder if this is a workshop or a store. If you asked me why I make decorations, I would say, “Because Yasuhiko will be happy.” The family continues to have conversations in the space, even today.

Mr. Tokuhiko Takesawa (father), Mrs. Hime Takesawa (mother), December 2014