

Voices of women ②

From the City of Ishinomaki, Miyagi prefecture where affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011

July, 2016

21) Ms. A (a woman in her 60's)

October 24, 2015

When I was escaping, I was walking in the sea water. I waved my hands to a helicopter to show that "I am here". I did not feel hard or sad. Right after the earthquake, I don't know why but I just grabbed a radio to evacuate. I walked around without eating or drinking. Finally, I arrived the garbage collection area. There I saw the Self-Defense Forces praying for each remain that they had found. My husband originally had a dental appointment on 3.11 but for some reasons, it was rescheduled the day before. Thus, he was home with me to evacuate together.

I learned that you can save only yourself. You are the only one who can save your life. Don't wait for people but just escape. Of course, I have a mixed feeling but it does not make me all sad that Tsunami destroyed our house. It is much sadder to lose your own family. My sister has become mentally ill and it is difficult to encourage her. I have no idea what the future holds.

A few days after Tsunami, I went back home. There we found only 2 pots of cactus on the 2nd floor. My son brought them down to downstairs. I was surprised to see green in that situation. I have been taking good care of the cactus since then but its flowers do not bloom any more. I also found narcissus in our garden so I dig it out and brought it back to the shelter.

On the 11th day after Tsunami, we moved from the shelter to Sendai and lived there for 3 years. During our walk, I found the same plants that we used to have in our garden and it made me sad. The smell from the stewed vegetables reminded me of our home and made me think why I was here. When I heard an announcement about an invitation to a concert during a bus ride in Sendai, I was surprised to learn how it was different from Ishinomaki and a different world.

3.11 gave me a chance to take a new step. For me, it was to close down the electronic appliance store. I was too busy. I spent working on the maintenance, repairs and accounting for 50 years. My priority was work than life. The store was for those who were waiting for the bus. Homeless and senior people often stop by too. I feel it is a waste to see people buying the brand new electronic appliances though you could just change the parts to fix them. Right now, I live my life day by day. I no longer live to work and learned life is not all about money. I started growing avocados. I like collecting rocks and fossils of trees since my childhood.

Right after the earthquake, a neighbor died because he went to get his car back. I should have stopped him to go telling him that Tsunami was coming. I just cannot

forget his last smile and I will not be able to forget it for the rest of my life. On May 12, I was saddened to cremate 5 relatives. Right before 3.11, my car made a strange sound. I hate the sound of the wireless-activated disaster warning system. I know that we will face natural disaster in the future. I realize how small the human beings are when I see the stratum and know the long and huge history of the globe and nature. A few months before 3.11, I saw a large crowd of sardine. We always must be on the alert.

I liked reading so much especially the “Anne of Green Gables” and “Daddy-Long-Legs”. I like the theme that tomorrow will be the better day. I also like movies, Bunraku and flamenco. Right before the disaster, I saw the flowers of lotus, blackberries and Asian hard clams. Now I spend time reading and studying without worrying about time.

My mother lost her young son due to illness and then I was born in the following year. I was never held by my mother. So, I don't know how to hold my own children. My father was an alcoholic but he loved me. He experienced the war and I heard him screaming “Help me” in Chinese. I am sure my mother was hurt. Now I feel that I wish I could understand my parents better. The war is just so cruel. After the war, a soldier came back crossing the Okachitoge Pass. Then he saw his wife hanging her baby's diaper. He then learned that his wife got married to his brother before his return. With that, he decided to go back the Pass.

I have 4 children. There are many issues that I need to revolve. So, I plan to face the issues and them to take care of the children. I also would like to take a walk. I would like to live an ordinary life. It has taken 3 years for me to get to where I am.

I designed my house to be a one-story house. This is because that our neighbors would be able to evacuate to be here in case of an emergency, about 50 people can be cared, cleaned and use the mud toilet.

22) Ms. B (a woman in her 50's)

January 20, 2016

I was at home for a day off on 3.11. On the 4th day after the earthquake, I biked in the water and went to the office. I believe judgement and the instructions by the office supervisor if the employees should stay in the office or to leave the office changed the destiny of the employees. In the middle of the night on 3.11, an employee's husband came to pick up his wife with a boat. He then asked if there were more people that needed to be picked up. Then the supervisor replied "No, there isn't". Other people would have been saved with his boat if the supervisor had said yes.

My house was barely affected by the Tsunami. So, the relatives came to stay with us. They ate my spaghettis, eggs and chocolates without asking. I managed to buy those food after being in line for a few hours and they upset me.

I start forgetting things as the time goes by. I am just happy that my son is alive. We sometimes have arguments but we are just more fortunate than those who died and lost children. Do you believe in karma? If you do something good, then will good things happen to you? Did those died do anything bad? Did those ladies who lost their children and still going through hardship do anything wrong? I feel guilty that I was fortunate enough to have a day off on 3.11 and happened to be with all of my family members at home. Was I fortunate? What is the fortune? Were those who died unfortunate? Am I more fortunate than those who died and who lost their close people? I just feel so bad to be fortunate then. My child is a high school student and getting ready for the college entrance exams. I just do not know what his future holds and get worried. I sometimes wish if I was dead at that time, and then feel guilty to have such feelings. I sometimes wish another disaster would happen and then I would die. I should have died for others. I have such feeling though I was given a chance to live. Even though those who died wanted to live. I know that it is bad to say I wish I was dead due to the disaster. Did the God choose who should survive?

I had never expected such a disaster would happen. What should I do if the next one comes? My mother who experienced Chili earthquake in 1960 says that it is like a legend. My 3.11 experience would be forgotten in the future and would become like a legend later. I hope a part of my memory would become an inspiration. We can always say "I should have done this" but we become wise after the event.

23) Ms. C (a woman in her 50's)

Sat, February 6, 2016

I lost my third-grade son for Tsunami. I later heard that kids were saying, "Let's escape to the mountain". The children were always told to make your own individual decisions, but those who just waited for the teachers to give instructions, 74 students died due to Tsunami. Those kids were raised to listen to the teachers and parents. The children simply trusted and listened to the grownups. I hope the children will learn from this lesson. I do not really wish to have the site remained as a Tsunami devastated area but I would rather have the kids to learn from the site and the experiences.

My son must have wished his parents came to pick him up like other parents. How come his mother did not come to pick him up? I regret that I did not go to pick him up. However, I thought that school was the safest place for kids. Somehow, I simply believed that the kids are the safest at school.

After his death, I found a bag of flower seeds in the back of his desk drawer. It was the seeds of the morning glory. The bag of the seeds said, "To the future me". He liked baseball, so he may have wanted to become a baseball player. He may have wanted to plant the seeds and grow the morning glory. After 3.11, I did not even notice the season changed and the cherry blossoms blooming. I can no longer go to the big shopping malls because I always remember my son. It is extremely difficult for me to see kids in the same age as my son. When I go to the shopping mall in the evening on weekdays, I still see kids in the same age. I cannot go to the game stores and book stores where I used to take my son to. He would have been a 9th grade student. A boy with whom my son used to play baseball, was picked up by his parents in time and he survived. I know it is not him but I just cannot stand seeing him or hearing his voice playing.

After 3.11, I went to look for my son everywhere but could not find him. I thought he was washed away to the open ocean. I was almost giving up to find him and then I heard his classmate was found in Dejima. So, I had a hope to find him. Then I found him in a rice field on April 2. He was wearing helmet and clothes. His clothes were not torn. He did not have a scratch in his face or body. The helmet band was tightened around his jaw and his skin was red. He had lost only his left shoe. He was drawn to death. He was wrapped in a vinyl and transferred by the refrigerator car. It still hurts me to see the refrigerator cars. At that time, the crematory was not in operation, so my husband drove our son's body to a crematory in Fukushima by car.

Even before 3.11, I was too scared to watch violent scenes in the TV shows but I visited the morgues to view the damaged corpse, tried finding my son based on the height. I checked the paddy farm and the beach back and forth. About 50% of the bodies were not damaged but those bodies found in the mountain, school building and the shrine had some damages. My son and his friend he used to play games with were found on the same day. My son and her body were laid in the morgues next to each other.

My husband's father passed away last year. He was older and we knew the time was coming. However, we just could not accept the fact that our child died. He was totally fine in the morning, we had meals at the same table and next each other. I totally believed that the school was the safest place, teachers are there to help and they were at the mountain side. He was taking a bus so he could have escaped with the bus. I heard that grandparents were washed away while they were waiting for their grandchildren coming back with the school bus at the bus stop. Something different could have been done. Why were the children waiting for 50 minutes at the school field without thinking about Tsunami? I will carry this guilt for the rest of my life. If we did not have a child from the first place, it would have been different. How could we lose a child after giving a birth?

A nearby junior high school was closed in March, 2016. At the closing ceremony, they said "due to the decreased number of the children" but do you wonder why the number of the children was decreased? The children who were supposed to enter the school were lost in Tsunami. I am afraid that people would forget what happened. Those children wanted to do a lot of things. I feel the same though years pass by. I actually feel worse. When my co-workers talk about their children growing up such as entering and graduating the junior and high schools and colleges, I pretend I did not hear them. Those children who attended schools by the beach survived. You should take good care of your own life. My husband got cancer and said "I don't mind dying. I want to see my son".

The supporting group with those who lost their children are helping me. Since the disaster, my husband and I have been arguing all the time. When I start crying to watch TV, he gets mad as he is sick of seeing me crying. He says I should calm. In old times, our child was a cushion between my husband and me. I cannot stand watching the TV on kids bullying. I feel the gap between the families that lost all children and the families that have at least one surviving child.

I own a rice field, but I am having other people managing it. What's the point to take care of the rice field that was supposed to be succeeded by our son, whom we lost. Now I am enjoying the gardening. I would like to grow flowers to place for our family Buddhist altar.

24) Ms. D (a woman in her 60's)

February 7, 2016

My husband's sister had been hospitalized before 3.11. She passed away soon after the earthquake at the hospital. We kept her remains at our house for a week or so after her passing because there was no crematory in operation. It was cold so here remains were ok. Our Tatami floor was wet due to the Tsunami but we used a few layers of dried materials and placed her body on them. I placed a few flowers that our friend gave to us that he was supposed to bring to somewhere else.

After the earthquake, we joined our neighbor's suggestion and escaped to a nearby building. Then we returned to our house on the 6th day. Our first floor was soaked with water but the second floor was ok. We were fortunate to have Futon and little food to survive. Each local community group provided the support supplies such as bread and rice balls.

My hair salon was damaged by Tsunami and I could not start the operation for a while. About 2 later, someone came to ask for a haircut. I found a pair of scissors and cut his hair by using a regular chair. We boiled water with the kerosene boiler and gas canister. We also cooked with the reflective stove. We fixed my salon, washed volunteers' hair and gave them cut until around August. I also provided a space for the volunteers so that they can have lunch with AC. I also shared such as bonito and saury Sashimi, seasoned tuna, ice cream, watermelon with volunteers because about 5 to 10 volunteers helped us with taking Tsunami water out of the place and also tearing off the floor. We are at least fortunate that our family member did not die. When you face a big earthquake, all you must do is escape. When I feel even a slight earthquake, I open a door. I would like to donate to Taiwan earthquake occurred in 2016.

Right after 3.11, the things that got soaked and damaged were left on the street and one person managed to pass by. My daughter bought us a refrigerator but the delivery car could not cross the street. Our relative was kind enough to bring us the kerosene. Things kept in the freezer on the 2nd floor were getting defrosted and we could eat them. I feel that we could survive because I was not alone but with my husband. When I

look back, I am not impressed with how well we did but how we could do it. As we are getting older, we would like to live our own age. For our daughter's wedding, we went to Hawaii. We would like to go sometime again. We need to start saving money. I enjoy watching travel TV shows because I feel as if I was traveling with them too. I need to have water drained from my knee every month. I am on my feet all the time as a hairstylist but I don't move around too much. I do not read novels so much so I am not very good with thinking and talking but I am a good listener to my customers. I know a lot of people who experienced so much damages. When I meet with those who had worse experiences and damages than me, I do not talk about myself but focus on listening. I listen to my son who was working at a gymnasium that was used as a morgue. I also shared my son and his family with food. My daughters who lived in Tokyo could not come to visit us for a while.

There is no public transportation. I feel sorry that those elders living in the temporary residence by themselves are find dead by themselves. Those elder people tend to watch TV all day long and do not have a change to get out of the house to socialize. The hospitals are usually crowded because the elder people are talking there. It seems that they are sharing the same experiences and supporting each other.

I took the online program to become a hairstylist. I always liked touching hair since I was small. My mother suggested I become a hairstylist. Before my husband and I opened a hair salon, I worked for 2 different salons. We got married by the arrangement marriage and opened our new salon. We would like to continue to work as long as possible as we do not have a retirement age without killing ourselves too much. As we get older, our regular customers are getting older and some even pass away. Most of the recent hair salons take appointments only and so those who come from faraway and living in the temporary house are having hard times. However, our salon is ok to take customers without appointments. So, customers come to our salon by taking a cab and then my husband drives them back home. Then my husband drives both ways from the following time. If the customer wishes to go shopping, he would stop by a supermarket. There are times that our salon gets crowded and then some days no one comes. I wonder if people want to go to a hair salon on certain days. We have been in this business for 43 years.

Lately, I am really into crafting to make things with paper and towel.

25) Ms. E (a woman in her 60's)

February 21, 2016

I was working as a nurse at the office of the pediatrics on 3.11. I was at the corridor with a medical record in hand. I saw that the huge earthquake threw the things out at a little shop. I found myself screaming "Please stop it!". I saw a father and a child under an examination table. I had never expected Tsunami would reach where we were. I was not ready at all. A colleague who went to pick up her child let me know that something terrible is happening We evacuated the hospitalized patients to the 3rd floor. We saw the wave coming and took the cars away.

We could not use the electricity but could turn on a radio. Our home power generator was destroyed. The self-defense force came to help us out. I remember that a nearby railroad crossing was left out ringing for a long time. I spent a night just with a blanket. The injured person was carried in one after another. However, all we could do was just disinfecting them.

We provided the blankets and hospital gowns to those covered with the mud. We survived with the food found at the stand. It was cold.

I went home next day, but the water was still there. I also saw a fire. I followed a person walking in the water with a cane to check whether it was safe to walk or not. The acquaintance made me rice balls. I was soaked with water up to my waist and went home. I went to pick up my mother who was evacuated at a nearby high school. Then we started living with 2 other girls, my daughter and other families. We found food in the refrigerator and ate vegetables without washing them. We cooked everything with only one pot and we boiled water with the solar photovoltaic generation. Our grandchild was only 1 month old and we needed water and also hot-water bag to keep the baby warm. Even in a same town, the damage was totally different depending on the location. Someone let us use a bathroom to take a bath.

I experienced when our heart was totally opened at an emergency. We talked about things that we usually do not talk about.

Some people shared gas and potatoes with us. We returned to work 1 month after the disaster. My hospital came to come to pick me up by car or I took bus. The medical records were all wet in the water. We should have printed out the record in addition to the information saved in the computer and then maintained upstairs. The

patients should have extra prescribed medicines in case they cannot renew the regular prescriptions.

I learned that the family is the most important thing and that I want to protect them. You never know what would happen post-earthquake. So, you should just escape. I sometimes think how the people connect with others. I have been busy with taking care of my own family first though.

At night, we lighted candles and seemed a little like having a feast. We laughed though we were in a tough situation. We helped each other by getting and carrying clean water in a bucket. We tried changing the mind stage and remember something fun. I had an experience our hearts were opened in the middle of the emergency and we talked about something that we usually do not discuss. A month later, I returned to work. I commuted with a bus and with a car that the hospital provided. The medical records maintained in the basement were under the water and messy. We should have kept a copy of the printed medical record and saved upstairs and not just in a computer. We should have also kept extra medicines for those who need medications regularly such as the diabetic patients.

I really felt that my family is the most important thing and that I needed to protect them. What we have to keep in mind is that you just have to evacuate first as you never know what would happen after the earthquake. I sometimes think about the people connection though I am busy every day. All I can do is supporting my own family. These days, I wish if people could consider home-care option for those in need and not just leaving them in a hospital. I feel that the doctors treat the patients based on the age of the doctor himself. Older doctors treat the elderly patients in a way and younger doctors treat the younger patients' feelings, but the young doctor sees the patient by the standard of his own life. The doctor does not allow the nurse to sit in the appointment with patients. Only the person who handles the paperwork of the computer and the doctor examine the patient. Isn't it important for nurses to hear the patients in person so the nurses can understand the patients' conditions?

26) Ms. F (a woman in her 30's)

February 27, 2016

On 3.11, I was working at a dental clinic and returned home on the 4th day. I walked in the water at the hospital and arranged to get water and food. I went through the mountain to go home to confirm my family's safety. Then I went back to work again. In total, I was at the hospital working for about a week. I thought the patients might come back to the clinic as soon as the electricity returned. I prioritized to work on preparing the medical chart. At home, seven relatives were evacuated and living with us. As we were not living at a shelter, the water and food were not provided. Our neighbors were helpful to share the springs and the well water. The volunteer people shared goods with us too. A reflective stove and a hot water bottles were helpful. I could have stayed at home but my coworkers were so nice that they let me live at the office. In other parts of Ishinomaki, there were some places that were not affected by the earthquake. I was surprised to see the difference. "What's that? When will it be our turn to get the electricity back? I wear the same clothes and my hair was messy". I was feeling sorry for myself. Even in the same city, the surrounding situation is different depending on where you are located. I did not feel it was reality when I saw the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (1995) on TV. I did not know how it would be like to live without water or electricity. We cannot take things for granted. If and when Tsunami ever comes, all you must is to escape to survive. You never know if there is tomorrow for sure. If you have something to tell someone, you should do it. If you have something you want to do, do it.

When I was 6 years old. My grandfather who was close passed away. It gave me a chance to think about death. Some cannot live thought they want to live. I think I was influenced by my high school classmate and my aunt's death too. I recall my aunt used to say "you never know what the future holds". For my aunt who did not have any children, I was like her daughter. I would like to live up with her words. Now the support of my mind is my family and acquaintances.

A violin teacher's mother escaped to a higher ground and survived. Then later, she went back to the lower ground and died. I just had talked with her 5 days before her passing. She used to say "You can make beautiful sound when you eat homemade dishes. So please try cooking for someone you care". I enjoy piano and violin

lessons as there are some songs that I would like to play myself. I feel so happy once I can play the songs that I could not play before. It feels like I am exploring to find happiness.

These days, I have dreams escaping from something. When I was at kindergarten student, I was so shy and bullied. I was always feeling I was inferior to other children. My mother told me to learn music as a hobby. I did not want to stand out alone. I was happy with my own small world. I would like to play at a retirement center. I had a dream when I was 7 or 8 years old to learn ballet, piano and violin. It came true and I am taking the lessons now. The music that I was continuing to learn has been a support to me and it heals me so much. It is a way of self-expression. I have to live! Because of 3.11, I had a chance to meet with new people. I appreciate the bonding and connection of people. I must be alive for me and to make my dreams come true to enjoy my life.

27) & 28) Ms. G (a woman in her 70's) and Ms. H (a woman in her 60's) Together

February 28, 2016

G: Born and raised in Ayukawa on the Oshika Peninsula. We all know each other. You don't need to act cool at all. On that day, I heard a loud siren alarming us that "6-meter Tsunami is coming". So, I took three mortuaries, closed the window of heavy sash, locked the door and left. I could see a wave like a black steam. I had never thought that my home would be gone. In our town, we lost five couples. One was someone who was in bed for a long time, one was waiting for her husband who had left to check on his ship on the road, one went to get his wife who could not move after the disaster, some were sheltered in the 2nd floor, 4 people working for a postal office lost their lives too. I had only the image of Tsunami running through a river. I managed to survive with the water from the natural water from the natural river. I saw cars pushing away in the river. I found my house getting crushed by a stranger's car. Only the hallway remained like a stage. There was also a storage with storing bunch of worthless. In the night of 3.11, I stayed over a night in a tent. Then I started living in a shelter run by the office. I found people I knew and we shared the blankets, rolled posters and crowded the cold. There was a man on the side and I was a little hesitant to fall asleep. We should consider women's needs. I got the necessary food and the thing from the households that survived the disaster. We also ate the hard meat and eggs that we

received from the egg farm. The fireman managed our toilet treatment. I felt bad to eat all the food that I received from my relatives and I also felt hesitant to use all the underwear that I had received.

On the 49th day, I left the window open to let the spirits fly away.

I lived in Ishinomaki for 3 years when I was in high school. After I graduated from the junior high school, my mother told me that I did not need to go to high school. However, my relatives persuaded my mother saying that the education was very important. I lived in a dormitory and enjoyed my life. They made rice balls for us and we took a day trip to a beach in Hibari. Everyone was so kind. My town is a fishing town and young people usually leave. After the disaster, my son came to pick me up but everyone kept me to stay. In January, 2011, before the disaster, I fell asleep while driving and fell from the cliff. My car was totally destroyed.

My husband had died while ago as he fell in the ocean. I have become a widow at the age of 69. I had been taking care of my mother who had been suffering from a dementia. I am the only child so I loved talking with people and I think I am pretty friendly. My father was a fisherman and kind. My Mother was strict and hard on me as I was not smooth. The people from my town were very kind and nice. We were always talking about what we should do if we win a lottery, talked on the phone doing a fraud, insurance agent. I have been busy as there is nothing worse than losing your own house. I have been doing work out with weights, making Japanese poems, Karaoke and more. I have also been attending the events that the temporary shelter is offering.

I have been living with my daughter and have arguments here and there. I cannot hold back myself. In March, 2016, my new house was built and I am living by myself. I am enjoying working with dirt, growing plants. I feel it is important to feel the kindness.

H: If you have life, you will be ok. More than 50 people lost their lives at a nearby supermarket. You would never expect a Tsunami would come. After a big quake, I went to pick up my grandchild who was attending a kindergarten in the elevated place. It was snowing so I did not wish to drive. Someone told me that I should not drive back to downstairs. So, I followed the advice and stayed at the kindergarten. We were lucky to listen to the advice. We could not understand the siren very well. I was wondering "What? Where? What's going on?". Those kids whose parents

could not come to pick them up were staying at a different room.

The only thing that I could find in my house was Good. On April 18, when the cherry blossoms were blooming, I went to visit my hometown and started living with my siblings after 40 years. As we did not bump to each other too much, I rented a house nearby. I really felt how lucky to have a hometown. My relatives helped me so much. I had never expected that my family would be helping us like this. Now, I feel it is important for me to find the slightest happiness, appreciate myself and don't think too much. There are so many things that I need to do now. When we built a new house, I told my son and his family that I did not want to have a new house in the same place the Tsunami attacked us. However, my husband insisted that he would build the new house at the same place.

Though we had experienced 3.11, I am so glad that I am still alive. I do not wish to be called a disaster victim. It makes me feel miserable. I am happy. I do not need to compare with others. It makes me feel better to move around. I hear others talking and I live with others.

"Enough is as good as a feast". You don't need to look up too much. Women are strong. I have been busy with taking 3rd grade grandchild to school and preparing meals for 6 people. We have a separate kitchen for different households. I am kind of glad that 3.11 was in March toward spring. We were living with longer sun. We were eating the fish from the freezer, washed the rice with the spring water, hid the food with a backpack and ate them with my grandchild. I was worried that the rainwater may have radioactivity.

I am the youngest out of the 4 siblings. Since I was little, I would not defy others. This is my way of living smart. Life is good at 60 points. I feel things the going as I like.

29) Ms. I (a woman in her 50's)

January 31, 2016

3.11 was my son's graduation day from his junior high school. After the earthquake, I went back to where our house was located and found that it was covered with the despair. When I was walking toward the shrine, I saw the wave coming. I ran up to upstairs and then climbed on top of the roof. Right around the landing, the wave stopped. I do not want to die! Then I smelled the propane gas and I was scared what

if the fire lit. I heard later that my son was telling the neighbors to evacuate and he evacuated to the elementary school. Next morning, my son came to pick me up. We could not get in touch with my husband. On 10th day, we walked a bridge over a river to go to his office to find him. He had thought that my son and I were dead.

Nothing lasts forever. We thought an ordinary day will last. They are facing more difficulties than us. Our house was destroyed but in the end, it's just a material and we should just let go. I would like to keep my chin up and do my best. No one is perfect and everyone has pros and cons. It just hurts me to see people being lonely and sad. I just can't help talking to those who are lonely and sad and can't leave them alone. When I saw a new high school, teacher being teased by the students, I told the classmates to stop it. When I was power harassed by a boss, I told him to stop. As I tend to think of other people too much, I get exhausted.

I lived in Sendai for 3 years from 2011. My husband travels to Ishinomaki to work by car. In the beginning, I felt guilty to be alive and could not sleep with my legs and arms stretched. Then I learned that smiles create more smiles. I would like to believe and follow that we oversee your own life. I am called a "Ishinomaki's Osekkai Mama" by the foreigners living in this town. I did not go to college but at the age of 41, I started learning English with radio and TV. Speaking English connects people and this is something that I enjoy. I enjoy being with friends from other countries living in Ishinomaki. I will be an assistant teacher from April, 2016 at an elementary school. I obtained a certificate to teach English. I am reading to children. I feel that a bridge is built day by day. Our 9th wedding anniversary is our son's birthday. I would like to thank my husband's parents to giving him a life. When I was small, I did not like to play with dolls or playing house. I was holding a stuffed animal. My mother was always busy with sewing clothes to sell and always busy. I spent time by myself and I was lonely. After the disaster, I went to a flea market and found a stuffed animal of a penguin. My eyes and the penguin's eyes were met and they looked like he was telling me to take him home. So, I bought it right away with 50 yen. I have been talking to the penguin all the time. When I place him in the passenger seat in the car, he looks after me as if he is telling me, "Drive safe!". A friend of mine lost 3 children for Tsunami. I got in touch with her by e-mail every day to keep her busy. She recently started the volunteer works to help out the children. So, I joined the work too.

When my son was in the junior high school, he took English classes by Ms. Taylor Anderson, an American teacher and he won the English speech contest 2 times. It was

also aired on national TV. My son was also invited by the Taylor Anderson Foundation created by her parents to New York. I still remember that Taylor joined our lunch at the sports-day event. We have Taylor's chest at our house through my friend's introduction. When we received the chest, we smelled Taylor's fragrance. The chest is as if it is telling us to live and be confident.

30) Ms. J (a woman in her 60's)

April 9, 2016

Many dogs that lost their owners were brought into a pet shop after 3.11. A friend of mine was working for the pet shop and brought 2 dogs to our house. I just said "our house" but "our house" was washed away and we were living in an apartment. My friend did not even try to hear what I was going to say and left the dogs with me. I was wondering what I should do with the dogs at that time but now, they are the reasons for me to keep living.

31) Ms. K (a woman in her 30's)

February 18, May 11-12, June 2, 2016

I was working at a day-care center in a beachfront town on that day. It was a nap time. We were supposed to wake up the children at 3 o'clock. During the long quake, I was shouting in my head "Stop (the quake) quickly". Every teacher was calm and not panicking. I told the children, "Everything is fine. Just wait." It was a long tremor. The windows of the building shattered and fell on the floor. The children listened to me obediently and there was no child crying. I think we had a trusting relationship with the children. If there were only adults, we might not have evacuated. We put jackets and shoes on the children and then gathered in the garden. They calmly lined up in one line. Nobody broke the line or panicked.

We handed over about 50 children to their parents who came to pick them up and took 50 other children to a higher ground to refuge. We had many teachers hired locally who suggested Tsunami would come after a big earthquake and also knew a different route to a mountain instead of going to a usual location used for our evacuation drill, we took that route to escape. Only locals would have known that route. There were long stone steps and slopes. The town was swallowed by muddy stream of the Tsunami and I heard the sound of buildings being destroyed. I thought "this can't be

happening, right?” The day-care center was completely destroyed with no trace of it. What if we stayed in the garden? What if we were late to evacuate? What if we went to the usual evacuation drill place? We would have been dead. The decision made in a split second saved us. The street sign marking where the tsunami from Chili Earthquake came to was completely submerged. The tsunami caught us off guard since we thought it would not come this far. Adults evacuated only because of the children. We were saved by the children. The parents who came to pick them up later thanked me, but I thanked them instead.

The gymnasium on the hill where we escaped to had broken glasses all over and we could enter. So, we got in and stayed in the warehouse in the playground. There were about 1,000 people in this playground to refuge. Even there were some food, it was not distributed as it would have been unfair to some as there were not enough for everyone. The children didn't want to go to a dark and dirty bathroom and had accidents. As we escaped without bringing anything, I had the children wear pants that I made out of newspapers and paper bags.

If there were only adults, we may not have escaped. I felt that my mission was accomplished by saving children's lives. The road was completely cut off and I couldn't go home for five days. My mother-in-law took care of my two-year-old son. I was worried. I had tears no matter whom I met, because I was on the border of life or death. It made me happy simply that I was living. On the 3rd day, I went searching for goods relying only on my sense of directions as there were no roads. I didn't know but the Self Defense Force (that comes to rescue) makes roads first.

I won't forget what happened. I would like to reflect on the lessons learned in the future, but I'm afraid people may forget. After the disaster, I couldn't talk about this experience for a while. I didn't want to remember, because my life was as difficult as it could be. I tried to forget things that I didn't want to remember. Now I can finally speak about it, recalling little by little. Training is important to deal with various experiences. I think there is no limit to possible scenarios, but it's important to build applicable skills and take actions on a flexible basis. People who lost family members continue to cry. If it were me, can I switch the way I think that “the deceased will not be pleased if I keep crying”? How do I talk to people who lost family? Should I even try to talk to them? I wonder how they feel.

Now my family comes first and it's my top priority. I worked as a nursery school teacher for 14 years but wondered if my only life would be ok for being this busy and my day starting so early? I want to value the time I spend with my small son. It was my dream to become a nursery school teacher, but I left work after the disaster. Now I am doing things that I couldn't do while I was working. I lost a car and other stuff, but I can live without them. I want to live a happy life, without stretching myself too much, although I get depressed from time to time. Enjoy living with my spared life.

32) Ms. L (a woman in her 50's)

March 25, 2016

I am doing my best just to live right now. It is no use to think deeper every day. It is important to live a full life by valuing each day without getting caught up with little things. Each person has a different life thus we have a different ending. Isn't it a view from the top to label those who lost their lives by the earthquake as "poor people"? Their souls are not dead yet, I want to believe that way. Isn't it better not to perceive them special? While it's painful to see life disappear from this world, you must leave someday. Everybody faces death. The difference is how long or short it will be. I won't be able to say this when I think about the bereaved families, but if I dare to say, I think that life cannot be measured with our 30-cm ruler. If I speak about the preciousness of life although I don't know about life myself, I feel those who passed away that day could be more precious than those who are living today without being serious. It is rude for those lost lives to feel pity about them.

Humans are part of nature. A tide shield is being built to protect from tsunami, but I think it's better not to try to measure nature. Human vs. nature? Isn't it better to just enjoy something that you don't fully understand? People forget, and since time will resolve problems, I think it's okay to forget about them and leave them to be resolved over time. It's been five years since the disaster, wouldn't it be ok to forget now? For me, the most I can do is to live my small life in a humble way.

For my health, I am doing exercise, dance and aerobics and it's a lot of fun. I am very impressed with middle-aged women who are proudly dancing belly dance in tight tights or bikinis revealing their full figure with no waist line. It looks as if they are taking a step toward getting over something. I want to think that I had a good life when I look

back. Currently, I'm working for a welfare office. The work is hard and difficult, but there is always laughter among staff. It's a nice and happy workplace. After the earthquake, we are advising people who are forced to live a hard life, objectively without emotions. I feel it's important to respect each person's way of life.

People who died on March 11 also lived their life. I think it's ok not to look for missing people as I believe they have properly gone to the heaven. A lot of support groups that wanted to help people in need came to help us, but I feel they just came to satisfy themselves. Do you encourage victims to become independent? How much is enough to help you? Can you make people happy by just sending materials? There are people who feel unhappy regardless of having goods. I think it's important to see a person's heart. Wealthy people are also feeling empty and sick. I think taking care of your own happiness first and sharing it with the people you are close to is essential to spread a happy aura, instead of trying to measure it by human standards.

33) Ms. M (a woman in her 70's)

May 2, 2016

We reopened our confectionery shop from May 8, 2011. I was happy because my house was saved, and we had futon to sleep with. On March 11, my brother-in-law was clinging on to a utility pole at the time of the tsunami but later died of hypothermia having tried to swim. My husband looked for him every day in mortuaries. He was found in a space under the eaves and identified by his jacket on April 19. On March 11, I was in the hospital in Sendai due to a compound fracture. My brother-in-law called me that morning and said "I am sorry I couldn't go join you guys for the 49th day of Buddhist memorial service. I missed it." That was his last word I heard. It was good that we could send him off properly. Due to my hospitalization, I was happy that my life was spared. I must have been saved.

I was discharged from the hospital on April 23. My source of energy is talking with customers, laughing and talking. I think it's no good to be alone or stay inside. I was made to live. It's better to cry and unleash my thoughts. I told my acquaintance who had been enduring the situation to cry instead. I am happy and don't worry over small stuff by nature. When I was young, I had nights that I couldn't sleep from worries. I came to think that I shouldn't worry because there was nothing I could do, but I could worry next day. I worry but bounce back and change my gear. Because I repeatedly

went in and out of the hospital, I can talk about many stories about sickness. Women who survived are strong.

I felt bad for other shops around that I reopened early. I could start early because the water didn't come into the shop. My acquaintances said "I'm happy you reopened" when I first reopened the store. But I think they were feeling jealous inside.

I opened a barber shop at the age of 23 to obtain skills and earn my own income. My mother advised me to get skills so that I could raise children even if I became a widow. Married at the age of 26. Had the first child at the age of 27. When I had the second child at the age of 29, my husband's parents opened a confectionery shop. I eventually had four children. My husband's friends bought confectionaries and I thought having friends was important. They also bought Christmas cakes to help us. My father died of tuberculosis in Manchuria at the age of 36, and my mother became a widow at the age of 32. I was one and a half years old at that time. My mother raised four children by herself. I was the youngest. My mother was the eldest daughter of nine siblings, very moody and had clear representation of emotions. She earned living selling yakisoba noodles and cleaning cloth used for tea ceremony. She never remarried. I grew up thinking not to cause any trouble for my mother.

When I was 22 years old, I worked at a kimono store for half a year. My supervisor was always grumpy and never smiled. He said to me "You are always smiling, fool!", and I returned "What is your problem? You are always grumpy". So, we quarreled but became close friends afterward for a long time.

There was a time when we were asked to be a matchmaker at the wedding. As I was fat at that time and would not be able to serve alcohol to the guests once I dressed in Kimono, I decided to go on a diet and lost a lot of weight from 70 kg by the time of the wedding in November. I walked ten thousand steps and commuted to my part-time cleaning work by bicycle (2 hours) every day.

When my husband fell ill at the age of 50, I thought of closing the confectionery store and re-start a barber shop and a shop for shaving women's faces by also offering makeup and massage. The confectionery store had debts after we opened with the savings that we saved diligently. A large chain store and a cake shop opened in the vicinity and our sales were declining.

At the time of the disaster, we offered 700 cakes to people. For difficult customers, you can become friends by giving extra service to them. I'd like to make people laugh ever since I was a child. It's easy to dislike people, but maintaining that feeling is difficult. So, it's better not to dislike people to begin with. I want my husband to enjoy the rest of his life that has something other than work. We have never gone out together. I want to draw a picture with colored pencils. I can die any time, I'm not afraid as I was made to live. If you humbly pretend not to know something, everyone will kindly teach you. If you pretend as if you know everything, people will not teach you. I don't bad mouth my husband's brothers or relatives. It will only make my husband agonize.

34) Ms. N (a woman in her 40's)

May 6, 2016

I want to repay for support goods we received, as it connects with people for the future. As our lives were OK by having our own house and my husband's work, I tried to record all the support we had received and return the favor. At that time, we were all up to the neck just trying to live and just accepting the goods. No one had any room to be able to make repayment, and I thought I was the only one who could do this now. I tried my best to welcome Prince William when he came to Ishinomaki, too.

I was largely influenced by my mother who shared delicious things with others or provided food to others even she didn't have any. She was from a family of pedigree. My parents were running a store. The first sale of the year was always busy and I was always sent away to my mother's parents'. I helped the store with my parents and think I've learned people skills then. I remember my mother cooled lots of Kinpiragobo (fried burdock root) and gave to customers to take home. I started to cook when I was third grade. My mother was a type of a person who always had good luck.

In February of 2011, my parents closed the store. On March 11, my mother was in the hospital for being terminally ill from cancer, and my brothers were also visiting her at the hospital as her doctor told us she had very little time left to live. We all worried about our father who was alone in the house. It turned out that he lost his life to the tsunami in the house, and we confirmed that on March 12. We informed about our

father's passing to our mother, and she passed away next day on March 13. Her doctor explained to us about her passing, and I became conscious of the existence of God. I felt there was God as I saw Self Defense Force looked for my father in snow and carried canned goods to help us. I'm thankful for policemen and SDF who tried very hard when traffic signals were out of order.

I have a feeling that God is arranging people and events ahead of time for us. I was shocked to hear a doctor from a large hospital said that he wouldn't be able to send doctors who cost 50 million yen to train to become a doctor to the areas that were hit hard by the disaster even though there were people suffering. But, later I understood why. We had bad sanitary situation and unsafe condition with thieves. We didn't have water, either. I was lucky to have two brothers and my husband. I'm still struggling just to live but feel I'm privileged. A friend of mine found her husband's body but it was just a lower part of his body.

Death will come to us in the order of our parents first then me. We don't have any children. When my husband was gone to England for a half year, my life was not as lively. We've been together 21 years, but I started to organize our belongings, dishes and inside the closets, and list things up so that my husband can find something easily after I'm gone.

It's important to care for others. I became acquainted with people who came from other cities. If you keep improving your character and personality, it will deepen your relationship too. A series of events is like a stream of water. I want to see the stream and be able to determine where it goes. I'd like to initiate a stream. People who are needed by others appear with specific rolls to play, build a road for us and go away.

35) Ms. O (a French woman in her 50's)

May 21, 2016

My neighbors helped me. People in Ishinomaki helped me in many ways even I was a foreigner. I didn't want to go home to France just myself, leaving these people behind. It's important to live every day to its fullest. Last year, I built a house and I was happy that my family came to visit me from France.

36) Ms. P (a woman in her 20's)

May 21, 2016

I have a cleaning job. It's no use to think about what happened on March 11. My house near the beach was washed away. But, it'll be all right. I'm optimistic, not worry about small stuff. I'm the only one who can protect my son who is second grade. My house was washed away but my family was saved. I've changed my gear to focus on looking for what's good rather than looking for what's bad. I was laid off from the work I had before the disaster, but I'm spending more time with my child now. I have been flexible to accept whatever that came to me from the time we moved to a small temporary housing from the shelter, or any other places. This is about the best I can do. It is good that I'm now living in one of the houses that were built to accommodate victims and found a new job. The commute time to my work is short, and I want to keep this job one way or the other. I try to take it easy, have accent in my life with high and low points. I try to see the good side of matters.

My parents said they wanted to live by looking at the ocean and built a house near the beach again. They prefer the location where their long-time neighbors are around. I value my life with my son. He likes to read books.

37) Ms. Q (a woman in her 60's)

June 1, 2016

I used to have a produce market by the river. I quickly brought vegetables and fruits inside and locked the door when I heard the tsunami was coming. Later, I heard from my neighbors that they ate some of my produce that were packed in plastic bags and floated in the water. I remember Ponkan oranges were floating in the water when I entered my store on the third day. Although my store was small, I could still see the marks inside the store where the tsunami swirled.

I thought of staying with relatives but went to the shelter instead so that I didn't have to be polite all the time at the relative's house. I stayed there for a half year. It may be because I was running a store that I liked to talk to people, and cleaning and cooking with others didn't bother me at all. I heard some people at the shelter were concerned

about being watched by others or not comfortable in a communal living. I was totally fine may be because I had many of my neighbors there. When I was young, I was shy around strangers, not found of interacting with people and didn't like to talk with others.

I was learning sewing and knitting as I liked to work with hands when I was young and stayed home without going to work. I married with someone whose family business was a produce market, started to get used to people and it's been 35 years. I've been living with his parents. Produce market is very busy. I bagged vegetables and fruits and lined them up to display. My hands got rough, and I remember my mother used to rub them for me.

Since we had a cat, we wanted to move out of the shelter as soon as possible and entered a drawing to win a temporary housing. Unfortunately, we couldn't find the one we liked. We lived in a temporary housing for three and a half years. As I saw people leaving after building a new house, I envied them. We considered living in a public housing, but our son agreed to build a new house together. My mother-in-law passed away one year before the disaster. I wanted to rebuild our house before the 7th year anniversary of her death and invite people to thank for their support. I was hoping to rebuild the old house even before the disaster, but my husband was opposing the idea saying we didn't have money to do that. We had a family meeting with our three children and I was happy that we came to the conclusion to build a house with our son where we could live together. I couldn't express my joy openly because other people were still living in the temporary housing. We took out our belongings little by little and left without saying anything to others when we moved. There are some new houses being built in where we used to live, but everyone stays inside and no one comes out. I hope for a neighborhood association to be organized soon. I want to see my neighbors again.

You can shop and check out by yourself at large grocery stores without talking to anyone. But, there are customers who enjoy talking to store staff while they shop as in the case of this small produce store at a temporary retail complex. While large-scale supermarkets are convenient, it's nice to have a small store like this one in your neighborhood, isn't it? Of course, you can buy everything you need at a large supermarket. And it might be a bit inconvenient to customers to come to a small produce store like this one as there are no butchers or fish stores nearby... This

temporary retail complex will close in October. And we will close our produce market business too, because there is no guarantee our neighbors will come back to our store even if we re-open it. No matter what, I remain optimistic.

38) Ms. R (a woman in her 60's)

June 1, 2016

At the shelter, I was hanging my hand made patchwork quilt to make a personal space. An American volunteer saw my quilt, and we become friends. While the tsunami disaster is difficult to overcome, I met with many people and built relationship.

19) Ms. S (a woman in her 60's)

June 4, 2016

I was at home when the earthquakes occurred. I went outside to wait for my husband. I saw a boy, a high school student, came running on the road towards me shouting "get out!" I could see the black Tsunami behind him. I followed him, and we escaped to the top of a pedestrian bridge together. There was a rush of cars underneath the bridge and some were being washed away. A young man on the bridge shouted, "put your hands in your pockets!" I obeyed his direction and put my hands in my pockets. After the water had gone down, the mountain of debris prevented me from coming down from the bridge. The men around me helped me to come down. I escaped to the building of a trucking company. Many of the kind drivers there helped me. They took me into one of their trucks with other strangers to stay. It was warm as they generously made fire continuously with the gasoline they had. One night, we heard a voice coming from top of a tree saying "help!" The men there helped the person by standing on top of the truck. It was good that there was a well nearby. Fish that had been transported by trucks and food items from affected grocery stores washed up to the mountain side. We collected and cooked them using drum cans. I used to run a boarding house and was used to cooking for a crowd. I liked to cook and it didn't bother me that I was cooking for dozens of victims. My cooking experience came in handy. I was creative in making the most of what was available, for example, I made porridge when we were short of rice and made some jam from apples to preserve them longer. We also did things like wrapping plates with plastic wrap so that they didn't have to be washed.

We craved for sweets back then. On the other hand, we got to eat some channel rockfish

that were on a delivery truck, which were very expensive. I want to take good care of our mountains so that our well water stays clean.

My husband was working in a freezer for fish near the harbor. When the earthquake happened, I was crying thinking my husband might have died being locked inside of the freezer with the power doors being disabled due to power outage. I have given up hope thinking he might have either been frozen to death or crashed under heavy materials. I later found out that my husband escaped to the mountain side immediately after the earthquake happened. I also learned that he came looking for me few days later. He had gone without eating for a while but someone he knew gave him some rice balls.

When I went home to clean up, the picture frame was standing in a different location from before, and I knew my husband had been there. We moved to our daughter's house in Sendai City after ten days. I was taken by surprise how little the lives in Sendai had been affected by the disaster. I suffer from Parkinson's disease and went around many pharmacies looking for some medicine. I still fear earthquakes. We demolished our house that was damaged by the Tsunami and built a new one. We also bought a new car as our old one got washed away. We sent two daughters to private collages thus we have no savings and are financially very tight. A grand child was born in 2014. The power of a new life is remarkable.

I took the role of the chairperson of the local neighborhood association in 2015, with an intention to give back for what our children had received while they were growing up. My life changed substantially after experiencing the March 11 disaster.

40) Ms. T (a woman in her 20's)

June 8 and 14, 2016

I was 9th grade and it was my graduation day when the disaster happened. I played a saxophone in the school band. There was a seasonal concert planned three days later, so we all went home saying "see you in three days" to each other. When I got home, the earthquakes came. My father, who usually was out for fishing on a fishing boat, happened to be home and said "I know for sure a Tsunami is coming, let's escape" and we escaped together to the second floor of a building. There were about 20 people there. There were some emergency food items stored and I was given some instant rice. I was too afraid to look outside from the window but knew the water level was getting higher. I panicked and was crying the whole time. I am still afraid of earthquakes and even with a slight shake, my heart starts to pound.

We couldn't get in touch with my sixth-grade sister which made us worried. We had tried to convince ourselves that she should be safe as she was at school. My sister later told us she felt safe because she was with her classmates. She also told us that she was not too worried about my father and me as we could swim, but she was for my mother who couldn't. We wrapped our feet with plastic bags and walked home in the water the next day. The first floor of our house was damaged by the Tsunami, so we started our lives in the second floor. We ate snacks that were not soaked with water, and our neighborhood fish cake store gave us some fish cakes.

When we visited the shelter on the fourth day, we were supplied with some bananas and fish cakes. We got our water bottles filled with some fresh water and on our way out, an older man yelled at my sister "you just get water from here and going home? Is that what you learned at school? Do you empathize with the people here at the shelter who have nowhere to go, to see how they are feeling?" On our way home, contrary to the earlier experience, a lady, a total stranger, gave us two rice balls which gave us a sigh of relief knowing that there were good people around, too. The media tends only to report stories of people helping each other. But, I learned that in a real life that it is not always the case. Things are glossed over on the surface. The announcement of the high school entrance exam results came out delayed and we started high school in May instead of April when normally is the start of the new school. Our relatives from Hokkaido came to clean our house which was helpful.

I was shy and withdrawn from the 7th to 9th grade years having a negative way of thinking. When I was freshman in high school, I became too negative and pessimistic that I was isolated from my classmates. Everyone kept a distance from me. In my junior year, however, I made up my mind and told myself “I cannot keep being this way, I want to change”. As a first step, I cut off my long hair to change my appearance. I hoped to try many different things in college that were not limited to club activities. I want to meet many different people and to participate in variety of activities.

When I was in kindergarten, my English teacher was a foreigner and I enjoyed the class very much. This gave me a desire to work using English. I would like to communicate with people from abroad in English and to introduce Japanese culture to them in English. I recently started to take lessons in martial arts. I want to do things that could only be possible while I am in college and not after being in the work force. I want to experience as many things as possible in the next four years of college as I feel like there would be no other chances. I was able to travel to the United States last year thanks to the Taylor Anderson Foundation that was established by the parents of an American lady who was victimized by the Tsunami. It gave me an opportunity to tell my stories as a victim to the people in the US. It was a fun experience to attend American college classes, communicate with the American students, etc. Seeing American students actively participate in classes, I realized how little Japanese people express themselves. I was touched by the strength of the Andersons to invite us and welcoming us warmly to the United States after losing their daughter, which made me almost crying. I am very grateful. The 3/11 disaster brought many encounters and experiences to me. I learned that what I have been taken for granted were not always available. I became more thankful for everyday things and I appreciate people around me and the community. After the earthquakes, we had no bath, food, electricity nor water. As we were living in the second floor of our house, I was very happy when we finally were able to dine downstairs. The life is slowly getting back to normal.

I now belong to a community orchestra and play the oboe. The reason I chose the local university was that I've always had some attachment towards my local community. By picking a brand-new major, I thought we can pave the way to create our own tradition. For better or for worse, I am a type of person who once determined, not easily being swayed. I am taking care of myself first emotionally and physically. I imagine many of us have some type of scars. However, things will work out as long as we are alive. Life

could be painful, but it will always get better if you do not give up. Things improve, only for the better. I consider myself lucky. I am going to the United States again this year, so I would like to introduce the history of Ishinomaki and Japanese culture to them.

41) Ms. U (a woman in her 50's)

June 12, 2016

I had been helping the flower shop that my brother ran for more than 30 years before the disaster. It was a family business of my parents but got swept away by the Tsunami. Before March 11, I had been thinking to stop working at the shop. I thought it was a good timing as my son was getting married and I wanted to be available to watch my grandchildren. I had been commuting from Nagatsura, Ishinomaki City for over 30 years. After experiencing the March 11 disaster, I developed a desire to sustain my parents' business. My brother had already taken a different job, then. I knew running a business was not an easy task but decided to give it a try. My husband quitted his job and helped me reopen the flower shop. My husband always loved flowers and he used to tend his flower garden. Our 15-year old house, the garden, and all were swept away. We looked for a new land and build a new house, but we currently have double mortgage as we still had a mortgage left on the other house.

When my husband's health declined in 2015, my son left his job to help with the delivery. Being healthy is the most important thing! Even with the challenges we had, we all survived and consider ourselves lucky compared to the people who lost their lives with the disaster. On the day of March 11, I was arranging flowers on the podium at the middle school for the graduation ceremony. It was quite remarkable to witness how the teachers reacted to the earthquakes. "Gather them!" Teachers gathered students immediately. Some teachers went on bicycle to look for students who had already left the school building. It is quite a contrast to one of elementary schools where many students' lives were lost. I wonder if the teachers there were either new or lacked in the ability to make decisions.

I spent the rest of the day after the earthquakes at the school. Warm rice balls were delivered by the women's group in Iinogawa that day. About ten of us went back to the site where our houses were the next day. I reunited with my son there. My son went to look for his friend's missing mother. It was strange that the fact I had a sister who lived in the area with minimal damage to take refuge had never crossed my mind then. It is a mystery to me to this day.

I reunited with my husband who was safe. His two sisters bought us a land for the new house. My husband is the eldest son in the family, therefore, his home means the “permanent home” for them. They bought the site so that we could rebuild quickly which was also to ease their painful notion of not having a “permanent home”. To return their favor, we opened the flower shop in July of 2011. I wanted to run the flower shop business just like my parents had even though I had learned that running a business was not easy observing my parents when I was growing up. I told myself I must turn the March 11 event into an opportunity to sustain our family business and the thought of losing it was painful. Having the flower shop connected me to others. The customers from a long time ago came back which motivated me. I gained confidence to run the business. My son told me he wanted to join, too, and we discussed and explored various new business ideas together, such as online shop. When I was younger, I used to carry my son on my back while I worked at the shop. I was considering retiring as I wanted to take care of my grandchildren so that my son wouldn’t have to go through what I went through and avoid hardship. On the other hand, the flower shop was my life. I was confident that I could make it happen. It has been like living in a dream the past five years. It was a sad first year after we lost our house. I now revisit the various events from those days. I cannot be discouraged; I have bills to pay and not time to be sick. In the second year, I switched my mindset to “live with what we have”. I’ve watched my parents run the business and learned how things were on the days when the business was slow, but it taught me to be strong and to be resilient through the hardships. My husband lost his father when he was young and has been fulfilling his role as the eldest son for the family well.

My husband and I visit both of our parents’ graves when the business is slow and ask them for more business. They help us each time and the customers come. It is strange, I didn’t think of them too much before the disaster, but I remember them often since then.

I go with the flow, positively and search for what I can do in life. Women are tough. If you live positively, people will help you in a great deal. I had many regular customers who used to come to our shop at the previous location. The life is so wondrous, I had no idea that we would end up opening the new shop where they lived. It was strange how we came about to this land. I wonder if we were guided by a higher power. I was concerned about opening the shop in a new locality in the beginning, but it turned out to be the neighborhood where our regular customers lived. I am convinced we are all connected in some way. Those customers refer other customers to our shop. It’s been helpful that

we've always kept good relationships with others. I try to see things in a positive light. I really appreciate my family's support.

42) Ms. V (a woman in her 50's)

June 19, 2016

I heard that the sea between the island and the peninsula got split in two and the seafloor was visible. I saw a picture of this occurrence. They said that the water got separated into two sides and a straight passage way was formed in between the island and the peninsula. The power of the nature is astonishing, indeed. Each side of the water crushed into each other afterward which resulted in the Tsunami. We cannot prevent an event like such that the slabs of rock moving at the seafloor level which was causing the earthquakes. We are completely powerless.

It may come out wrong, but I am wondering why not build homes that are easily put back together even if they get destroyed by Mother Nature or why don't we lead minimalist lives? The earth has tremendous power over us beyond our imagination. We are nothing more than creatures living on the surface of the earth for its mercy.

You know, the bears are coming around the town recently. They come down to the village because there's no food in the mountains, you see. They won't bother coming down if food is available in the mountains, you know? I am wondering if the fact that we are depleting the bamboo shoots in the mountain is contributing to it, as well. I suspect humans are responsible for many bad things. Do you remember a large number of deer on the island died after the earthquakes due to food shortage? A long time ago, a herd of deer from the island moved to the peninsula side by swimming across the sea. The monkeys could not swim so they went on the back of the deer to come across to the peninsula side. How interesting. It sounds like it was made up, but it is a true story. The tide is fast around there, and I am wondering if those deer were able to time the tide correctly. Speaking of tide, I heard that the fishermen are having a hard time unloading the fish from the boat to the shore lately prevented by the tall concrete breakwaters being built or soil piled too high after the earthquakes. They are forced to wait till the tide is high enough for the boat to be at a closer level with the pier in order for them to unload the fish. It is bizarre. For elder fishermen, it makes it especially difficult for them.

The ground that sank by about two meters after the earthquakes is slowly rising again, and

the efforts to make a higher ground by piling soil are being wasted. The earth is constantly shifting, you see? It scares me a bit. Speaking of fear, I attended a school by the shore when I was little. On one high-tide day, I remember walking to school on the road where crashing waves from the ocean was splashing over my head. I had never walked on the same road again when the tide was high after that as it's dangerous.

I am convinced that human beings are powerless against nature.