

A TIME OF DISASTER



THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI

SASAKI PRINTING & PUBLISHING CO., LTD
Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan



A Time of Disaster
The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the people devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. We would also like to express our condolences to the family and loved ones of victims of the disaster.

Greetings from Publisher

When the magnitude 9.0 great East Japan earthquake struck on March 11, 2011 at 2:46 p.m. in the Pacific Ocean off of Northeast Japan's coastal region, the shaking was so violent and lasted so long that, for a moment, it knocked me senseless.

At approximately 3:00 p.m., the tremor subsided and we evacuated our building. Power was knocked out. Items and documents had fallen from desks and shelves and lay spread out all over the floor. Later I was to learn that several of our company employees who resided and worked in the tsunami ravaged areas had been tragically swept away.

Four days later, I was able to verify that all of the company employees from our office in Sendai City were safe. Under the circumstances, however, we were in no condition to resume work within our office. As a group of employees, now bonded together in our own way as survivors of a catastrophic event, we asked ourselves, "Though we too were victims, isn't there anything we can do to support our country, our community and those more severely affected by this natural disaster?" The answer to that became this book.

The eyes of the world bore witness as an unimaginable tsunami swept Japan's coastal region in a matter of approximately 30 minutes after the earthquake struck. Waves over 10 meters (30 feet) high swept through 500 kilometers (over 300 miles) of coastline.

Our company, Sasaki Printing & Publishing Co., Ltd. is small with a total of about 70 employees. When the series of disasters unexpectedly hit, many of these people began writing about their harrowing experiences and powerful emotions during and following the aftermath. Their personal accounts have been gathered together here in the hopes of sharing moments of triumph, courage and humanity among ordinary people under extreme and extraordinary circumstances.

I believe it will take some time before stories such as these can be read among the people of Japan. The healing process is ongoing. For readers abroad, I wish to impart descriptions and insights of a plight that I hope no one else will ever have to endure.

Proceeds from this book will be donated to the Red Cross towards restoring and rebuilding the devastated areas of Japan.

Mr. Saburo Sam Tsuchida in California was instrumental in arranging the English translation for this book. He was introduced to me by a friend from my middle school and high school days. I contacted this friend after recalling she had an acquaintance involved in English interpretation and translation in the U.S.

Despite his busy schedule, Mr. Tsuchida empathized with this project and, together with the help and cooperation of friends and colleagues, worked quickly in a relatively short period of time to complete this project. I would like to offer my heart-felt appreciation to Mr. Tsuchida and his team of translators, whose names are listed on the second page, in California.

May 11, 2011

Two months after the Disaster

Yukio Sasaki

Chief Executive Officer

SASAKI PRINTING & PUBLISHING CO., LTD

Prologue

The time was 2:46 p.m., March 11, 2011.

A violent tremor unlike any we had ever experienced assaulted our hometown of 'Sendai.'

Some people left to seek refuge in other prefectures. Still others lost contact with their family members. Others were hit directly by the tsunami.

From this day on began a time for reclaiming a semblance of prior conditions.

This book will tell you how ordinary people, like you and me, were dragged into that devastating event and how they struggled in their daily lives after the disaster.

We get on the trail of how all leading characters made every effort to cope during the one month period from March 11 to April 11, 2011.

Chapter 1: A Vision Burned into the Eyes

Keiko Kimura (Pen Name)

The Day of March 11

Keiko is a young designer from Akita prefecture in Northern Japan who has been with our company for two years. Enjoying her single life in the city of Sendai, she had been looking forward to a fun-filled weekend on the fateful Friday of March 11. That day, Keiko had been busy at work on three different projects when the floor beneath her began swerving gently.

Keiko's department is in charge of computer generated design data and, thus, makes it a priority to protect the data in the event of an earthquake. As the tremor grew bigger and stronger, Keiko, while clinging to her personal computer, took shelter under the desk.

The violent shaking felt like a hair-raising rollercoaster ride. The lights went out with the initial big jolt and the power outage only fed Keiko's mounting fear. She yelled out several times, "Stop it! Stop it!" She was terrified that the ceiling would fall or the floor would give way.

As the building shuddered violently, twice and again a third time, she heard her boss bellow out, "We're moving out when this shaking stops!" Once the shaking subsided, Keiko, who was closest to the door, followed those orders and ran to open it. Upon exiting the building, she saw other employees taking refuge outdoors. When hit by an aftershock, the building swayed like rubber.

Two People Better than One

A necessity in this day and age, particularly for a young single woman living away from home, is a cell phone. It is no wonder then that Keiko's initial instinct was to go back into the office and retrieve hers from her locker.

In light of the disaster, Keiko's boss dismissed his employees for the day. However, Keiko, who dreaded being by herself as the ground continued to tremble, turned to her co-worker and friend, Erika. "I don't want to be alone." Erika, a local girl from the Shichiga-hama beach area, invited Keiko to her home.

Afterword

In order to encourage our company's fellow members who had fallen victims to the disaster to share their encounters, we started taking meticulous care in approaching them so that they would be willing to support our efforts in creating a record of the disaster. The production of this book began from such distress of ours.

Rather than gouging into their already wounded and bruised soul, we gambled on the hope that by talking about their experiences, it could serve as a healing process.

As a result, we received support from eleven employees who were willing to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted amidst ceaseless aftershocks. It was still a very frightening and stressful time. Of those interviewed, some still cringe under the weight of the horrible memories. Others have walked away relatively unscathed. Throughout the book, we hope their voices and stories helped convey the different perspectives and angles of the same event.

We deeply appreciate your time and attention in reading this book.

May 11, 2011

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