



March 11, 2020, will mark the ninth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster, which claimed approximately 20,000 lives in the Tohoku region of Japan. To promote public awareness and highlight the resilient spirit of the people of Tohoku, five organizations have come together to host *絆 Kizuna 9: Memory*.





KIZUNA 9: Memory

Every year since the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake — more commonly known as 3.11 — the Kizuna Project exhibitions produced by our collective group have brought Chicago residents together on the anniversary of the disaster. These exhibitions have provided those of us in Chicago an opportunity to honor the lives that were lost, and learn more about the lives of those still living in, and striving to recreate the Tohoku region. This Kizuna Project is how we in Chicago attempt to prevent memories of the disaster and the experiences of those who were affected by it from fading away.

This exhibit, *Kizuna 9: Memory*, shows how residents of Tohoku themselves work to preserve the memory of 3.11. Based on photographs taken by Shishido Kiyotaka and interviews collected by Alex Jania during the summer of 2019, the exhibit presents the stories of six different memorial projects located across Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures. These pictures and stories show that the preservation of memory can take a variety of forms, such as planting flowers, telling stories, preserving buildings, or creating crafts. The goals of those who work to preserve the memory of 3.11 are equally diverse. These memorial projects can help survivors mourn those who were lost, create new communities, and inform future generations about the dangers of such disasters. What ties them together is the belief that the past should not be forgotten, and that the preservation of memory is vital for the future.

By reading the stories of Tohoku residents presented by this Kizuna Project exhibit, viewers participate in the larger collective effort to remember the events of 3.11. The purpose of this exhibit is to show that memory is not something static that only exists in the past. Preserving the memory of 3.11 is an active practice that is happening today in various forms; connecting people in Tohoku, Chicago, and beyond.

Centers of Memory

— *Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture*



Opened on September 22, 2019, the Iwate Tsunami Memorial in Rikuzentakata is one example of the types of institutions being created across the Tohoku region to preserve the memory of 3.11 and attract visitors to the area.

Treading New Grounds

— *Kamaishi/Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture*



Completed in June 2019 and used during the 2019 Rugby World Cup, the Kamaishi Recovery Memorial Stadium in the Unosumai district is a symbol of the region's recovery and Japan's success in winning a bid to host an international sporting tournament.



The city center of Rikuzentakata rests on ten meters of new ground. As a preventative measure against future tsunami events, the local government used rock fill to raise parts of the city. While safer, it has also changed the city's appearance.

A Storyteller's Hospitality

— *Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture*



The first things one notices about Akira Kugiko as he guides tours through Rikuzentakata are his loud commanding voice and his welcoming face. These skills, which Akira attributes to his time working in hotel service before 3.11, were useful in the aftermath of the disaster. Barely escaping the rising waters himself, the approachable Akira became an acting person-in-charge at the local evacuation site. “In hotels, my job was to help guests feel safe and secure,” Akira said. Following the disaster, he thought of his work for fellow evacuees as being similar. Nine years later, Akira uses these skills in his work as a 3.11 *Katari-be*: a storyteller who recounts their disaster experience to visitors and guides them through the disaster zone. While it is common for *katari-be* to maintain their day job in addition to their storytelling, Akira works as a *katari-be* full-time. “As for people who are full-time *katari-be*, I’m pretty much the only person in the country who does it,” he explained.

Akira employs a number of different methods to maintain the memory of the disaster. In addition to showing a video of the disaster, he also has a gallery of pictures featuring the scenery of Rikuzentakata before and after the tsunami. He hopes that visitors can get a feel for how terrifying the tsunami was through the pictures. Akira also leads tours of Rikuzentakata, starting with a silent prayer at a local memorial and including a visit to the middle school where Akira evacuated to and lived in for 5 months. Akira sees his work as a resource for children and victims of future disasters. He hopes that maintaining the memory of 3.11 can foster awareness and subsequently save lives in the future. Akira has committed to work as a *katari-be* until the 10th anniversary of the disaster.

A Storyteller's Hospitality (cont'd)



Akira worries about what will happen after the 10th anniversary of the disaster in 2021. Although he expects people to come to the disaster zone to commemorate the 10th anniversary, he is concerned that 3.11 will be forgotten like other disaster events.

For Akira, it was hard when the plot of land where his house once stood was covered with rock fill. "It's as if my own history was wiped away with an eraser."



In addition to the harsh realities of living in the disaster zone, Akira recalls the happiness in the midst of hardship. He recalls crying at the smiling faces of children while living in the evacuation camp, saying, "they represented hope."

Saving the Building that Saved His Life

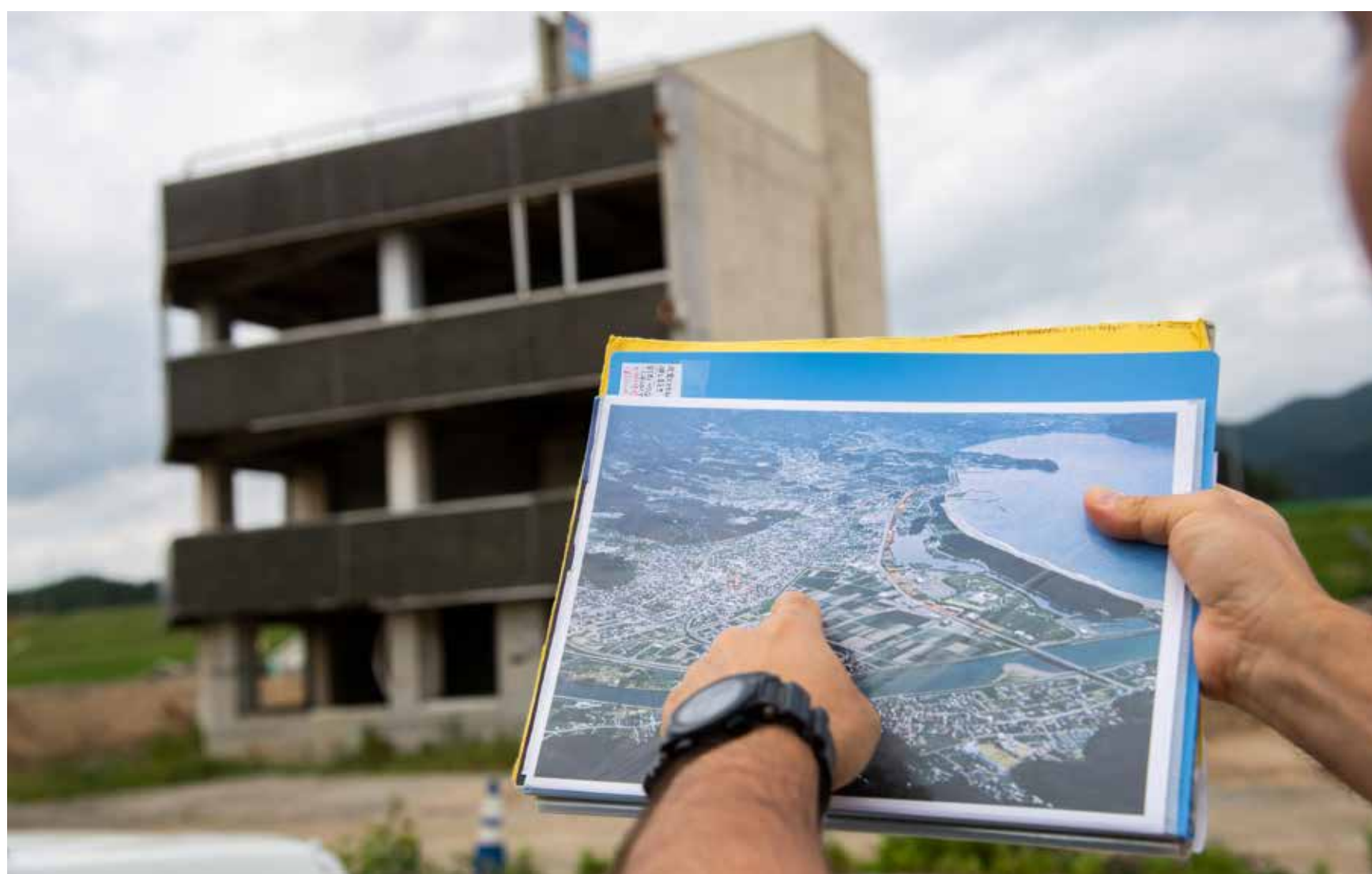
— *Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture*



March 11, 2011 was a special day for Yuichi Yonezawa and his family. Just a month before, his wife had given birth to their first child, a daughter. The morning of the 11th, Yuichi and his family gathered at a local shrine in Rikuzentakata to perform *omiya-mairi*: a newborn's first shrine visit to pray for good health. By the end of the day, however, the tsunami claimed the lives of Yuichi's parents and younger brother. Yuichi himself was saved by sheer happenstance. Instead of evacuating to the local assembly hall where his parents and brother would later be swept away, Yuichi ran to his family's store in the middle of town. Yuichi survived the tsunami by climbing onto the building's chimney. He held onto the building's edge for 30 minutes, crouching in a space only big enough for him, as the dark waves rose to just below his feet.

Following the disaster, Yuichi had the option of letting the city demolish the building free of charge. Instead, he and his wife chose to maintain it with their own money. "This building saved me. If it was not here, I wouldn't be alive," he explained. Moreover, Yuichi said that for others, his building is a reminder of the town they lost. Far from just a static reminder of the past, Yuichi uses the building to retell his disaster experience, guiding visitors and animatedly narrating his ordeal step-by-step. The tour culminates with Yuichi asking each participant to crouch on the chimney themselves and imagine his experience. For Yuichi, maintaining the building isn't a question of money. He will maintain it as long as it doesn't burden his daughter, now eight years old. Until then, Yuichi invites visitors to his building in order to preserve the memory of 3.11 and raise awareness of tsunamis.

Saving the Building That Saved His Life (cont'd)



Yuichi points out where his building is located on an old picture of Rikuzentakata. For some residents, Yuichi's building is all that remains of the old city center, and helps them remember where their homes once stood.

When asked if it is hard to constantly retell his story Yuichi responded, "I don't want to forget the experience, I want to convey it to other people."



The view from the roof of Yuichi's building shows that it is the only structure remaining in the area. With access heavily restricted, Yuichi and those taking his tour are escorted to the building and required to wear hard hats.

Old and New Ways of Remembering

— *Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture*



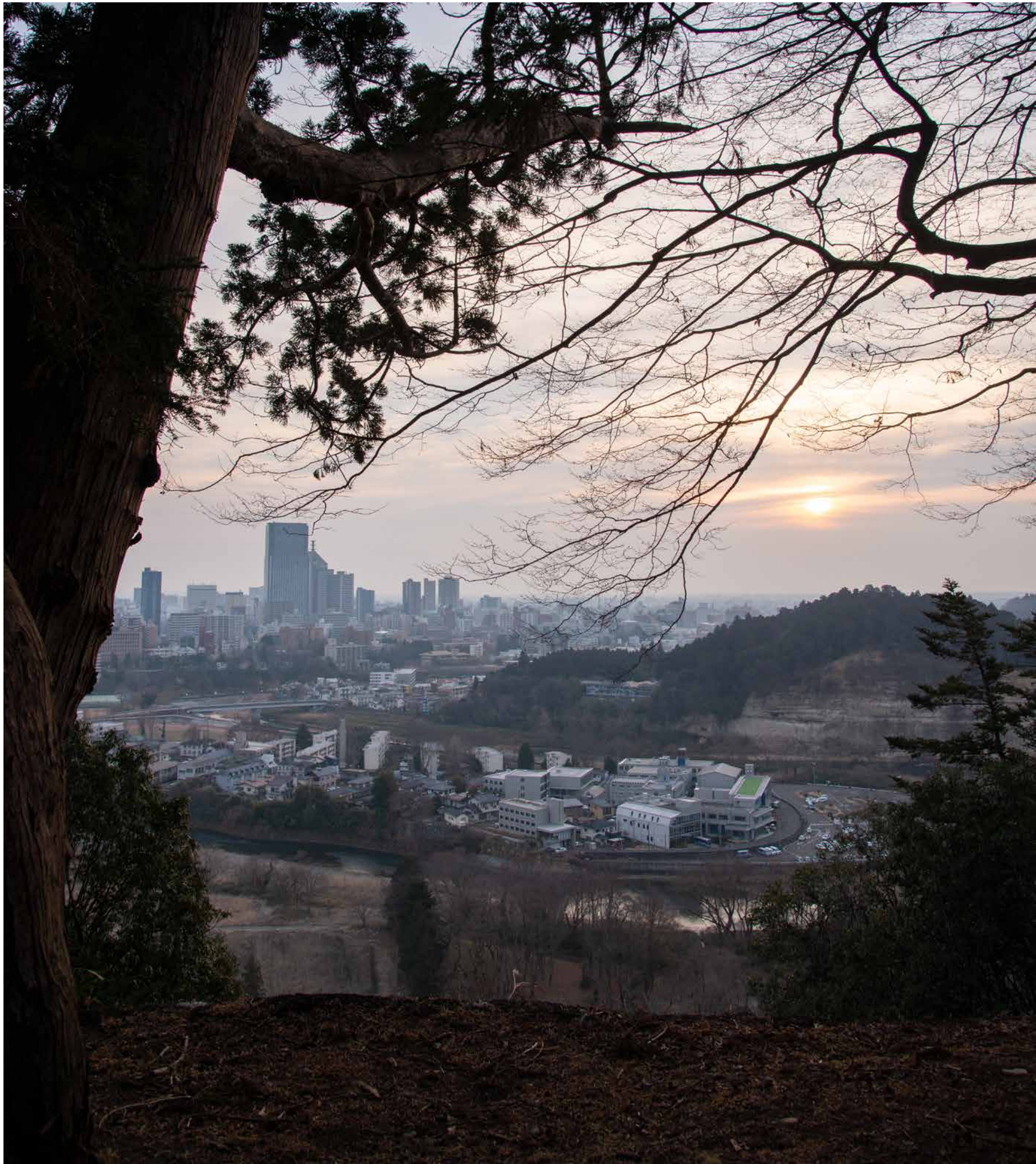
A Jizo statue stands as a memorial to those lost during 3.11 in the Unosumai area of Kamaishi in Iwate Prefecture. Jizo, a type of Bodhisattva believed to protect travelers and children, are also traditionally found in graveyards across Japan. They have been used after 3.11 to memorialize victims of the disaster.

This stone monument in Unosumai's Tomosu Park reads, "To Protect Life." Tomosu Park is located right by the Unosumai bus stop and contains a 3.11 memorial park and hall. The name Tomosu is meant to evoke the sound of the words "light" (tomosu), "together" (tomoni), and "friend" (tomo).



A City of Survivors

— *Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture*



The sun peeks through the clouds over Aoba Ward in the city of Sendai. In addition to being affected by the disaster itself, Sendai also served as a common destination for those relocating from other areas of Tohoku after 3.11.

Protecting the Future

— *Ishinomaki/Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture*



New seawalls, like this one pictured in the Ogatsu area of Ishinomaki, are being built in the coastal areas of Tohoku to protect the area from future tsunamis. Although they offer protection, some residents remark on how the new construction has changed the scenery.

A similar protective wall is being built in Minamisanriku along the river. A 3.11 memorial park is planned near the concrete embankment.

Preserving Difficult Memories

— *Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture*



Okawa Elementary School in Ishinomaki is well known in Japan as the location where 74 children lost their lives due to mistakes made during the school's evacuation process on 3.11. Although it was a hard choice, the Ishinomaki city government decided to preserve the school as a place where people could pay their respects to those lost and as a lesson for future generations.



Stitching Together a Community

— Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture



“Okaerinasai” or “welcome home” reads a sign on the display of hundreds of small *obina-sama* dolls made by the organization, Sendai Kaeribina-kai. The display was part of the Y’s Men International 28th Asia Pacific Area Convention held at the International Center in Sendai’s Aoba Ward. The “welcome home” sign, as well as the hand-made dolls represent a wish that those from Miyagi Prefecture who are still considered “missing” in the wake of 3.11 will be found. “As of March 11, 2019, 1,221 people from Miyagi Prefecture have yet to be found,” explains organization president, Midori Matsuzaki. “Usually we display one doll for every missing person.”

The members of the Kaeribina-kai were each forced to move from their homes due to the events of 3.11 and began making small *obina-sama* dolls as part of a workshop held for disaster survivors. “I had registered on a mailing list for disaster survivors and saw the invitation to learn how to make *obina-sama*,” said Midori. “Before then, I was feeling down and depressed, but I was good at dressmaking and handicrafts in the past, so I wondered, ‘could I do that?’” Each member of the group ended up in similar situations after 3.11: renting apartments in Sendai away from their original communities. Making *obina-sama* together provides them with a sense of community and purpose. “It was something worth doing and I was always excited for what we would make next,” explained member Yumiko Tsuda, adding, “it’s great to talk to people and share food with them at the meetings.” Over the years, the group coalesced five key members who talk and remain close. These five decided that they would continue to make the dolls to maintain the memory of 3.11 and to wish for the return of those still missing.

Stitching Together a Community (cont'd)

Club President Midori is a disaster evacuee like the other club members. She had to move into temporary housing after her original house was damaged in the earthquake.



At first the club members bought second-hand kimonos to cut into the materials to make the *ohina-sama* dolls, but as word of their activities spread, people began donating their old kimonos.

(From left to right) Tokiko Chiba, Wakiko Saito, Midori Matsuzaki and Yumiko Tsuda all met each other through making *ohina-sama* dolls. Wakiko made the floral aprons the club members wear while they sew. "It's like our uniform," she explained.



A Patch of Color Amidst the Debris

— *Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture*



Starting in August of 2011, Rie Tokumizu began planting flowers where her mother's house once stood as an act of mourning for her family members lost on 3.11. Since then, over 8,000 volunteers have worked with Rie and her husband Hiroshi Tokumizu, to make the garden a place that would be attractive to locals and visitors alike. "We wanted people to see it from the road and think, I could probably meet people there, and they probably have information," said Rie about the vision for the garden. As the debris was cleared in Ogatsu to reveal bare dirt underneath, Rie was sad to see the town had become a monochromatic brown. In addition to being a way to mourn for her family, the garden beautified the area. Rie felt that a garden was the perfect space survivors needed after the disaster. Just like flowers that grow, bloom, and wither at their own pace, "every survivor has their own pace, some are ready to move ahead while others aren't."

In 2017, the garden moved from its original location at the remains of Rie's childhood home to its new location, but the new iteration of the garden still offers a space that is open to interpretation by visitors. With the garden, "we did not have any true aim other than to make something beautiful and to show our determination to not give up," she said. Beyond the original intention, Rie explained, the garden probably has a different meaning for everyone. Rie's complicated emotions were evident throughout the interview. In one moment she would be talking about the sadness of losing her mother and at another moment would be laughing with a visitor saying hello. "The sadness will be with me for my entire life," Rie said, but she has learned that amidst that sadness, "it is still possible to be happy."

A Patch of Color Amidst the Debris (cont'd)



Rie explained that she was inspired to live a happy life despite the sadness she felt over her mother's death, after she met 9/11 survivors who were living happy lives, despite their tragic pasts.



Tsunami seawater soaked into the soil of Ogatsu, preventing new plants from growing. In order to plant the garden, 60 trucks worth of fertile soil were brought from other areas of Miyagi Prefecture.



Rie said that while the color of Ogatsu changed after the disaster, the mountains and land itself did not change. Rie realized that despite the destruction of the tsunami, Ogatsu remained the same place and she could not bring herself to leave it.

Histories Cut Into Paper

— *Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture*



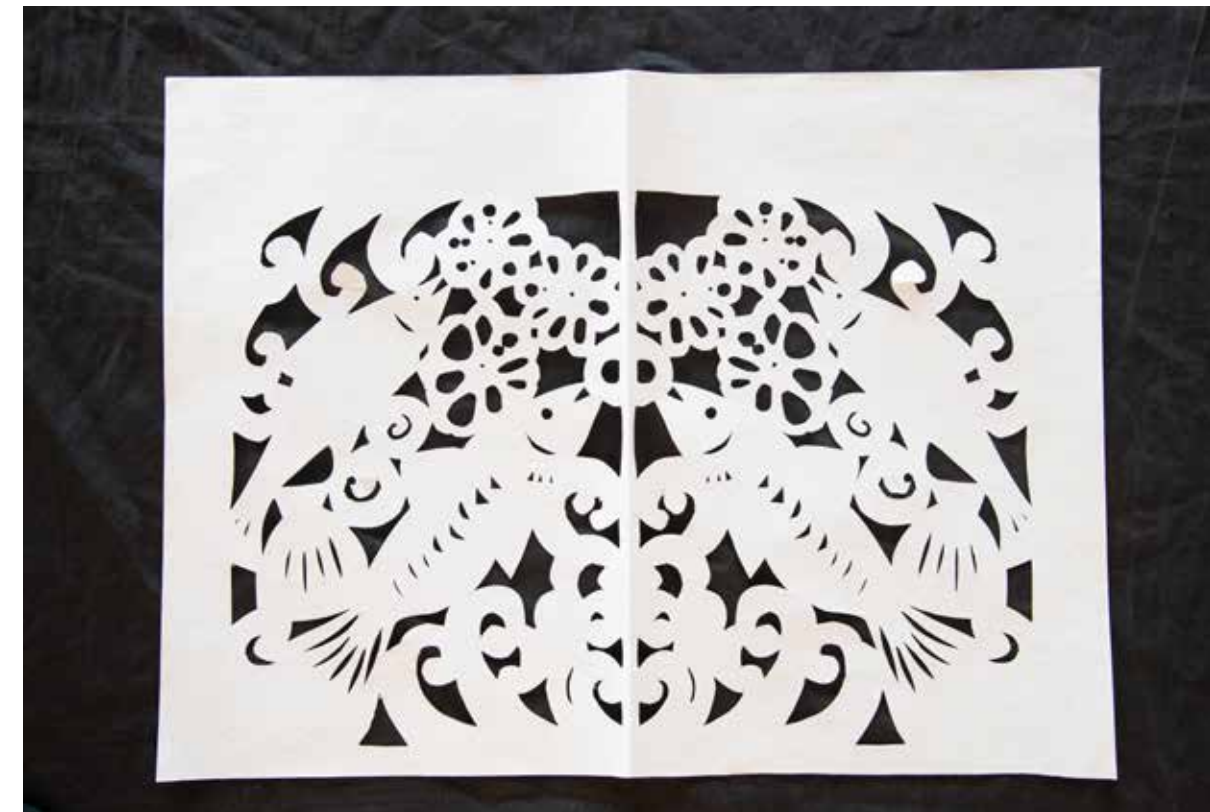
Started in 2010 by Yumi Yoshikawa and her company, Da-Ha Planning, as a way to involve women in local community building through art in Minamisanriku, the Kiriko Project took on new meaning and importance following 3.11. *Kiriko* are designs made from cutting folded paper and are based on a local shrine practice. In 2010, a group of local women interviewed shop owners in Minamisanriku about their shop's history. "We used the stories of individual stores and put them in the designs," explained Hiromi Chiba, an artist from Sendai who has worked with the project since 2010. The designs were then hung above the stores to attract customers by conveying each location's history. However, "upon losing our hometown to the disaster, the connotation of the *kiriko* suddenly changed," participant Mai Miyakawa explained.

The businesses whose history were depicted by the *kiriko* were washed away by the tsunami, but the designs remained. The designs suddenly became a way of preserving the lost Minamisanriku. "I feel nostalgic," said Mai about her feelings when looking at the *kiriko* now. "The past image of my hometown is strong when I see them." Since the disaster, the Kiriko Project has become a memory project in addition to a community building project. Large metal versions of the original designs were displayed for a while after the disaster at the former store sites and were later moved to a central location. Since 2011, the Kiriko Project has continued to bring people together. "We gather every summer to make and hang *kiriko*," explains Kie Sugawara, a participant since 2010 who moved out of Minamisanriku after 3.11. "Even though our family doesn't live in Minamisanriku anymore, we want to cherish those memories."

Histories Cut Into Paper (cont'd)



Yumi, the founder of the project (photographed above), speaks very highly of the people of Minamisanriku. “They can become friends with anyone. I want people to come here and experience that.”



This *kiriko* design was made for a restaurant that was later destroyed by the tsunami. It features some of the food the store was well known for, like fish, clams, and *renkon*.



Volunteers and city workers hang *kiriko* designs in Minamisanriku’s town hall, which was newly opened in 2017. The project’s impact on the town is evident even in the design of the town hall itself, which features several *kiriko* designs.

A Reminder of Lives Saved

— *Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture*



Before the disaster, the Takano Kaikan served as a wedding reception hall and event space in Minamisanriku. During 3.11, 327 people managed to survive the tsunami on the top floor of the building. Its remains are now maintained and serve as a site for guided tours.



Reflecting on Fukushima's Past

— *Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture*



A display at the TEPCO Nuclear Plant Decommissioning Center in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture shows a scene at the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Plant located nearby. Opened in November 2018, the center was built to show the work of the decommissioning process to the public.

A Place for Fukushima's Present

— *Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture*



Originally opened in 1997 as the first national soccer training ground, J-Village in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture was closed due to the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant accident on 3.11. It was recently reopened in April 2019.



Making a Familiar Face in a New Place

— *Aizuwakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture*



“We evacuated from Okuma with nothing,” explains Yauko Shuji, who runs the Aiku Workshop in Aizuwakamatsu. “There was nothing to do, nothing we could do. I always knit, so I couldn’t stand having nothing to do with my hands.” Yauko, who was born and raised in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture was one of the 154,000 evacuees after the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear accident on 3.11. Yauko created her Aiku Workshop, where she makes small stuffed bears named “Aiku” with four other employees, in order to occupy herself after evacuating and provide employment to fellow evacuees of the nuclear disaster. Yauko, whose home was only 3.3 km from the nuclear plant, and her fellow evacuees from Okuma can never return to their town due to its proximity to the plant and level of radiation. Instead, the town and 4,000 residents of Okuma were welcomed to move to Aizuwakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, which is further inland. Yauko was happy to be received by Aizuwakamatsu, where she felt evacuees were welcomed without prejudice and “everyone was kind,” but she remains nostalgic for Okuma.

The Aiku bears that Yauko’s workshop creates are in some ways symbolic of her yearning for her old home and her appreciation for her new one. The bears themselves are based on Okuma’s bear mascot “Ku-chan,” but are made with Aizu cotton from Aizuwakamatsu. “I wanted to use Aizu cotton to make a mascot in order to repay Aizuwakamatsu by spreading Aizu cotton further and further.” When people look at Aiku bears, Yauko wants them to know that they were born from “nothing,” explaining “we had nothing after the accident, no thread, no needles, that is what this bear came from, nothing.”

Making a Familiar Face in a New Place (cont'd)



“If I have this, then I can live,” Yauko said while explaining her feelings about starting the workshop. “The black bear is my symbol, its not just to earn money, making Aiku bears gives me the power to live.”

If you look at Aiku bears you may notice they do not have mouths. Yauko explains that she did not give Aiku bears mouths so people could project “their own impression and feelings” onto the bears.



Yauko holds the papier-mache model, made by an acquaintance, that Aiku bears are based upon.



絆 *Kizuna 9: Memory Credits*

Photography:

Kiyotaka Shishido, Photographer

Kiyotaka Shishido is a photographer based in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture. He studied documentary photography in the U.S. in the 1980s, and is well known for the portraits of WWII-era Japanese Americans like Senator Daniel Inoue and a translator for Douglas MacArthur. He published many monographs, including “Home,” featuring the Great East Japan Earthquake affected areas. Kiyotaka also took the photos presented in *Kizuna 2*, which can be viewed on Chicago Sister Cities International’s website.



Narrative:

Alex Jania, Doctoral Candidate, The University of Chicago

Alex Jania first visited Tohoku in 2012 to volunteer in the disaster zone as part of an intensive Japanese language program. This experience influenced him to study the history of memorials to natural disaster victims in Modern Japan. In 2018 Alex was awarded a Fulbright Graduate Research Fellowship to pursue his research on disaster memorials in Tokyo, Kobe, and the Tohoku region. In addition to his research, Alex has participated in the Kizuna Project to collect and share stories of 3.11 survivors with audiences outside of Japan.



Curation:

Mayumi Lake

Design:

Reiko Takahashi

Project Management:

Hiromi Fukasawa-Lindquist

Photography Production (Japan):

Rie Sugai

Installation:

Joe Cochran

Many thanks to all the volunteers who helped bring this project to life.
