

Seize the Day

~Shining a light
on the lives lost~

Beyond the pain of passing on stories of the disaster

"It is very painful to pass along the grief of the deceased and the bereaved family. Each person who died had a name, a life, and a dream. I want to keep passing on those testimonies." Hiroshi Ono (67), a member of the Iwaki Storytellers' Association (chaired by Keiichi Otani), said, with tears in his eyes. We, the Journalist School Team 4, listened to Mr. Ono's story at the Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum in Futaba Town, Fukushima Prefecture, and covered his efforts to inform people of the disaster. (**Fumito Nakajo**, 5th grade at Asaka-2 Elementary; **Itsuki Honda**, 6th grade at Shirae Elementary; **Miyu Kimura**, 1st year at Koriyama Xaverio Junior High; **Yu Shinogi**, 2nd year at Otori Junior High; **Kanna Sato**, junior at Asaka High)

Passing on living testimonies

Mr. Hiroshi Ono from the Iwaki Storyteller's Association

The Iwaki Storyteller's Association was established in 2012, and this year marks its 10th anniversary. Based at the Iwaki 3.11 Memorial and Revitalisation Museum, 16 "earthquake storytellers" who experienced the unprecedented disaster are sharing their memories, lessons learned, and the current state of restoration and revitalization in the affected areas. At the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake, Mr. Ono was working as a local archivist at the library of Latov in

front of JR Iwaki Station when the disaster struck. He said 140,000 books fell off the shelves and he could barely escape outside. His parents' house in Onahama, Iwaki was also affected, and his family would have been caught in the tsunami had they been a few minutes late in escaping. Then someone close to him lost his life, and he became a storyteller to leave a living testimony of those people.

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Mr. Ono said, "We must not let the disaster fade away. Not only do we superficially report the disaster, such as the number of casualties and evacuees, but we also interview the families of each deceased person to learn their names, lives, and dreams, which we then pass on orally. Sometimes I find it painful to pass on the message orally, but passing on the living testimony of the victims and survivors is also a living testimony for me, which is something only I can do." He mentioned that while many people died directly as a result of the earthquake, there were many dis-



Mr. Ono sharing Himeka's dream, showing the handkerchief.

aster-related deaths, such as suicide and solitary death, and that many people are still evacuated and in need of psychological care. He also pointed out that he felt that the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and the COVID-19 pandemic had accelerated the fading of the Great East Japan Earthquake by reducing media coverage of the disaster

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Himeka Suzuki of Iwaki City, who had a dream of becoming a designer in the future, was one of the victims of the tsunami. She was then 10 years old; 4th grade at Toyoma Elementary. Mr. Ono shared the story of a handkerchief designed using a painting Himeka made while she was alive. Although we may never be able to understand the true frustration and pain of the deceased and their bereaved families, we were able to learn more about the living testimony of Himeka. Mr. Ono performed a magic trick for us at the end of his talk. "I want to see smiles. I want to make people smile. That is the genesis of storytelling," he said enthusiastically. Mr. Ono's dream is to train young storytellers. "I hope that the younger generation who do not know about the disaster will learn about Fukushima today and envision Fukushima's future. I would like to train people who can pass on these messages orally and take action to prevent the disaster from fading away," he says. I would like to believe that the "true revitalization of Fukushima" lies beyond the pain of passing on the message.



Members of the team learning about the situation and plight of the people at the time of the disaster at the museum.

Editorial Note

I experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake when I was five years old. Due to the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, my family and I evacuated to Niigata Prefecture. My birthday is March 21. That year on my birthday, I could not get gifts from my parents... Those are the memories of the Great East Japan Earthquake for me. Through this interview, however, I was able to hear many deep and important stories. It was not just humans but many animals also suffered greatly, which I did not know. I was

fortunate to learn with my own eyes, ears, and heart about what happened in Fukushima, and what is happening now as Fukushima works hard towards revitalization. With those close to me, I would first like to share what I have learned and felt, as well as Mr. Ono's thoughts and feelings as he continues to tell the stories even though it is painful to do so. And I want to communicate to many people through a newspaper, a medium that conveys correct information. Reporting the current situation correctly is the first step in the revitalization process for me. (Kanna Sato, Team leader)



Members of the team taking a commemorative photo in front of the museum.