

## **Kizuna – Power of Friendship**

Translated 2013 from a private diary by  
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Each heading corresponds roughly to one day except the last 2 working days in Ōfunato.

Admittedly, I am fan of Japan since I visited this country the first time in 1989. In the meantime I spent three sabbaticals of half a year each and attended several scientific meetings at various places. Of course, I was shocked that just in this beloved country of high civilization the terrible earthquake happened and – even worth – the atomic power plant of Fukushima broke on March 11, 2011. The latter event hit all Germans in their heart and caused a final walk-out of atomic power in Germany though not in other European countries.

When my friend Hiro (Hiroomi Fukuzawa), a retired Japanese language teacher from the Free University of Berlin, asked me in early June if I were interested to join him to go with a small group (students and others) to Japan and to help there clearing the damages caused by the big Tsunami wave, it took me only a few days to decide to join him. Already in the past I often thought how I could engaged myself socially in Japan since I met so many nice in Japan. This, so far, appeared impossible to me in a highly developed country. But it became suddenly a real chance, knowing that the North of Japan is a generally poor part of the country and the who were hit by the Tsunami were in very bad conditions. Therefore, I booked the cheapest flight with Aeroflot on September 13 to Tōkyō and on October 4 back to Berlin, as recommended to me by Hiro. Previously, I considered the Aeroflot airline as somewhat dangerous. However, when I learned that the Aeroflot airline had only casualties in inland flights, but not in international flights I was calmed and did not follow up any further thoughts to this topic.

Hiro got a good friend of mine when I learned the Japanese language for 2 years at the Free University of Berlin. He found finally 6 Japanese language students and some friends/colleagues. We were a total of 16 people. We obtained also several donations to pay for 3 students and to cover local expenses in Japan. Everyone else payed most of the expenses from his own pocket.

There were several e-mails and meetings before the departure from Berlin. Particularly interesting to me was the message by Dr. Frank Brose, a member of our group, that the radioactivity of the Fukushima power plant was spread only about 30 km around the reactor and two stripes, one stripe about 40 km into Northwestern direction and from there another stripe about 60 km to the Southwest. We were supposed to go to Tōno, about 200 km North of Fukushima so that we did not have to be concerned about radioactivity. Actually, the radioactivity in Berlin from the Tschernobyl catastrophe was higher than the one in the area of Tōno. The reason for his is firstly that the radioactivity of Fukushima did not reach the high altitude of Tschernobyl and, secondly, the favorable winds around Fukushima at that time.

A second important matter was the local planning for Tōno. We all had little knowledge of what to do and what to carry with us for our work in Tōno. There ware some basic informations like to have high-safety shoes with iron fortifications at the shoe's sole, to have working gloves. We knew that we would sleep in a gymnastic hall under primitive conditions so that we were asked to carry along a mat to sleep on. The temperature could still be very hot. But not much more. Concerning our work we could anticipated to choose from a big list with easy and havy work according to our choise. Then, we were warned that there might be lots of bad smell from detritus, food and fishes and lots of flies.

All responsibility for all planning rested on the shoulders of Hiro. Amazing what he arranged in the forfield. I just mention here that he asked at several institutions for money to support our work. Although most of us payed e.g. their travel expenses by their own, there was money needed for the bus from Tōkyō to Tōno and for the stay in Tōno. We had to pay also a small amount for an insurance during our work in Tōno. After asking several societies we could obtain some support but we had to present a beneficial society to obtain financial support, mainly by the Bosch Stiftung (Foundation). Therefore, Hiro handed in an application for a society with the name „Kizuna“ to become successful while Frank Brose and his wife Brigitte helped him to constitute a welfare organization. Frank – like me – had also learned the Japanese language and he and his wife were great Japan fans like me.

Kizuna was the motto of our enterprise. It is a Japanese word and means Power of Friendship. At Tōno there was a large welfare station called Kizuna and Hiro called our enterprise Kizuna Berlin. We all had to look forward what we could contribute to our name when we would arrive at Tōno.

## **Flight to Tōkyō**

Already a day before departure Hiro asked me if one of his friends could stay overnight with me because at his house there was presently no room available. No problem! It was Farid, about 65 years old, a French fellow, born in Algeria, living either in Paris or in Algier. He was a former German language teacher and studied for a while at the same place as Hiro did. Now, he is retired and is still doing substituting teaching either in Paris or in Algier. He spoke fluently German and was a rather communicative. It turned out that he forgot to change some money into Yen and asked me urgently to help him but I was too busy in preparing myself for the flight. The second point which surprised me was that he wanted to travel through Japan after our work at Tōno and did not have the slightest idea where to go to and what to watch out for. So, I gave him some of the beautiful books I had about Japan to get an impression. This meant that he was occasionally somewhat disorganized. Nevertheless, we had a good sleep before leaving the next day.

The next morning Hiro and his wife picked up Farid and me. At the Airport of Schönefeld we met Frank and Brigitte. Check-in and passport control were as usual. At the airport in Moskow we were surprised to stop in the open and to use a bus for just to reach the building 50 m away. The inside of the very new building was in a very modern style. While waiting for our connecting flight we looked out for Tilmann who just finished school at Berlin but we could not find him. After less than 2 hours of waiting we embarked the flight to Tōkyō. We were warned in the forfield that the standard of Russian planes would be very primitive, however, we were surprised that most was similar to Western Airlines. We also anticipated that the food on the plane would be very meager but was sufficient to feel well during the flight though there were no feast meals. Also the service was excellent. The only real limitation was that everything was in Russian language, all journals, all TV etc. However, from a more realistic point of view the side tracking was much less for us and we did what one should do on a long flight, we slept mostly as well as we could.

At Arita Airport we arrived well in time. We were welcome by a small group of Hiro's friends. There we also met Tsuru-san, Ishii-san and Fumiko-san. Tilmann was in the same plane from Moscow as we were! After a few minutes of rest we were brought by Hiro's friends by car to the home of Hiro's sister. It was really hot and a little humid on this day and we enjoyed to reach the air-conditioned home of Hiro's sister, a nice one-family home on a hilly territory. In the basement we were asked to sit along a low table on the floor. With us and Hiro's school mates it was a really big group. And Hiro's sister, her husband and her daughter served us very delicious food. Whoever does not know Japanese hospitality he cannot imagine the many courses they served us. And all food was self-prepared. Even the

husband prepared one of the courses himself – very rare that a Japanese man works in the kitchen. This was a really nice reception in Japan and a good motivation for our Kizuna work.



Next, we distributed to host families to stay there overnight. I was attributed with Hiro to the home of one of his best friends, Tsuru (full name Tsuruoka). Of course, Tsuru was like Hiro a little over 65 years old. He appeared very skinny and always gave me a hard time with my big stomach – just for joke. Tsuru also had a nice one-family home not far away from a railroad track. The air-conditioned was not in use because this takes a lot of energy and energy is very expensive. Tsuru showed us our room and I took some time to walk around the neighborhood for recovering from the flight and to overcome jet-lag. There were many small roads with many one-family houses. Three blocks further away there was a big construction area to build a new center of commerce. Hiro used to live here and his way to school led him across the construction area. Now, it is all history.

In the evening we walked to a nearby restaurant behind the construction area for dinner. Here, we met again with many of Hiro's school friends and were invited again for dinner and beer. Amazing how generous Hiro's friends were to us. I had some nice conversations with several Japanese fellows but could not memorise their names. One of them was Ennyu, lived close to Himeji and ran there a coffee place. Of course, while introducing myself I usually admit that I like music and play the flute and the violoncello. This friend, then, invited me very heartily to give a performance in his coffee shop. I first thought this would be little unrealistic. But he started over and over with this performance. Also another friend of Hiro, Fuko-san (full name Fumiko-san) said that this would be a beautiful place and I should go there. Finally, I agreed to consider a visit to his coffee shop during my next visit to Japan. I also learned that the coffee shop is situated on the country side and that his coffee can host about 35 guests. Usually only about four guests would come per day but if there would be a special event it could be booked out.

The following night it first had to fight the heat in the room, but finally could sleep well. In the next morning Tsuru's wife prepared Hiro and me a nice coffee and some snack because we had to leave very early to meet the others. We were about 11 people and had a bus

with 11 seats and the private car of Ishii-san, another schoolmate of Hiro, for travelling to Tōno. First, we went to a big shopping center to buy some bits and pieces which some of us needed. I, e.g., bought a mat to sleep on. It took us, then, many small roads and then a larger road before getting after one hour out of the Tōkyō area onto the highway towards Morioka. After half-way to Tōno we passed through Fukushima. The city is about 50 km from the atomic power plant West of the coast and the highway runs East around the city of Fukushima. Shortly after Fukushima, we had a rest, then continued until we left the highway and headed Eastwards to the coast.

Tōno is about 40 km from the ocean and considered as one of the most beautiful places of all Japan, just behind Sapporo and Akita. The city is spread over a huge area of land, is little populated, has a lot of forests and agricultural places and is situated in the middle of a mountainous area. There is no big pollution problem. Many Japanese would prefer to live here in a natural environment.

## **The first day at Tōno**

At Tōno we headed directly to the Magokoro net station. It was about 100 m from the main road and consisted of a gymnastic hall and some smaller buildings attached to it. The parking space was full of private cars from people who came here for the same purpose as we did. First, we were introduced to all local facilities like the big hall to sleep in, the toilets, some small water facility, offices and waste containers. The sleeping room was covered with about 250 tatami mats (90 x 190 cm) in rows on the floor, with narrow paths for walking through. The shoes had to be taken off before entering the hall. Towards the inside of the building there were big shoe shelves where one had to watch out where to deposit his shoes to find them again. Many just left their shoes also next to the entrance on the floor – nothing to worry about. There was another sleeping room with about 50 tatami mats for ladies – all just on a smaller scale. There were two washing rooms, one for male and one for female. On the floor to the offices there were several waste containers. One for paper, one for food waste, one for plastic bottles, one for glass bottles (without labels), one even for the caps of the bottles which even should be cleaned before wasting them. I thought that many Svabians (who live in the area of Stuttgart, Ulm and Augsburg in Germany) could have profited from this logistic system.



The temperature at Tōno was around 30°C and even higher around daytime. It cooled somewhat in the evening but it was still hot in the evening. In the evening Hiro proposed to visit a small sento (public bath) and to have dinner afterwards in a small restaurant. We went by the small bus to the sento. The entrance was very nice with a very clean reception. Passing through some doors and floors we reached to a dressing room for men (a separate facility was for ladies). After undressing we washed ourselves and had a nice hot bath for 10 min in a hot pool. Afterwards, we found a nice restaurant and had some good Japanese meals with beer. At 22 h was deadline for the night. Then, the light was switch off to dim light. We were happy to have arrived savely to Tōno. I felt very hot and selected a tatami mat near one of the outside doors. However, as soon as the light was dimmed a older fellow closed this door and we were trapped in the heat of the hall. Protests were denied with the argument that there could come up a cold wind during night time. I could not do better than uncover myself as far as possible. Good to have carried with me a linen sleeping bag from my son!

The next morning at 6:00 o'clock: Ringing of a bell, the sign to get up. We had left all our luggage and personal belongings in the cars. Therefore, we had to fold our sleeping bags and isomats and to brings them to the cars, get new dresses, food, tooth brushes etc. out of the cars. Breakfast was in the open, sitting on the grass or on a stone wall while talking about our impressions. After clearing our waste we had to prepare our belongings for the day, i.e. rucksack, bento, 2 l-water-bottle, safety shoes, gloves, hat etc.

7:30 o'clock: Early morning exercises with NHK radio program. Imagine about 200 doing their exercises together. The Japanese know the program very well, but I didn't yet. Anyway, after 10 min there was the morning greeting ceremony by the head of Makokoronet and at least 20 subchiefs who would later guide us. Every greeting of Ohayo gozaimasu (good morning) was responded by a military Ohayo gozaimasu by the crowd and so on (21 times). Everyone of them addressed a few nice words to us. Then, we were asked to group ourselves in rows of four and we were assigned to about 20 busses going to different destinations at the coast. Everyone obtained a green or yellow jacket and had to post his name tag on it, for identification and insurance reasons. Insurance was always very prominent, costed about 10 Euro and lasted for three months.



8:30 o'clock: Departure for Kamaishi, about 40 km East, located on the coast. First, we could enjoy the high valley landscape with small villages at the foot of the mountains and with fields around. Hiro explained us that this was very typical for an ancient development of villages. We also had a short stopover to buy bento (Japanese meal in a plastic box). The road winded across a high pass and going through several tunnels. After about 1 hour we arrived at the point of destination. In Kamaishi, there is an old steel plant which had been discontinued but was reopened again in order to process the many metal which was accumulating during the cleaning process after the Tsunami. The Tsunami reached up to the train station (about 30 m above sea level). The highest water level observed by the Tsunami in Japan was 39,7 m above sea level. The first houses we passed by were only damaged in the basement, the next ones up to the first floor and the rest beyond the roofs. The houses had marks to indicate if a house was to be rescued, torn down and whether there were dead people found in them or not.

We continued to the shore and the village Hakosaki. All houses at the lower parts were destroyed and already removed so that only the concrete of the base was left. (Japanese houses do not have European type basements.) Only three concrete buildings were left with their concrete skeletons, no windows, nothing inside left. On top of one of these three buildings there was a car on top of the third floor. The crash barriers along the street were heavily bent. On one place there were all damaged cars collected, all heavily dented and no more reusable. Along the street we could often see big piles of wood, iron and other material, resulting from torn-down houses and being collected separately for reuse.



10:30 o'clock: Arrival at the old school building of Hakosaki. It was a two-floor concrete construction, only the walls being left. Even the ceilings and the windows were destroyed. We were assigned to clean up a nearby house of which only the basic walls were left, the rest was torn down and removed as for all the other houses around. Of the 12 rooms or so four were not yet fully cleaned from the tsunami dirt (ca. 20 cm high), mostly glass, tiles, dishes and sand. Some of us were digging the dirt, others were carrying it with small wheelbarrows to a separate place. At the end we even had to clean the walls from dust. At the end one could nicely recognize the basic walls of the house and with rooms and where there was the kitchen, entrance hall, dining room, toilet etc. Everything was ready to build on top a new house as it was before. However, the new plan for reconstructing houses had yet to be decided by a special panel.

As we learned quickly also: before reconstructing any of the houses the old walls would be removed in October or November this year. Therefore, we wondered why we had to clean so carefully this place when it would be removed later anyway. We were then taught that the old lady who was around all day collecting small pieces of glass and plastic from the ground was the owner of the building, that she requested our help for cleaning her house, and that we would have to understand our work as some type of „social care“. Apparently, this old lady wanted to see once again her home in a well cleaned manner before having a final farewell. This type of thinking would be very little accepted in our German society but seems to have a much greater importance in the Japanese mentality.

Two other members of our group were at the place of a 90 year old man and had to help him to revive his garden. Sometimes, he put hands on himself. His house was gone. On one occasion he mentioned that some day he may have to build a new house on top of the old one. I thought right away on a story from the bible or from Martin Luther: And if I knew I would die tomorrow I would plant a new tree today in my garden.

Now a short comment to our working intensity: Our Japanese guide requested that we had a rest of 10 min after every 20 min of work. Remember, we started at 10.30 h. We had to

have a lunch time between 12.30 h and 13.30 h. Already at 14.30 h we had to prepare for returning, this meant cleaning ourselves and our shoes, packing our rucksack, entering the busses and returning.

Was the work tedious? Please consider the temperature of 30 °C and somewhat more and the high humidity, in addition to the full blast of sun. We all were eager to have enough water with us for drinking. On these hot days I drank easily 4 l of water each day. We were also happy of having a pause in the shadow of the old school building.

We were asked not to take photos, particularly of persons or of the rest of the undamaged village further uphill. This could indulge these people. At least at the end of the day we were allowed to photograph the work we had done this day, and also some photos from the top of the school building. The view towards the ocean appeared to us very exiting.

Together with us was always a Japanese group of workers like our group. The relationship was very easy and cooperative. Real friendships developed rarely. The Japanese people came often from far away like from Shizuoka, Osaka, or Niigata. Working dresses had to be brought by everyone individually. Everyone had to have his booths wi, suncream, hat, and working gloves. As toilet served rental toilets.

The landscape of the coast was very beautiful, mostly steep mountains rising from the water and with plenty of healthy needle trees from about 5 m above sea level. Virtually everywhere green forests and on top blue skies. Only on the backparts of the bays there were sand strands and little villages.

On our way home we passed by at a small monument reminding of a high tsunami from a few hundred years ago, but with no further details. Possibly big tsunamis could happen as often as every 50 years. One can build houses earthquake-proove, but there is no way to protect houses against water of tsunamis but by building them at least 20 m above the sea level. A little statistic: in Hakosaki 45% of the children lost their homes or parents or both.

## **Rikuzentakata**

Tōno is situated about 50 km from the East coast and separated from the coast by mountains. Driving to the coast the street goes first upward, then through a tunnel and finally downward to the ocean. It takes about 1 h to get there. The street follows a beautiful river, with green forest on either side. Finally, the ground of the valley widens from top (50 m) to the bottom (500 m). Dreamfull houses at the bottom of the mountains, in front of them rice fields. The big area of Tōno is known in Japan as one of the nicest area in all Japan.

At the end of the valley there was a 2-3 km valley ground. At the end towards the ocean there was a 5 m high concret wall to protect houses and men against tsunamis. Tsunamis were considered to be not much more than 4 m high. Because the latest Tsunami was up to 20 m highere these walls were totally ineffective. And the walls were, in many cases, torn down mostly by the wave from the land back to the ocean. In the area of Rikuzentakata where we worked this day, there were 500 m of sand strand before the tsunami hit the coast. Afterwards, 300 m were missing. This meant that the wave back not ony carried back a lot of dirt from the gardens and the fields but also removed much of the soft coast land. All houses behind the wall were carried away by the wave, 2000 died.



On this day we were asked to remove dirt from a piece of land on the lower part of a hill, to separate it according to debris, burnable, glass and iron, and to pile it up separately at the road. On the piece of land where we worked there was an old lady raising vegetables. She raised all by herself from the seeds and then planted the seedlings in nice rows. Amazing to see how accurate she planted everything. A man on another piece of land said that he had lost his wife, his family and his all of his grandchildren. And he came to here to raise vegetables and to clean the ground. In the afternoon, the owner of the land which we cleaned came and brought us some soft drinks. He was a very sympathetic man, around 40 years old. He explained that he had built 30 houses 10 years ago, all gone by now. Last year he bought a new rice harvesting machine for 100,000 dollars, no more to be used. What he would do in the future? Yet unclear!

Further uphill, we could see the end of the Tsunami wave, above it all houses were as before, directly below there were houses of which only the bottom floor was destroyed, and below nothing was left. On the rice fields below the road there was just chaos, a new wild vegetation, all small walls of the rice fields were lost. Because of the salt water, said that it would take years to reuse the fields again as rice fields. Occasionally, there was a boat in the middle of the landscape (about 500 m behind the protecting wall), some demolished cars, or occasionally left overs of concrete building, a school and 2 other buildings. Further to the ocean, there was originally a pine forest with 2000 trees, only one being left. This last one will eventually also die because he will not tolerate the salt water in the ground.

In the evening, we went to a hot spring onsen at Tosen. We washed ourselves and lied extensively in the hot water. This is really recreative after sweating all day. However, I was also very tired afterwards and could hardly develop power in my body. When I measured my blood pressure it was really down at the bottom. The onsen was a natural hot onsen. We could swim also to an outside pool. There was also a dry and a wet sauna which we did not use. And there was a terrace to watch the nature with the forests and the mountains, all as part of the onsen. Then we went to a restaurant and had nice food and beer for dinner. I think it was here when we recognized that one of us, Baptist, was missing. He was a fairly quiet person and

decided to be for a while a bit aside from others of us. So he was sitting in the onsen for relaxing and missed the time when we left for the restaurant. And he did not have the phone number of Hiro. So, he went to a restaurant and these started to phone up all places, also the volunteer center, before getting contact with us. Finally, we got contact to him and picked him up. In the meantime also the volunteer center sent a bus to pick him up. This event caused a lot of trouble because the whole area then knew that a German group had trouble to stay together. Some similar events of this type and we were quickly branded as a group of chaos. Hiro assured assured not for the first time that everyone of us had one of the three phone numbers in case of problems. Finally, we returned to the volunteer center to get ready for the night. This time shortly before 22 h was the usual time for me to write my diary.

## **From Tōno to Ōfunato**

Today, we moved from Tōno to Ōfunato directly at the coast. In the morning we were told about a last-night trouble, apparently caused by a group of young Germans who were sitting in front of the sleeping rooms of the big hall in front of the sleeping rooms talking loudly, smoking, and leaving cigaret ends on the grass in front of the building. Again a bad impression we were blamed. And this was even more serious because this was reported to the staff of the organization. Quickly, the 3 young students of our group were found to be guilty. They had some excuses but if the rule says „22 h the lights off“ it meant quiet, also outside the gym. And cigaret ends on the grass was as bad. I learned quickly that Japanese habits are much more stringent than ours. Particularly two ladies of us blamed them of not knowing how to behave in a foreign country the language and behavior of which they wanted to study. It took days to calm down everyone.

Another problem came up when Farid, our Algerian frenchman took the boots loaned at the last day with himself without asking for permission. Again when getting known to the administration this attributed to a bad image of our German group.

At 9 h we had a small conference with Mister Sato, the head of the Kizuna Volunteer Center at Tōno. Kizuna in Japan formed from the Social Welfare as a main institution for the tsunami catastrophe. Mister Sato underlined the importance of Kizuna Japan also for the future in order to take care for the actions in need. We reported on our impression which we made so far and handed over three presents which he accepted with gratefulness. Mister Sato was a very keen man. He emphasized that he would be grateful for our help and that help would still be needed for a long time. He did not know any about our internal problems causing the administration.

The town of Tōno is a very nice place for vacations and for retiring. Actually, there are not too many important things to visit. The city is widely spread across the broad valley inbetween rice fields. In the center there are nice one- or two-floor high buildings. This weekend was a festival commemorating the 100 year anniversary of a matsuri (festival). The matsuri included many groups with different dresses, all very colourful and mystic, according to old Japanese traditions. They performed dances, accompanied by drums and flutes. In the evening there was a great presentation in the roads which we could no more attend. Almost every school class represented a group of nicely dressed performers. Many groups met in the morning for another rehearsal and at the market place there were the first performances. The Volunteer Center was about 1 h from the market place. A large part of the center was covered by temples with large cemeteries. Some of us just enjoyed the market place looking at all these having a coffee or a snack, others wandered around and visited the temples

At 14 h was departure to Ōfunato. Mister Konno, some type of vice chairmen of Ōfunato, came to us with his private car to guide us. In the meantime our group had enlarged to 18 so that all places in the cars were in use. Our tour went again through a beautiful narrow valley. Shortly before Ōfunato we made a short stop in the middle of a small side

valley at a very nice old temple, all made out of wood and with water around it. When we arrived at our destination (Oshinosaito Center in Ōfunato) we obtained several rooms, one of them with air conditioning and real beds, a dream after the hard tatami mats in the gym hall with 200 others in one room. The place was about 4 km from the local volunteer (meeting) center and was located maybe 200 m above the valley ground. One had to walk or drive up a steep, curvy road to get to there at the end.

In the evening all 18 of us were invited to the house of Mr. Konno. His wife had prepared some small things (so Mr. Konno), all very delicious like sushi, Negiri, tempura, saussages, chicken wings, potato soup, soba and sake plus beer. Amazing again the efforts to serve us. Since some of us were very good in speaking the Japanese language there was soon a vivid conversation between us and the family members and friend of mister Konno. Unfortunately, Isabel caught a cold, she, nevertheless, presented a Tirolian song in Italian language from her home country. I presented „Uff d´r Schwäb´sche Eisebahne“. At the end we tried the canon „Abendstille überall“. Many thanks from both sides, exchange of gifts, farewell and back home. Oyasumi nasai (good night).

## Cleaning ditches

Ōfunato is situated on a deep bay of the ocean and has several suburbs along the seashore, all at their own bays. Ōfunato had lost 300 lives and is missing 100. The reason for the low number of casualties originated from the fact that they had lost numerous citizens from a tsunami wave from South America about 40 years ago and that they were very aware of tsunami waves. Other places without this experience were hit much stronger. In one place the local had decided not to build new houses in endangered areas. They had no casualty at all. Ōfunato has about 40.000 inhabitants and, because of its fishery, it was considered very rich.

The first morning in Ōfunato we got up at 6 h. However, the start of the day was delayed by many causes. A larger problem was that no bus was running that day because of a holiday. Therefore, we had to walk to our meeting point about 4 km away. The first part was downhill and the rest even. At the meeting point all was of much smaller scale than in Tōno. There were no exercises, big instructions, no check-up on everyone. After waiting for another hour we were transported in small busses to the point of our destination. Here we had to clean up the ditches of the road. They were much larger than in Germany, around 40x40 cm deep and covered by a concrete lid of about 60 kg. The ditches were full of dirt. First, we had to remove the lids. There were sometimes even locked and had to be loosened by a strong iron stick. This was fairly quickly done. But to lift the lids it took two strong men and special iron equipment. Then, the dirt had to be transferred with shovels and spades to sandbags so that the sandbags could be reused to block waterflow. This could be very hard if there were, as usually, many stones in the dirt. One had to first dig a hole in order to reach the ground of the ditch to have an even ground for the shovel. Who did not reach to the ground had a very hard time to get grip on his shovel. One person was digging and shovelling and the second person had to hold the sandbags open to be filled with dirt. When a sandbag was half full it was sealed by a knot and a string and put aside. A sack half full was weighing about 40 kg (all wet material!) and could just be carried by one person. At the end of the procedure the ditch had to be cleaned by sweeping with a broom, particularly also the upper edge in which finally the concrete lids had to be fitted in again. This all was craft. The sandbags were then transported with a wheelbarrow to a collecting place somewhat uphill.

We worked on one side of the road and a group of Japanese and two Spaniards worked on the other side. Of course, in the intermissions (every 20 min for 10 min) we started to talk to each other. It was also interesting that in the dirt we not only found earth and stones, but also bricks, tiles, dishes, spoons, an undamaged toolbox and many other householdware.

Particularly, large pieces were hard to uncover. After 2 hours there was lunchtime. Unfortunately, there was a misunderstanding about lunchboxes this first day in Ōfunato. There was no place to buy food all around. Many of us had nothing to eat with themselves, but were finally nicely fed by those who had somewhat in their pockets.



In the lunchbreak we had the chance to go to the coast about 200 m away. There was a big concrete wall towards the ocean with further extensions land inward to channel a river to the ocean. Large parts of the wall were missing, in other areas the wall was torn out of their fundamentals and partly fallen onto the ground. There were also parts of concrete buildings left, with a staircase of about 30 steps towards the water. Possibly, it was part of a swimming place. A steel railing was left on the staircase, but not upright, but pressed down to the stairs as if it were of light aluminum. This gave us an idea about the strength of the tsunami wave. Behind the wall there was deposited wood and household equipment: 10 refrigerators, 10 stoves, couches, bedbases, tables, a package of 10 volumes Britannica. A staple of tatami mats caused a very ugly smell.

On the way home we had to wait for an hour at the meeting point. I discovered a ramen (artificial noodles) shop. I told Anne Marie. Suddenly, she and 2 of us were running to there, then some others followed and, finally, we all had a nice noodlesoup after the poor lunch. After this experience we bought our own meals every day to be save for a full day. After dinner in one of our rooms we had a conversation round to recall all impressions of the day. There was allways one or several guests with us who were to be informed of our activities. Sometimes, some of us were at other places and these members reported on their activities. The always external person present was Mr. Kon'no. He was a sort of vicemayor and city representative to mediate between the city council and the citizens. He help us in many respects and was our advisor in many situations. He told us that at the time of the earthquake he was with many others from this area at the government in Tōkyō. Because of the earthquake they went to a basement cellar. With time they learned about the desaster by the earthquake and the tsunami. Many members from his region knew already by this time

that their home would be destroyed and possibly their relatives no more alive. They were totally desperate. No trains ran for the first days after the earthquake to get back home. The tracks to the coast are still destroyed. No telephones. What terrible imaginations!

This night we got assigned our final rooms, one for males and another for females, large enough to unpack our luggage a little and to feel with a limited private sphere. We had to sleep again on tatami mats, not too comfortable for our shoulders and hips but there were enough covers.

## Rain

Already the day before we registered that a typhoon was crossing Japan, from Okinawa through Kyushu towards our area. Despite the rain which came up Mr. Tōno advised us to visit the harbour area to obtain an idea of the damages by the tsunami. But not all of us followed this proposal because they wanted to prevent the suspicion of catastrophe sightseeing. For me as a natural scientist for all my life, it was an exciting experience to follow up the effects of natural powers. Before, I experienced one of the strongest typhoons in Kyushu which ever hit Japan. I watched a newly erupted volcano on Kyushu and observed for days the pictures from an earthquake. On our tour we stopped first at a small restaurant at the end of the bay with a beautiful overview. There were many small islands and a fissured coastline. The mountains ran mostly steeply into the water and were covered with needle forests. The host of the restaurant, an elderly thick man, got the 9 ramen soups fairly quickly onto our tables, very delicious!

Then, we drove back several stations to the point where the tsunami wave was highest at the South slope of the bay. From there we went down to the bottom of the valley where we could recognize the concrete foundations of the many houses which were here. The top parts were all removed but the basic foundations were still visible. On the other side of the valley was a big hill of rubble where several baggers were at work with sorting the materials collected in the valley. A view back and we saw a big ship in the middle of some houses, about 1 km distance from the present water. Even his mast was still intact. On another ship in the grand of the valley the owner had written his phone number to inform him in case of problems. On our further way we visited a small temple uphill the street. There was a long and steep staircase of stone. On top there was the temple and a tsunami warning station. From there we had a beautiful view across the former city.

In the old destroyed city there were only a few concrete buildings left which were just to be torn down. The problem with flooded houses is that there are damages inside which cannot be restored. All wooden and insulation material would have to be replaced. And last but not least, their remains produce an awful smell which never fades. We saw also parts of the old railway track which was mainly washed away. In some parts with bridges the steel railings were totally bent to the floor. We then walked towards the city until we reached the non-destroyed parts of Ōfunato. Just at the beginning of there was our daily meeting point. Finally, we were picked up by Mr. Konno and his wife for a reception at the mayor's office.

The meeting was at 16 h. The mayor pointed out that

1. there were only 300 dead and 100 missing, just 0.1 % of the population, the lowest rate along the coast.
2. 5.000 houses were destroyed and 20.000 became homeless. The destroyed area was already mostly cleaned-up. They would make a plan for rebuilding the city in the near future.
3. about 5.000 were impoverished. Whenever they could not find housing with friends or relatives they were accommodated in temporary containers.
4. about 40% of the business places were destroyed. Half of them started again on other places. Another third plans to restart with governmental support. Ten percent gave up.

5. the group hit worst by the tsunami were the fishermen. Only sake and ocean fishermen were somewhat lucky. However, 25% of the boats and much of the fishery equipment was destroyed or lost (e.g. oyster plants).

The impressions from the mayor of Ōfunato was likewise positive although the background of his story was rather depressing. At other places it must have been much worse.

In the evening we had again exchange of informations from experiences during the day. One group of 4 students were in a old people's home and in a home of people suffering from dementia. The ratio of nurses in charge was 1:3. One nurse lost her house and stood in the water up to the throat, but survived. Now, she lives in a container with 1 room, a bathroom, a kitchen, and a toilette. Another one also lost her house and her memory. A second group visited the director of a school in order to prepare a visit for all of us.

## The taifun

It is part of each crimi to describe taifuns in all details and as cruel as possible. The Japanese people spell it taifu which means big wind. This ment about three days of rain and storm. The taifuns usually come from the South, move along the Southeastern coast and finally turn East. They are numbered according their appearance during the year. This one was number 15, not counting those hitting e.g. China or Korea and not hitting Japan. The good aspect was that the taifun 15 had already lost a lot of its strength on his way up North. The Taifun meant also an intermission of our work. The taifun which reach us in Ōfunato was rather week although he caused great damages in Southern parts of Japan. The maximum should go through Ōfunato by 24 h. Already in the afternoon at 16 h a stronger storm began to come up with losts of rain and squalls.

This afternoon we were at a school which had an university day on which several assistants and professors from universities gave lectures in social sciences, biology, agriculture, chemistry, mathematics, or techniques. We could visit the lectures by entering the back of the class rooms. According to us, the attraction of the lectures ranged from boring to full action and the attention of the students ranged from sleeping to highly motivated. The lessons were given as lectures from the front, with only one exception.

In the morning I was with three others in a small container village for people who have lost everything by the tsunami wave but their lives. We had to distribute flyers for an information event for suffering from dementia (Alzheimer). One unit consisted of 5 container homes in a row. There were about 70 homes. Because of limited space they were arranged on a very dense scale. There was also a parking lot and a few central buildings for administration and meetings, no stores. At the entrance of a container there were 2 gliding doors for a entrance room of 1x2.5 m. It was followed by a kitchen with a washingmaschine, a sink, a cooking stove, and a refrigerator, a bed room, and a living room with TV. According to the number of people there were 1,2, 3, or 4 rooms. Each home had its own gas tank from flasks and a water tank. The place we went to was at a hilly plateau leveled out with havy machines. All was covered with gravel. In another case such containers were just put up on the sport field of a school so that the school had to give up its sports field. In the container village above there was a clerk who was a former employee of mister Konno's wife. Previously, he lived with his family in a big house which was destroyed by the tsunami. Now, he lives with his mother, an aunt, and his grandmother in a 3-room unit. Such a change in one's live is really hard.

Another group of four of us went to two kindergardens. In the morning the kids were playing together drumms, in the afternoon they were playing games. There was a 3-h lunchbreak. In the other kindergarden the two student girls got name tags which could be even read by 3-years old kids. The one student had very nice blond hairs and many kids (of course, all with black hairs) wanted to caress her hairs. Both of them were often embraced by the kids.

Discipline was no problem. But there was some help necessary to calm them for the lunchbreak nap.



Not all of us were present all the time in Tōno and Ōfunato. For instance, Jörn joined us while he was at a sabbatical leave at the university of Sendai only for the first week. Another member, Sascha, came just for two days to Ōfunato. He had spent two years at the city council of Miyazaki in Kyushu. He came just from Fukushima where he gave a lecture on the abandonment of nuclear energy in Germany. Also the day before he gave a similar lecture in Tōno for about 60 people. The following day, two new members joins our group, Marcus, the brother of Anne Marie, carpenter by profession, and Bianca, student of Japanology, originating from Dresden. Marcus is still a good friend of mine and helped me in Berlin to redo my private home. The same day Tsuru-san left to return to Tōkyō with Ishii-san's car while he left us the rented VW bus in Ōfunato. Fumiko-san who wanted to join him decided to stay with us for 2 more days.

While writing these notes I am watching inbetween the TV which was full of informations on the Taifun for the last four days. Roads were flooded, car remained stuck, torrential rivers, huge waves from the ocean, unrooted trees all over. By midnight the center was close to us, with really strong storm and much rain. I thought that we were savely located on a protected hillside home and with a taifun already exhausted from its action in the Southwest of Japan.

## Morioka

The next morning, the storm and the rain were gone. There were mainly blue skies and some clouds. Morioka to where I wanted to go this day is about 100 km away from Ōfunato. The train service was given up because parts of the track were destroyed and will not be repaired anymore in the near future. Instead, I had to take a public bus for 3 hours to Morioka. Morioka is a central town with about 200.000 inhabitants in the Northern part of Honshu. It is

located near the former volcano Iwate near the city the snow-covered slopes of which are beautiful to look at over most the time of the year. There, I met my former friend Tsutsumi-sensei from the Iwate university. When we talked about the earthquake and the tsunami he said the he really felt the earthquake but there were no major damages in his house or in his laboratory. For him the coast and the tsunami were far away from Morioka and he hardly thought about the tsunami and its effects. I should add that he is a person of rather low empathy. Other friends in Kyoto and Kyushu were much more concerned what happened by the tsunami wave in the Northeast of Honshu.

The public transportation system in Japan can be considered as very good. Particularly, the long-distance train, the Shinkansen is a fascination for Europeans when it runs with an average speed of 200 km/h. Non-Japanese tourists can obtain a Japan railpass for a very cheap price to travel unlimited distances for one week. However, one has to buy a coupon outside Japan and to trade it in in only 5 places in Japan. My friend Farid and I had such coupons. I wanted to trade them in in Morioka but I learned quickly the the nearest place to do so was Sendai, a 1-million city and about 200 km away. Luckily enough, my friend Tsutsumi-sensei offered me to bring me to the train station of Sendai by his car. The ride to Sendai took us just 2 h but from the highway to the train station downtown it took us another full hour despite of two 4-lane throughways because at that days the center of the city was just jammed with cars.

Amazing the kindness of my friend to bring me to Sendai. Formerly, his wife came even from Sendai to Tōkyō to pick me up for Morioka. In Germany we would say „Please take the train from Düsseldorf (about the same distance) and we will meet at the main station in Berlin“. My next problem was to return to Ōfunato. There was a direct bus at 17.05 h. The area around the Shinkansen station is very complicated and confusing. The bus station was around several corners and the locals whom I asked could help me only vaguely. In addition, there were bus stations on both sides of the Sinkansen tracks. After one hour and many turns and detours I was already nervous to meet the bus in time but when I found it, it turned out that the bus would be delayed for more than one hour. I took a snack and was very relieved when he finally came and brought me after 4 hours safely to Ōfunato.

## **Ditches, nothing but ditches**

The following day we wanted to go to our central meeting point, however, no bus came. Finally, we found out that there was another holiday in Japan, the culture day (bunka no hi). Therefore, we had to walk again. No problem for us because there was blue sky and bright sunshine. Today, we were asked to work in Okirai. Cleaning ditches was also without problem because it was already routine work for us. However, in the afternoon, clouds came up and it started to rain by 15 h. So we had to quit and to return home.

The oncoming three days, there was beautiful weather again, 23 °C, dry air, sunshine, blue skies, and green forests on all the surrounding mountains. This is a usual stable weather condition after a taifun. Instead, it was necessary to protect oneself against sunburning. Our work was again cleaning ditches, a very trivial work, but it had to be done. Each day we produced about 200 sand bags full with dirt which were collected and used at other places to protect against water. With one bus load of Japanese and our group we could restore a good part of cleaning. If no one would do this work there would be a big disaster during the next heavy rain (particularly in June/August). Amazing what we unrevealed every day: small and large stones, sand, decaying mud, a panhandle, spoons, knives and forks, tiles for roofs or from bathrooms, empty sandbags, porcellan, occasionally intact dish plates and bowls. This went on for another three days.

Usually, the Japanese and we worked separately, however, with time there was an increasing interaction between them and us. I recall one day on which I worked with a young

Japanese fellow. He was sweating really 4 times as I was. First, we had to clean a small hole with a lot of debris and with water in it. At the beginning I had to hold the sandbags open and he shoveled, two small stones at a time. I then proposed that I would dig and he would hold the sandbags. This was much more efficient, of course. However, this lazy fat guy! He did not dare to bend himself down to lower the opening of the sack so that I could hardly reach the opening of the ditch from the bottom of the ditch. How happy I was when lunch break came and got another coworker! The day before I worked together with Luise, a young Japanese language student. Although she was a bit smaller person our work proceeded very well. And whenever there were big pieces stuck in the ditch I could help her with a large crowbar. Amazing how engaged this female student was and she even sometimes demanded to work harder.

Another engaged scholar was Tillmann. The two of us were mostly doing the hardest work, i.e. loosening the concrete lids with a large crowbar and put it together aside to the street and at the end back again on top of the ditches. Before covering again the ditches with the lids the joints for the lids had to be cleaned carefully with a small brush, work for Hiro and Fumiko. I always thought why did not Hiro's wife come along and did do this work.

Already two days before, there was a cruel accident. Occasionally, there were iron grids over the ditches to allow water to get into the ditches. These grids were very heavy and had to be carried by two persons as well. On one occasion Frank was doing this job together with a Japanese fellow, just at the day when I was in Morioka. When one of these grids was not yet in the proper position Frank wanted to position it with his hands. At the same time a Japanese fellow did this with a kick of his foot, not realizing that Frank had still his fingers in between. What happened was that Frank lost the tip of his thumb and had to see the hospital. Already the transport to the hospital was very tedious because we were in the middle of nowhere. When he finally arrived in the hospital he had to wait long again because he was not brought there by the emergency ambulance but came privately. Finally, he was treated for four hours to sew on the tip to the thumb. Of course, he had to quit working. Instead, he made nice walks with his wife Brigitte to the surroundings of Ōfunato. How did we others dream of doing also such walks! And how good that his wife was with him because he needed continuous help during the following days. Frank was a geologist and a very engaged person in our group. He helped much to communicate with the Japanese at many occasions. He found always nice words to explain to the Japanese our sympathies and to explain the goal of our commitment.

One little story I wanted to mention here, too. On one day we had a nice group from Akita with us. Akita is certainly a one-day drive by bus to Ōfunato. In the evening we were already in our bus and they took a farewell photo. Suddenly, they asked us to get out of our bus and to join them for a final photo. The bus driver who took the photos had about 30 cameras around himself to take shots. It was a really nice group of Japanese fellows.

On another occasion, when walking home in the evening, I was called back by a Japanese fellow to his car who gave me a ride back home. The young Suzuki-san talked German fairly well. He had studied German language at the Goethe-Institut in Hildesheim 10 years ago and also worked there at a farmer's place. He was the first time in Ōfunato to help. Frank was assigned to him to be guided for walks into the forests while we did our and also Frank's work.

What doing else after a busy day? One night we were asked to go to a karaoke place, not really my music. It was a flat building with about 150 karaoke places. We were about 15 in a smaller room with a big screen for accompanying photos, text and melodies and a book (like the yellow pages of Berlin) with the titles available. For me all titles were unknowns except the choir „An die Freude“ from the 9th symphony by Beethoven. I was also surprised to see how our young students sang most of the titles, many of them in Japanese language. The

entrance fee included also free drinks so that we had a good time together. After two hours, our time was finished and we returned home.

## **Visits to schools, homes etc.**

Occasionally, Hiro planned a relaxing time for us. On one such day some of us went to work, but others, also me, went to visit an old 's home in which Mrs. Konno worked. In the first floor we were welcome in a nice spacious foyer. Then, we went upstairs and met 26 elder people suffering from dementia in another big room. Some were brought in in wheelchairs. A Japanese lady talked to them really nicely. She appeared to me as well trained animating professional with an easy and comprehensive language. She taught them to sing together, to make movements with arms hands and fingers while singing for training coordination. She had also 12 large, easy to be understood paintings with her to explain them a story about Hiraizumi, a nice traditional place with ancient temples and a beautiful lake South of Morioka. There was also a funny charming man among the patients. He immediately procured Farid and me for four old ladies. Lots of laughing! At the end it was our turn. Frank addressed some words to the old people. We sang some songs like Oh Tannenbaum, Stille Nacht, Heijo, Spann den Wagen ein, Das Wandern ist des Müller's Lust, and Freude schöner Götterfunken. Frank and Brigitte distributed some presents. Among the old people was an old, handicapped person. He got a Teddybär and was very happy. Great applause for Frank and Brigitte and all the others of us.

Afterwards, four of us each went to another floor to have lunch with these people. I was told that the atmosphere in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor was very relaxed, particularly this one older man knew to make jokes. In this group was also a 100-year-old woman. In the first floor the atmosphere was a little more triste and wretched. Hardly any of the patients could talk, some were deaf, several had to be fed. The communication was achieved by caressing the hands. Remarkable for me was that before eating there was some kind of gymnastics for face and head muscles. Head to the right, to the left, backward and forward, circling of the head, saying a and o, massaging the cheeks etc.! This helped them to better chew.



In the afternoon we visited a middle school. We were welcome by the director in his office. We could visit several classes for 10 to 15 min. The kids had official classes in the morning. After 1 h lunchbreak there were classes according to everyone's choice until 19 h. We were first guided in a large gym hall in which about 130 students from 4 classes were kneeled on the floor and learning to draw kanjis with a brush. Next was a visit to a class with drawing and art lessons. There were very impressive paintings with distinct lines and fields, the latter being filled with different acrylic colours. Beyond, there were classes for mathematics with geometric rows and a computer class (a bit boring). Interesting for us was an English language class in which many of the students tried to talk with us, mostly through trained phrases from a text book. This was entertaining for both sides.

At the end there was another meeting with the director of the school. He explained us that there was no sports field for them available because a container village for homeless was established there. Also an evening school with preparatory classes for highschool was cancelled because of the tsunami. The tsunami had delayed teaching for about 4 weeks which has to be worked up partly in vacation time and partly at weekends. For music there was a choir and teaching instruments. This was the impression from Yuriko's school.

After the school visit we went shopping and back home, the usual 4 km. Towards the end I was walking with Isabell ahead of the others. She walked so fast that I had a hard time to keep up with her and was sweating all over when we arrived. We had dinner already at 18 h because Marcus and Christina went to a shipwright. The six others of us who went working did clean ditches in Yamaichi. They met apparently a very nice group from Niigata together with whom they worked.

## **The last two working days**

In the morning there were some clouds which were gone by the evening. Our work was again to clean ditches, this time in Ōfunato city. First, I worked at a street corner where a clearing vehicle caused some severe damage by pressing the debris into the ditch. Lots of tiles, dirt, a water pit, spoons, forks and other kitchen equipment. Directly the next square there was a demolition excavator at work. After three hours he had torn down a 2-story house. There were also several other excavators at work at other places, separating iron from wood and other materials.

For lunch we drove back to our meeting center, also because there was no place to sit except in the dirt and because the sun started to burn strongly. In the afternoon, we worked only 1 h because we had already finished our part. Back to the meeting point everyone obtained a flask of yogurt from special cows of Mt. Aso on Kyushu, very tasty, a little sweet and certainly very rich in calories. This was a very nice gesture by the organizers. Back home I took a bath and could for the first time enjoy the beautiful view from our room onto a nice grass border in front of our room and a nice, bluish sky.

Today, there was a group of 5 students and their professor from the Tōkyō City University with us. Their major field was communication science, among them one Mongolian with perfect Japanese language skills. This night we were invited with them in a nearby welfare facility. It consisted of a great hall and two smaller rooms. The big hall was also the place to stay for the group from Tōkyō. There were set up 8 low tables in a square. There were several welcome addresses by city officials and the local group of welfare. Isabell made the translation in either direction and with always a great smile in her face. Afterwards, there was a big dinner. As I suppose, all was prepared by some ladies from the local hosts: freshly grilled fish, pickled or steamed vegetables, sushi, tempura with beer, sake, wine, ocha etc. Because of the low tables everyone was sitting on the floor except Farid and me sitting on chairs. The conversation was splendid between us and the Japanese. After 2 h the dinner was closed with a bansei.

The highlight of the evening was a performance of the Mongolian student. He lived already since 2 years in Tōkyō. He appeared in Mongolian costume and had a Mongolian instrument with 2 strings with himself. He played three pieces on his instrument, very virtuous and did musically and technically really everything as one should do also on the violoncello, the instrument which I am playing in Berlin. The music was Mongolian, but more related to European than to Japanese music. In the encore he even sang with his instrument. He is married in Tōkyō to a Mongolian girl and very open minded. In the evening he came over to our place and we had a beer together.

The next day we had to clean again ditches in Ōfunato. This is really dirty work and will keep busy many groups for a long time. Two more things to mention. On some of the concrete houses still left was a faint, brown horizontal line on the third floor. This was the height of the water about 1 km behind the coastline. The other thing to mention was that, when looking from our working place to the places up the valley around 14 h, I recognized suddenly that there was water all over the road. I thought that the water originated from leak of a former water pipe. But then we were informed that the ground of the city there had been lowered by the pressure of the water wave up to 1 m. Because with the empty ditches the ocean water could make its way freely to the lower places of the old destroyed city.

In the afternoon of this day we went to a highschool which had a student meeting. The meeting took place in a big gym hall. The students were sitting on the floor in rows of twos. On the platform panel were sitting the officials and representatives. There were reports and also instructions for a better teaching or learning by some students. Everyone got his applause. At the end Hiro, Miro, and Frank presented the goal of our Kizuna group. Big applause for each of them. After the meeting we met with the students (15 to 17 years old) in small groups for discussions. I got into an English language group with 5 girls. Four of the five wanted to

become English-language teachers, the fifth a stewardess. One student had already been abroad (Australia), 3 played the piano, one of them already since 10 years.

This day left not only Baptiste, but also Mr. Konno (not to mix up Mr. Kon'no). He joined our group for a few days. I got aware of Mr. Tonno when he gave me a ride with his car from the meeting place to our home in Ōfunato. The luggage space of his trunk was full of batteries which were fed by solar energy collected by an absorbant foil at the front window of his car during the day while he parked his car in the sunshine. Also Noriko Ayama left for Tōkyō. Also she helped us much during the day like Fumiko. Noriko's husband came yesterday and they will go to Tōkyō to visit his sister there.

## The last night in an onsen

Supported by a large financial gift by a friend of Hiro we were invited in a large onsen near Morioka. We went by bus to Morioka and from there by taxi to the onsen. It was located at a reservoir lake which was surrounded by beautiful forests. The building itself was huge and at least 4 floors high. It was certainly a first-class hotel with many hot spring facilities. Maybe it was too good for us, but to reenter civilisation and as a farwell experience it was just superb for us. We could stay in 6-men rooms and sleep on tatami mats with soft futons. What a relief after the hard tatami mats in Ōfunato! First, we took a hot bath and then went for dinner in a room just fitting all of us. There were many words of thanks to our hosts and we were served an excellent dinner Japanese style and with beverages whatever we wanted. The atmosphere was very pleasant just right for farwell.



Too bad that Annem Marie left a few days before. She was always good for some entertainment together with her brother Marcus. They were teasing each other and telling us many tails from their youth. Particularly Annemarie was a cheerful person with a very prominent voice. Sometimes she could bring a crowd to go to a restaurant by enthusing a good meal, on another occasion she could easily pinpoint particular behaviours and bring every to laugh. Her brother Marcus, the carpenter, was before on Kyushu to work on a

Japanese farm. He tried to get contact to a Japanese carpenter, but the only contact was with a ship carpenter. Also Luise departed a day earlier to meet some friends in Northern Honshu. She gave a very moving farewell address in German and Japanese.

Again I would also like to mention Fumiko-san. She was around 60 years. She lost her husband three years ago. While with us she took care many things and mediated in many situations. For Hiro she was really a great help. She had always a happy smile no matter what happened. She helped every night after supper to clean the tables and to take care of the garbage bags. I also loved her because she loved to make massages on our shoulders or feet in the evening. Very relaxing! Sometimes, we were piling up several people to massage one the other in a long row. Or she brought me some coffee for breakfast when I had, as usually, just water. She had also left a few days earlier but returned with Tsuru-san for the last night.

Not to forget my friend Farid! Sometimes he was a little lost. It was not once that we were ready to leave for a certain place. Who was missing? Farid! He was perfect in German literature and told me much about French and Algerian habits and literature. And often I could deduce from his behaviour his French and Algerian roots. He sometimes gave also a hard time when I had to take care of him. I remember one occasion at the coast. He had a nice bento, but when he returned in lunchtime to his rucksack the rucksack was opened and the content of his lunchbox partly eaten. Of course, he was furious. When he learned that some birds did it he calmed and ate the rest. At the end of our tour there was a big problem for him how to continue, but I managed to bring him to Kyoto and from there he had a nice tour for a few additional days.

There were some other Japanese language students, also engaged in our work and everyone very nice on his way. However, occasionally they had their own views of life. E.g. Miro from Belusia. He is a highly intelligent student with great interests in languages and many other fields. It was interesting to talk with him. When I met him on the way to my aircraft at Narita Airport we both were happy to return home. While going down on an escalator I was standing on the left side of an escalator going down and he was on the right side while talking to each other. Suddenly, he demanded me to turn to the right side as he. This would be a Japanese habit except in Osaka. Just have in mind that no one else was on the staircase or in the hall.

Also Baptist was sometimes a little unlucky. Poor fellow! He became a strongly middle ear infection and a strong coughing towards the end of our stay, due to pneumonia. Also another peculiarity of him: when we decided to have dinner together in the evening he could not tame his hunger and had already eaten before we started.

Marina and Christina were certainly a group within our Kizuna group. Christina was highly engaged in studying Japanology, Marina was working in the embassy (?). Both had a slight traditional view of thinking and were often opposing the young Japanese language students. I admired very much their Japanese language skills. Compliments! Not much to report on Bianca and Isabel, very quiet students, very good in Japanese language skills and always with a polite smile when talking to them.

Returning to our dinner we received a beautiful dinner with at least 15 different dishes. All were nice to look at and very tasty. Later this evening there was a mask with a red nose making its tour around the table. Many intelligent comments and views! There were also lots of thanks to our Japanese friends, Tsuru-san, Fumiko-san, and Ishii-san.

One last comment to Hiro! He was the spirit of all. However, he usually did not show it up much due to his modest personality. However, it was amazing how he managed to put together a program which was fascinating for certainly most if not all of us. He was sitting often in the evening on his computer and was finding out ways for the further program. Or he was talking with Mr. Kon'no who seemed to feed him always with other good ideas. And he knew always to tell the people at the right time to do the right things. Thank you, Hiro!