

# Thoughts for the Future

~The miracle of the sailboat and the mountain~

## Tsunami Lessons for Future Generations

### Disaster Ruins: Traces of Ukedo Elementary School

The "Disaster Ruins Ukedo Elementary School" in Namie Town opened to the public in October 2021. Eleven years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, and memories of the disaster seem to be fading, and an increasing number of people do not know about the damage caused by the tsunami. Journalism School Team #5 interviewed Yusuke Watanabe (36) of the Namie Town Board of Education, who is in charge of managing the ruins, about the significance of preserving the Ukedo Elementary School ruins for the future.

"Disaster ruins" are facilities that maintain, preserve, and exhibit affected buildings and other structures in order to pass on the memory of the disaster to future generations. Ukedo Elementary School is the first disaster ruins in the Prefecture, and the school building that was damaged by the tsunami still remains intact.

The Ukedo district, which faces the ocean, was devastated by the tsunami, which swept away everything but the Ukedo Elementary School building. The district was designated as a calamity danger district, so new houses could no longer be built. "We want to leave it as a place where people who were there originally can feel the atmosphere of that time when they come back from evacuation sites." With this in mind, the town and its residents repeatedly discussed the matter, and it was decided to leave it as a "disaster ruins," a relic of the earthquake.

Upon entering the current Ukedo Elementary, one can see that the classrooms are covered in mud and that doors and windows that were supposed to be sturdy are broken and missing. In some rooms, debris from the washout is left untouched. The floor of the gymnasium had been dislodged by the weight of the water. The strong force of the tsunami had bent even the supposedly sturdy steel pillars. The water marks were all the way to the second floor. The machine that ran the clock in the staff room was also broken, and the all clocks in the school stopped at 3:37 p.m.



A classroom hit by the tsunami. The remaining steel frame is bent.

Visitors from abroad are sometimes shocked at the extent of the damage and call it "crazy." For visitors from outside the prefecture and abroad, the earthquake seems to have left a strong impression of the damage caused by the TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident, and Mr. Watanabe is concerned that "the memory of the tsunami damage may be fading." He urges people to see the damage caused by the tsunami and earthquake as it really is. The ruins of the site still hold the memory of that day and continue to speak of the horrors of the tsunami. (Otsu, Suda, and Ohara) Ukedo Elementary is a 25-minute drive from the Namie Interchange on Joban Expressway. Admission is 300 yen for adults, 200 yen for high school students, and 100 yen for elementary and junior high school students. For inquiries, contact Disaster Ruins Ukedo Elementary (Tel: 0240-23-7041).



The observatory in the shape of a boat's sail, one of the symbols of Ukedo Elementary School. The plate in the center shows where the tsunami arrived.



All clocks in the school stopped pointing to 3:37 p.m.



The school building is a two-story reinforced concrete structure with an illustration of the sun and the sea on the wall. (Right side of the photo)

## Be More Aware of the Familiar Disasters



Mr. Sato sharing his experience with tsunami evacuation

### Mr. Sato talks about the miraculous story

Ukedo Elementary principal's quick judgment and evacuation helped all 82 students at the school survive the tsunami, earning it the nickname "The Miracle of Ukedo Elementary." We interviewed Shinichi Sato (57) about the evacuation. He was the chief teacher who was in charge of the evacuation, and is currently the chief teacher at Namie Sosei Elementary School.

On the day of the earthquake, Mr. Sato was in the gymnasium preparing for the graduation cere-

mony with the fifth graders. At the fateful 2:46 p.m., the chairs in the gymnasium, 1st-grade classrooms, and 2nd-grade classrooms began rattling and shaking. The tremors were louder than ever and kept happening. It was only 300 meters from the school building to the sea. Following a tsunami warning and a suggestion from a nearby fisherman, the school principal decided to evacuate the entire school to Mt. Ohira, eight minutes after the event.

He called out to the children as if they were "playing explorers" to help the students evacuate without making them feel anxious. A nearby friend soothed a crying child by saying, "It's going to be okay." As he was looking for the entrance to the mountain, "Mr. Sato! It's this way," a child told him the way. The child in wheelchair was carried on his homeroom teacher's back as they continued to make an over-2-km journey to Mt. Ohira. The tsunami swept down the mountain-side only five minutes after the evacuation had been completed. During the evacuation, the children did not see the approaching tsunami, and Mr. Sato was relieved that no one was traumatized.

Later, after descending Mt. Ohira, Mr. Sato and others met a truck driver from Iwaki City. The driver put the children on the back of the truck and carried them to the town hall. All were able to evacuate to the town gymnasium.

"Where is your Mt. Ohira?" asked Mr. Sato, wondering if their memories of the disaster were fading. "I want everyone to think about how to escape not only from earthquakes and tsunamis, but also from rising rivers and volcanic eruptions," he said. Staring at the remaining school building, Mr. Sato is advocating lessons to be learned. (Homma, Kojima)

### Editorial note of Team #5

Having experienced the disaster myself, what Mr. Sato said during the interview was realistic and I was able to relate to it. (Keigo Otsu, Freshman at High school of Special Needs Education attached to University of Tsukuba) I would like to make the most of what I have learned and spread the word to others in the community. (Yuto Suda, 2nd year at Tomita Junior High) I felt the importance of conveying people's

thoughts about Ukedo Elementary and what happened after the earthquake. (Utako Ohara, 1st year at Junior High attached to Fukushima University)

Visiting Ukedo Elementary this time, I thought it showed the extent of the damage caused by the earthquake. (Hiroto Homma, 6th grade at Sukagawa-3 Elementary)

Through the interviews, I was able to see the Great East Japan Earthquake as my own matter. (Kanna Kojima, 6th grade at Kinto Elementary)

As an alumnus, I helped write the articles. Seeing everyone writing articles with such enthusiasm reminded me of myself as a former student of Journalism School. (Hiroyuki Kakuta)

