

## Introduction

---

# Towards a culture that honors the experience of the earthquake even in a different era

Miyagi Prefecture Mental Health and Welfare Association  
Noriyuki Takashina, Director  
(Chairman, Shotokai Minamihama Central Hospital)

It has been 12 years since the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. Although over 10 years have passed, I believe that the scars of the earthquake have remained in people's hearts, albeit in a different form.

The first natural disaster that remains in my memory is the Niigata Earthquake, nearly 60 years ago. An M 7.5 earthquake with its epicenter off the coast of Niigata Prefecture occurred on June 16, 1964. The images I saw on the television of severely leaning high-rise residential buildings owing to ground liquefaction left an impression on me. Miyagi Prefecture also saw a seismic intensity of 5, and the earthquake occurred at 13:01 on Monday—I must have felt the shaking in a classroom, since I was an elementary school student at the time. When I hear about the Niigata Earthquake, for some reason, I think more about looking out from the windows of a wooden elementary school classroom rather than the shaking of the earthquake. The year 1964 was also when the first Tokyo Olympics were held.

Next was the Miyagi Prefecture-Oki Earthquake. At 5:14 on June 12, 1978, about 45 years ago, an M 7.4 earthquake occurred with its epicenter off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture. Sendai City experienced a strong earthquake with a seismic intensity of 5. At the time, I was an engineering student, and the earthquake occurred when I was back from university and lounging in our living room. A chest of drawers began trudging around like a sentient creature, and outside, the telephone poles swayed like pampas grass in the wind. The next day, in the Aobayama research building, I cleared up the books that had fallen from the interconnected steel bookshelves in the library. I learned from a senior colleague that the experimental equipment in the laboratory had broken and that cleaning it up was a major struggle. As for the lifelines, electricity was quickly restored, but the gas supply in Sendai City took longer to be restored. My home was outside of the city gas supply area and instead used LPG. We were not too inconvenienced in using fire. Learning from this experience, my parents continued to use LPG at home even when the supply area extended to their home.

I also recall the heavy snowfall on Christmas Eve in 1980. The snow that had begun falling from the day prior had accumulated up to 25 cm by 18:00 in Sendai City. Since it was wet snow, about a dozen steel towers collapsed, which resulted in a major power outage that affected 70% of the area under the jurisdiction of the Tohoku Electric Power Sendai Office. It is my memory of a white Christmas.

There was also the Tanabata heavy rain. On August 6, 1986, over 400 mm of rainfall was observed in Sendai City owing to the heavy rainfall from a typhoon, with widespread flooding occurring in the city center. I had to drive through the flooded streets, with water seeping through the gaps in the floor of the car, and the musty smell persisted for some time afterward even after I washed the floor mats.

Subsequent multiple natural disasters have occurred, such as earthquakes, heavy rains, and heavy snowfall. On July 26, 2003, about 20 years ago, there was the Northern Miyagi Prefecture Earthquake. On February 22, 2011, there was a major earthquake in Canterbury, New Zealand, which killed 28 Japanese people. This was then followed by the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster, brought about by the earthquake off the Pacific coast of Tohoku. During the Great East Japan Earthquake, the hospital where I worked was struck by a tsunami, and we were forced to hole up in the facility, with the hospital then closing for one year after. I am still in disbelief that 12 years have already passed, and even now, there are times when I still remember it like it was yesterday.

There has been an increase in public awareness of disaster prevention among Japanese citizens following the 1995 Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake, and there were a series of earthquake disasters during the middle of the Heisei period. Public awareness reached its peak after the Great East Japan Earthquake, but it has subsequently begun to decline, according to the “Public opinion survey on disaster prevention” by the Cabinet Office (year).

In 2016, the Kumamoto Earthquake occurred with a seismic intensity of 7, which is the highest on the Japan Meteorological Agency's seismic intensity scale, and people who came to offer support during the Great East Japan

Earthquake were affected by the disaster. These people had mentioned that they did not think much about potentially being affected by the disaster. Although the Great East Japan Earthquake remained in their hearts, it may not have stuck with them. Perhaps offering support during and living through a disaster are separate experiences. Although my experience in this disaster is minor, the pattern of behavior that I follow remains even after the disaster.

It is sometimes said that a decade can feel like ancient history. However, nowadays, everything seems to be faster, and the same applies to the passage of time. To some half a decade feels like ancient history, and to some even one year feels this way. Would 12 years become so far away in the past, and the memories of the earthquake rapidly fade away? There are some communities where cultures based on past disasters have been handed down. Even if the memories of the earthquake fade, I think that it is our duty to incorporate those memories as much as possible into our culture.