

Chapter 1

Life

Life

Kobe

By Yuko Nishiumi, 40s, Kawanishi

When I lived for less than a year in this city,
I could climb the slope near my home to see the verdant hills,
And if I turned back, I could see the ocean.
The little house with red door was our first home.
There, because I was not in the best of health,
I began to write poetry.
Having found a job in another city, I left this place.
In the new place there was no view of the ocean.
Suddenly, I became discouraged with my job.
How I missed Kobe.
Eventually, when I became a mother,
I was burdened by the combination of an outside job
and the responsibilities of raising a family.
On my way to visit my parents,
I stopped by Kobe, wishing that someday I could live there again.
I loved the ocean breeze.
Unable to accept the stifling lifestyle of Japan,
Kobe, open to the sea,
Seemed to offer me my beginnings,

I didn't want to sing of the city in this way.
I believed in the beauty of it,
nestled between the hills and the sea.
I didn't want to think that this city could be so cruel to those who lived in it.
The shock that flashed through the earth
sent buildings tumbling down on the sleeping inhabitants,
crushing them underneath.
The flames leaped up,
burning our dreams to ashes.
You must have been so afraid, so in pain, so hot.

And 5,000 or lives vanished in this city.
The catastrophe continued.
The evacuation centers, transformed into relocation centers, did not warmly welcome
the victims,
who lacked even food and water,
That Kobe was known as the city of culture was just an unfounded notion.
The profits from the city known as Kobe, Inc.,
left and went somewhere else
Only the debts from the city development that had torn down the hills
to fill in the ocean
were left to weigh heavily on the citizens of the city.
Having to vanquish its livelihood,
re was nothing to central city government could do.
Rebuked even by the surrounding area,
top brains, together, raised their arms in defeat.
Instead of the Self-Defense Forces, criminal organizations stepped forth to help,
but the terrible catastrophe had left the city gasping for its very breath.
But, yes but,
people came, one after another to the disaster area, with their arms outstretched to
help.
Individually, they had little strength.
In the long run, though, only humans can truly save humans.
In the rubble, the people were shining.

Even so,
This wretched spectacle was more than enough to crush the hearts of the people.
Many of the victims were elderly people, children,
the physically disabled, and mothers clutching their infants.
All of them were related to me.
they were my elderly parents
my infant children,
they are just like me 10 years ago.
My life was spared only by chance.
For remembering lives that were lost,
we want a city where everyone can live in tranquility.
Kobe, connected to the world by the sea,

was an illusion born of my youthfulness.
Now, I believe
that when the weakest are protected,
not only will the city rebuild itself,
but the people will begin to live again.
the city exists for people.
the wound is large and deep.
Whether anyone can soothe it,
people will have to go on living.
Only if every person continues living,
can this city resurrect itself.
I only hope
that it will live, for
It was in this city that I began to live.

What is frightening is frightening

By Junko Yano, 40s, Akashi

“Where is the epicenter? If it is in the Sea of Japan, what about the nuclear power plant?”

I’m not sure whether those concerns were circling in my head during what seemed to be a very long quake or after the quake had subsided. Upon hearing that the epicenter was in Awaji, I thought, “Ah, that’s a relief. I was so scared.”

However, the unexpectedly disastrous situation in the Hanshin area strengthened my fear of the quake. Seeing me tremble with fear as the aftershocks continued to rock us throughout that day, some people made fun of me and said, “To think that there are people out there whose very fate is unknown...”

This is definitely true when you think of people who lost relatives, their friends, or their homes. But it was frightening. It was really frightening.

Immediately after the quake, many people rushed to the disaster area and were moving about, doing what they could. Having suffered little damage, I felt that I, too, must do something. So I thought, but found that I couldn’t move.

Half in shock, I was unable to collect my thoughts about anything. I was ashamed of myself. About two months later, I was able to see myself in a more positive light. Having returned to my normal lifestyle just one week after the quake, I felt that I had suffered practically no damage. But there is no denying that awful terror that I felt. One’s experience should not be denied in comparison with the experiences of others.

Each person feels differently about things. This is true not only in the case of this earthquake. In any number of situations that we run into, it is unfair to measure our experiences up to the experiences of others, with some arbitrary ruler.

Even now, when I think of the people who are in mourning, and those who are living in difficult circumstances, I want to think again about the quake.

It seems that the disaster has brought the fact of death closer to my daughter, who is going into the third year of elementary school. It's a pity that someone who is only 8 years old knows that she might die at any time. But I hope that this will foster in her the importance of life, and its protection.

Be that as it may, the winter is long this year, and I feel tired, body and soul.

What is wrong with putting a little makeup on?

By O.R., 40s, Kobe

I spent 10 days in an evacuation center. At first, I was totally self-absorbed. Eventually, I became calmer and began wanting to pull myself together. So, one morning I put some makeup on. I got such cold stares from people around me when I did that!

"What's all this about?" I thought.

Are earthquake victims not supposed to put a little makeup on? What's wrong with taking care of your personal appearance?

Self-discipline, self-discipline, we are told...

By Tae Shibata, 40s, Kobe

One month after the quake, the intervals between the aftershocks are longer.

"Whew..." I heard a homemaker sigh.

Homes where people began to live together after the quake; homes that became daily public bath houses; homes where supper was prepared and served to victims...

I take care of the house when my husband is not around. I prepare lunch for the children who come home after half a day at school. All of us have done our utmost, saying it's because this is a special circumstance. We are lucky just to have our home. So the gas won't turn on. So the water won't run. When you think of the people who suffered serious casualties, you can't complain. I know that, but there is no way out of this situation. One month of not leaving the house. There are absolutely no pleasures.

When someone in my neighborhood said she went to do volunteer work, I felt ashamed of doing nothing. Ever since the earthquake, my children have become afraid

of staying at home. I can't just leave them. I sigh because I'm tired of not being able to provide any help.

Friends who live far away call me and tell me, "It must be difficult. It must be tiring."

It's not all that bad, but when they keep saying that, I can't even answer them cheerfully. I tell them, instead, "Oh, well, that's the way it is."

Here, there, everywhere...self-discipline, self-discipline. I'm losing my ability to stand the pressure of the words, "Because this is a special circumstance..."

The meaning of fun

By Kazuko Sakaki, 40s, Kakogawa

To someone like me, who thought that disasters only occurred in urban areas, it was a great shock that a terrible earthquake struck a metropolis nearby. I thought that my sense of values would change. After I got over the shock, I found that my values were shaken but didn't really change much. Now, though, I do feel fear every day because I think that disasters can happen, might happen and will happen. I used to be able to think, "Disasters will probably not happen. Everything will be fine."

In the midst of all of this, the idea of having fun didn't enter my mind for sometime. I wasn't in the mood to have fun. Now that I've settled down a bit, I feel that to have fun feeds us a desire to live, and I am actively pursuing pleasure.

Three months after the earthquake, if I go east, all topics of conversation are the earthquake. Everything that I see reminds me of the difficult times waiting ahead, putting me in a very gloomy frame of mind. But if I go west, the conversations have drifted away from the quake and are no different from what we used to talk about. Given the gap, I tend to clam up when I am in the west.

It seems that people who have experienced disasters and bad fate must carry heavy burdens throughout their lives. But we must have fun in order to lighten the burden, even a little.

Rubbish dropped on the roads

By Tae Shibata, 40s, Kobe

About a month after the earthquake, we began removing the broken-down buildings. Excavator tractors tore down the remains of the completely and half-destroyed buildings and loaded the rubble onto large dump trucks. Of course, there were no covers. The dump trucks, loaded with as much rubble as they could carry, started off toward the rubbish centers. Everyone was determined to restore Kobe as

soon as possible.

However, as the trucks sped to the rubbish centers, trash -- even the tatami mats (dried grass floor mats) -- was blown off from the trucks and fell on the streets. Such a large amount of garbage was blown off the trucks that both sides of the roads looked like small garbage dumps. At a neighborhood junior high school, the PTA started a volunteer organization called The Road Cleaners. While they were picking up trash on the sides of the streets, they came upon some old photographs. Sepia-tinted photos. They must have held someone's heartfelt memories... woman who picked it up told me that she was overwhelmed by sympathy.

But is it OK to scatter the trash like this? Is it safe to just burn anything? Even people who live relatively far from the rubbish centers said they could smell it. The air must have been contaminated. I wonder if it's all right.

Box dinners at evacuation centers don't go bad

By Rei Kujo, 60s, Kobe

I feel that this disaster forced us to reconsider the meaning of fundamental human rights. Now that half a year has passed since the quake, I often contemplate this.

The following is a record of contents of box dinners that were handed out at Akatsukayama High School in Higashi-Nada Ward, Kobe, on February 15. We had bread and milk for breakfast and no lunch that day.

There were two triangular rice cakes wrapped in nori dried seaweed, a rather large pork cutlet, a small, bright red sausage, and two meat balls. All of these were cold and hard as rocks.

The box dinners distributed on March 15 looked exactly the same as those we ate a month ago. And on March 18, a 5-milimeter piece of mold was detected on a cutlet. The rock-hard rice cakes became soft and decomposed finally around mid-April.

It is unbelievable that the government continued to serve se awesome meals to the citizens and that our city councils approved of them.

Do they even feel the same sense of pain?

Taking part in the toilet inspection in Kobe

By Miharu Kawamoto, public toilet inspection team member, 40s, Amagasaki

The Japan Toilet Association and the Kobe International Toilepia Association conducted a study of the toilets affected by the Great Hanshin Earthquake. As a member of the Public Toilet Inspection Team, I readily took part in this study. Public

Toilet Inspection Team was established in February 1992.

Our first job was to research whether public toilets were amenable to women. After inspecting the toilets near Osaka Station and those at other stations, parks and department stores in Amagasaki, we presented reports at the Hyogo Prefecture Women's Forum. We received a lot of support for our efforts. Urged on by the encouragement of the participants, we went inspected 100 toilets in both Osaka and Kobe. In the end, we published a book based on our findings!

Getting back to the subject at hand, I transferred from train to train in Amagasaki on the torn-down railroads to participate in the inspection on February 25. As a team of five members, we were assigned to investigate the northern Nagata Ward. In addition to a chart, we loaded necessary equipment onto a car, such as brushes, buckets, cleaning fluid, and a pole used to break apart the mountains of feces (I had never seen anything like that pole before). We set off for five schools designated as evacuation centers, as well as toilets in the parks.

I have summarized what the manager-in-charge at the evacuation centers told us.

Before the portable toilets were set up, the school toilets (flush toilets, of course) had been clogged up with a pile of feces. They first cleared them, using garbage bags and gardening shovels. After the toilets were cleaned, they carried water from swimming pools and nearby rivers to the toilets. They instructed people to pour water into the toilets after urinating and to line the toilets with newspapers when defecating. After defecation, they were to wrap the newspapers around the feces and put them into a garbage bag.

The portable toilets were brought in about a week after the earthquake. Water began running again in three to four weeks. Our inspection took place a month after the quake when everyone had started using regular flush toilets again. We found them very clean and sanitary at that time. Most of the portable toilets had already become unnecessary.

We tried some of the portable toilets that were sent to Kobe from all around Japan. First, we felt that the emergency-type tent toilets were difficult to use. They had no locks or stability. They were also dark and scary inside.

Additionally, people could see the silhouette of a user in the toilet from outside especially at night. People at the shelters told us that it took a long time to build these toilets because they didn't know how.

Even the regular type of portable toilets was unstable and difficult to use. They smelled bad. There were no sanitary pad containers. Men and women used the same

toilets. Those with steps inside the compartment were unmanageable for handicapped people. Some people complained that the toilets were located too far in the corner of the athletic field that they were frightening at night.

We were told that immediately after the quake that people relieved themselves behind shrubbery and bushes. We felt that toilets should be sent to disaster areas before anything else. As the victims continue to live in fear of aftershocks, the toilets should be set up firmly and steadily. Safety first. No one wants to die crushed in the rubble of a toilet. We also felt that we should begin saving and using rain water in toilets, even in normal circumstances, because flush toilets only work when there is running water.

When the able-bodied are in rubble, are handicapped shoved aside?

By Yoshiko Azuma, 40s, Kobe

After the earthquake, I watched television for some time. I noticed no handicapped person or anyone in wheelchairs among the victims in the school gyms. I was greatly worried about what had become of them.

I have a friend who lives alone in an apartment in Nagata Ward. She takes off her walking braces when she goes to sleep. I wondered if she had been able to escape at the time of the quake. I also know a married couple in wheelchairs who lives in a government subsidized apartment in the same ward. They must use wheelchairs to get around. Were they able to escape using their wheelchairs? Even if they were safe, they wouldn't be able to use the toilets at the evacuation centers. I was beside myself with worry.

Two or three days later, I was finally able to get in touch with them. As I had thought, my friend had taken her walking braces off, so she was unable to walk. However, her next-door neighbor carried her on his back to a nearby school. Once at the school, she could not use the toilet and had to return to her half-destroyed apartment each time she needed to relieve herself.

The married couple with wheelchairs couldn't use the toilets their. They didn't eat or drink all day. Considering that their paralyzed feet are usually as cold as ice, I didn't think one blanket distributed for each of them would alleviate the cold. Although the able-bodied victims took a hot bath in large metal barrels, it was impossible for people in wheelchairs. Since no one came to their aid, they moved to a center for handicapped people.

I will never forget what y told me: "When the able-bodied are in trouble, the disabled are shoved aside."

I wasn't able to go to an evacuation center

By H.E., 30s, Akashi

Right after the earthquake, I received a phone call from my younger brother.

"Sis, the windows of Mr. Y's van are shattered. Without the van, he can't move his children. His or buddies and I are trying to find a car repair shop right now. But things are hectic, and none of the shops have replacements. He's really in a bad fix. Do you know another auto repair shop?"

I called an acquaintance in Miki who owned a shop. I had heard before that he was, like me, the parent of a severely handicapped child. He agreed to help find the parts and quickly repaired the van.

Our neighbor even asked us to come along with her family to the nearby shelter. Although I was glad to be invited, I couldn't bring myself to take my handicapped child, who has no control over his body. Instead, I went to the center with her and saw her in.

Upon seeing the evacuation center, I thought, "Ah, I can never bring my child here. Regardless of the expected dangers at home, my son and I will stay there after all."

When I was talking with the other mothers from the Sunflower Play Group a few days later, one of them said, "When I thought about my child, I couldn't go to stay at the shelter." And I realized that she felt the same way as I did.

About schools serving as evacuation centers

By Tae Shibata, 40s, Kobe

"I never imagined schools would be serving as evacuation centers for this long."

Both the earthquake victims and those connected with the education system must have had the same impression. Nothing like this had ever happened before. Out of nowhere came a great earthquake. It could be brushed off by saying that it was unpredictable. However, no one can say that this type of disaster will never occur again. If it were to happen again, would it be appropriate to once more designate schools as shelters? I feel that we must discuss this problem.

When schools became evacuation centers, children lost their place for learning. Maybe they can learn at home. But just as adults participate in social activities such as work, children have schools as part of their lives and society. Is it fair for m to lose that?

Even if children suffered greatly from the disaster, they would get relief from interacting with their friends at school. They must feel positive toward life again. This is an important topic for the future.

What I discovered after the earthquake

By I.S., 50s, Akashi

It has been about three months since the Great Hanshin Earthquake. Although residents in the area were suffering many hardships, they slowly began to move forward. Immediately after the quake, I appreciated people's kindness, psychological strength and gratitude. I felt grateful for the fact that we had water, gas and electricity. However, as the situation changed, I began to notice or things and became concerned.

The people of Kobe are said to be bright and cheerful. However, when they lost their loved ones, homes and belongings, they were left in deep despair. There were people who stayed in the evacuation centers without complains when they couldn't eat as much as they liked. Others who wouldn't (perhaps I should say couldn't) enter the shelters lived in tents instead. Some elderly people couldn't get accustomed to group life. Even though they were well aware of the dangers, they chose to remain in their half-demolished homes. I am worried that it may take a long time for earthquake victims to find homes and live in peace. I hope they can stay healthy until then.

The other day, I heard the term "the weaker victims." After the quake, many disabled victims had difficulties getting disaster information. Not knowing what was happening, they continued to live in fear for days. When they finally moved to the evacuation centers, they became disoriented and felt uncomfortable living with strangers under new circumstances. In the same way, many elderly people and children experienced various inconveniences. The senior citizens who couldn't find caretakers were too afraid to take baths at the shelters. I have heard that the elderly who needed out-patient care gave up on going to their doctors since they couldn't find any helpers.

Because things we never imagined had happened, people began to discuss new obstacles. People started to realize that inconveniences came up in daily routines and the victims were enduring such situations. Ways to cope with these problems started to spread through a word of mouth. We began to notice problems that had been left unnoticed but should have been tackled earlier. I want to collaborate with the residents of the disaster area and build a city where we can all live in security. To accomplish that, it's important for the victims to remember the disaster and how it changed their lives. Most of all, we should never forget the warm support we received from all over the world.

In memory of Mrs. Eiko Mitsuya

By Keiko Muroya, 40s, Kobe

On January 2, Mrs. Eiko Mitsuya, her daughter, Shiho, caretaker, Mr. S.,

disabled Miss A. and I sat happily around the table at Mrs. Mitsuya's home, cooking a pot of Japanese stew. The same group as the year before, we enjoyed a realizing New Year's dinner together. Most disabled people and their caretakers usually return home for the New Year's celebration and the Bon festival (Buddhist All Souls' Day). It was becoming our tradition to gather at Mrs. Mitsuya's house every year. But January 2 turned out to be the last day we spent with her.

Mrs. Mitsuya graduated from a school for the disabled in Himeji, Hyogo Prefecture. Although she landed a job, she was dismissed from it because of discrimination against the disabled. After losing her job, she joined the Hyogo Green Grass Association and took part in planning and carrying out its activities. She later got married and had a baby. While she was raising her daughter, she and her friends formed the Hibiki Cooperative Workshop (a workplace for the disabled). Upon moving to Nishinomiya, she participated in the Hanshin Center for the Liberation of Disabled People. At the same time, she was registered as a member of the standing committee of the National Green Grass Association. She expected her activities to prevent the retrogressive revision of Mother and Child Health Law and to abolish the Eugenic Protection Act.

She questioned the existence of a disabled community that is denied rights by society. As a woman and a handicapped person, she faced obstacles squarely and battled on. She fought for her own rights repeatedly in the midst of constant discrimination. She knew the loneliness of possibly hurting someone weaker than herself in fighting for her rights. As she stood up for women's rights, she formed a discussion group to study the ideology of mainstream society and to find a way to live in mutual understanding. The earthquake hit just when she was embarking on these projects.

She lived in a dilapidated low-rent housing project. I heard that she was crushed to death under her own house, which was completely destroyed. Five others in the same housing project also died. Upon moving there, she had said that she chose that project because the deposit was less costly. Twenty days after the disaster, I went with Shiho to pick up that rent deposit. A few days later, I learned that concrete blocks of walls had been used as the foundation for the housing. Even considering that this was in the area hardest hit by the quake, what poor housing conditions! This disaster, in which the poor and the weak were sacrificed, revealed both the dark and the light sides of society. I am truly, truly mortified.

Though telling myself that other people felt grief much more than I did with more than 5,000 deaths, the question keeps recurring: Why, of all people, Mrs. Mitsuya? Buffeted by incoherent thoughts, I was able to somehow make it through the chaotic

conditions at an evacuation center, half-destroyed home and the workplace with the help of my invalid mother. It certainly seems that my body managed to function solely for the purpose of attending Mrs. Mitsuya's memorial service on April 2. But how sad to see, for the first time, people living on the streets without their lifelines and to understand the plight of the disabled people.

Although I spent only a little over a month at the evacuation center, living there made me ponder certain social issues and realize my insensitivity.

"Even before the earthquake, there was no place where the disabled could safely live. The ongoing search for caretakers continues, and it has not changed. Should we hope things will return to how they used to be? No. The disabled are going to build a city where they can live in security."

To the disabled who are saying these things, the governments have shoddy housing plans, denying the disabled citizens' rights to live in the mainstream society.

But they haven't given up. They have pinned their hopes on the dream of "independent living and living amongst the mainstream community." In doing so, they have managed to continue living. The disabled have always hung on to life by looking straight into death. It always brings home to me how differently the frail able-bodied live.

This society, which puts priority on economic growth and where materialism leaves people behind, has discarded the disabled and the weaker in its pursuit of profit and development. We are no longer allowed to dream. Those of us who were allowed to live must ascertain the challenges with which we have been entrusted and take over where Mrs. Mitsuya left off.

Living in temporary housing

By Fumi Miyasato, 30s, Kobe

When people at my workplace were discussing temporary housing, someone said, "It's selfish of those people to stay in evacuation centers just because the temporary housing units are far away."

"Just plain selfish."

Is it really true? The prejudice arising from the different degrees of damages people suffer is frightening.

Even though we have felt the same pain, it is not necessarily true that we all share the same understanding of everything. Can we not recognize that everyone had different problems and choices to make? I would like people to kindly look on others who instantly lost their homes, dreams and hopes.

And yet, the volunteers don't share the same feelings as disaster victims. For example, at 7 p.m. one evening, they put up a screen next to where I was trying to sleep and started showing a movie. The movie was a famous comedy series in Japan. Everyone was completely worn out from cleaning up all day, and we were just getting ready to sleep. Some people were not interested in the movies. Also, our pride had been tarnished by having to stand in line for food cooked outdoors. Accepting charity made us feel miserable. We would have felt much better if we just took one of the piled-up box lunches ourselves.

Let me tell you about the temporary housing. I was handed the keys to my living quarters on April 16. Since I had priority listing as a single parent of three children, I had expected to be awarded housing sooner. Until then, my children had been evacuated to the home of a friend in Osaka. Since I was attending a nursing school, I stayed in my half-destroyed home and lived apart from them.

With the help of volunteers and friends, I moved to the temporary housing unit on April 22. There are 48 multiplexes here, made up of two to eight units. There is a fence around the area with a rough unpaved surface and one telephone pole. The place is nothing other than a prison of a war camp.

Whenever I enter the housing area from a hole in the fence, I fear that someone will see me, so I look all around before stepping through. An extremely miserable feeling arises within me. It's not as though I'm doing something wrong.

On June 20, some shades were put above the door. On June 29, an air conditioner was installed. On July 7, an outside light was put up.

By the time May and June had passed, more than half of the units in this temporary housing area, 15-minute walk from Naya Station, were still empty. Currently, there are only a few unoccupied units. We still haven't started any neighborly relationships. No one talks much.

A number of disturbing things have happened here.

One is that after a few rainy days, large puddles form, making it impossible for us to walk. Even though we placed stepping stones across them and dug trenches to drain the water, we couldn't fix the situation. Water pools soon appear underneath the building because there is a gap between the bottom of the building and the ground. Water skippers swim around in the pools. Elementary school children come to catch them and peer under the house.

Another thing is that the house is not private. I don't like the fact that anyone can peek inside the house through aluminum-sill windows. I never leave the curtains open. Probably because of that, mold grew on the *tatami* mats. The shelves in the closet

began to fall apart perhaps because we shoved too many heavy items on them. The window sills seem to have warped, and it is impossible to lock them.

I can clearly hear noises and voices of the neighbors. I feel under pressure, knowing that I need to keep quiet. When I hear my neighbor's door being unlocked, it sounded as if my door is being unlocked, and as if someone is going to come into my house at any minute. Is it a post traumatic syndrome of the earthquake? I'm too afraid to turn off the lights at night, and I can't change into my pajamas.

No matter how I try to return to my former lifestyle, I am captured by the thought that it can be broken again. An image of the quake-ravaged city and terrifying experiences still haunt me. These things are simply my own personal experiences. I'm not asking anyone to do anything about them. I think that I may even make use of the experiences someday. I have also decided this: I want to become a nurse who is sensitive to others' pains. I want to become a professional nurse soon and become a member of the overseas volunteer corps.

The disaster, its aftermath

By Mitsuyo Mita, 40s, Kobe

My home was totally demolished in the disaster of January 17. After living in an evacuation center, I now somehow manage to get on with life in Aioi. Although I try, it is difficult for me to write anything about this disaster or my current life in Aioi. I don't think I can order my innermost thoughts about what happened between January and now.

The other day, when I went to see my house that was half torn down, I couldn't stand it. The dog I had kept for three years died in the disaster. Coming back to the house reminded me of him again. I think I will soon be able to think about things less emotionally.

Now, the most important thing for me to consider is rebuilding my home. My old home was a multiplex apartment. Considering the size of the apartment, it was quite spacious. But having it torn down, I must now abide by the land I have been rationed, and that means the new house will be very, very cramped. I asked the Kobe City Housing Authority, "Can't you do anything about this?"

But they answered with, "Your place is going to be rebuilt so it's troublesome for us to hear your complaints. There are lots of places that can't be rebuilt."

I was crestfallen. I was surprised when a neighbor who came with me asked, "Isn't there some loophole?"

To ask that of the city! At any rate, my housing loan will be doubled. The house is going to be smaller. And it seems that I'm going to face a lot of problems. In other countries they seem to have various aid plans, but Japan is so cold to us.

What is troubling me now is life in the countryside.

There is only one bus each hour. It's very difficult to catch a taxi. If I miss a bus, I have to walk. That's how it is. Then, the day after I moved here, someone in the neighborhood said, "It doesn't seem like you have many personal effects with you. Is it possible that you came from the disaster area?"

It shocked me when someone asked that. In the countryside, it seems as if they often check up on other people.

My fourth-grade daughter appears to have lots of problems with social life. "It's hard to communicate with people here," she said.

We will probably come up against many hardships from now on. But these days I'm starting to think that we'll somehow manage to come through them.

Our charcoal briquette bath

By Mayumi Kobayashi, 50s, Kobe

February 1:

"*Banzai!*" The water is running again. We can wash the dishes. We can wash our hair. We can eat vegetables freshly dug up from the garden.

Since the water was running again, a vegetable producer came by on February 6 to lend us a cypress bath tub. He had loaded it into his van and brought it to us. It looked like wooden vats that people cooked boiled tofu a long time ago, but only larger. It had been unused since it was made in Taisho era (1919-1934). Presented with this wooden tub at the end of last year, the man said he had taken a bath in it once outside under a winter sky, gazing at the myriad heavenly stars. Not knowing what this type of bath was actually called, we dubbed it the "charcoal briquette bath." The man even brought us American charcoal briquettes (a package containing 60 to 70 briquettes costing 400 yen). He said they were softer and a little smaller than the old Japanese briquettes. They last about four hours. Even though it would take a long time to heat it, it was worth 400 yen for a family of four to be able to take a bath. To prevent leakage, he told us to wash the tub out, fill it with water and wait for two days. The wood would soak up the water and expand, which prevents water leaks.

On the morning of February 8, I proclaimed to the three members of my family, "Today is a bath day."

I began preparing at about 4 p.m. I lit five or six briquettes. I removed the chimney. Peeking in from the top with one briquette between two fire sticks, I put m in very carefully so I would not drop any of them. Since the briquettes were treated with lighter fluid, they flamed up for a short while. A lot of ashes were left after the briquettes burned, clogging the bottom of the burner and diminishing the heating power. Every 20 to 30 minutes, I removed the ashes from the bottom, improving air circulation and added new briquettes. Each time I did this, the carbon monoxide and the smell made me sick. I put a bonnet on my head and a cotton gauze mask over my nose and mouth, as well as holding my breath while I checked fire. As it got later, I boiled water on the kitchen stove and added it to the bath water over and over again. Finally, after about five hours, the bath was ready.

The family, who hurried home anticipating the hot bath, let out a cheer. I gave everyone directions on how to take a bath.

1. Before getting into the bath person should prepare a kettle full of hot, boiling water,
2. They should wash their bodies in old bath first,
3. They should soak themselves in the cypress bath tub
4. When they get out of the bath, they should add some hot water to it and should not let the coal die out.

The order in which they take their baths was decided according to their personalities and wishes. My eldest daughter got in first and made the final preparations for the bath. She removed the fan used for ventilation from the cover of the bath, opened the lid and closed the window. With the window closed, the briquettes were dangerous, so she exchanged them for wooden coal. Two guests got in next (a neighbor and my daughter's friend). Next, my younger daughter got in, then me, and finally my husband. The reason my husband took it last was because he is big, and a lot of water usually overflows when he gets in the bath. Instead of having to worry about the people who got in after him, he said he had rather be the last and relax.

I sank my body into the charcoal briquette bath. I felt the soft texture of the cypress on my body, enjoying the fragrance of the wood. I also felt the softness of the hot water. I forgot about everything around me and for a few minutes fell into a daze. My body was heated to its core, and I felt nice and comfortably warm. As each of us came out of the bath, our faces turned pleasantly relaxed. Everyone said, "Thanks for letting me enjoy that wonderful treat." On the days when we took baths, it was our greatest treat. We took a charcoal briquette bath six times between February 8 and March 3.

Everyone who took a charcoal briquette bath was delighted. As for me, I was getting a little tired near the end and was a little anxious for gas to be turned back on.

These days I have found that my greatest pleasures are a hot meal, sleep in my own home and a nice bath.

What is life, if not being tossed about?

By Satomi Amano, 40s, Takasago

Every time I think of the pitiful roof of our home among the rows of or houses, I tell myself I will eventually have to climb on the roof and get to work. I'm going to have to take all of the tiles, which are now completely covered by a tarpaulin sheet. I'll have to remove all of the clay, too. After that, what should I do? Some say that old houses in need of interminable repair should just be torn down.

Windows from which we used to view the sea, the fields and the mountains long ago, are now shattered. The remains of countless repairs and of the earthquake fill the entire house. In spite of that -- no, actually because of that -- it is dear to me. Rarely cleaned, it looks like a storage space.

However, it costs a lot to repair it. Tearing it down costs money. Whichever choice I take, it's a fortune. At any rate, with hardly a penny left to my name, I'll have to climb up on the roof. With things in this state, we won't be able to withstand a typhoon season. But I'm afraid of heights. It's quite different from hiking in the mountains. I'll have to train myself for this. I'll have to limber up my legs and loins and strengthen my arms. More than anything else, I need courage, courage, more courage. All I have to do is climb onto the roof. Does it really have to be this hard? The hardest thing is that I'll have to go on a diet. It will be better for the roof if I weigh five kilos -- better yet, 10 kilos -- lighter. What a pity that I have such a nice, plump body.

I'd completely forgotten, but it was just last March that I impressed myself with my sheer, brute strength in tearing down and burning two storage bins and more than 10 meters of a fence. I was dragging an injured leg at the time, so it was painfully slow work. It took me about three weeks. During that time, of course, I was without income. Mother and children, how in the world did we manage to feed ourselves?

The damage that my city suffered in the earthquake cannot be compared to the hardest-hit area. Even so, when I enter the disaster area and see the damaged buildings, I can't help but see my house superimposed upon them. One wooden pillar, one wall plank, a damaged cooking pot -- practically none of them put to use but just thrown away. It's heartless to do that to people or to things. It was so distressing for a while that I couldn't do anything.

After a while, I began to weave and to dye cloth. If I don't do that, I can't make a living. I can't become overanxious, and yet I can't do enough each day. The youngest of my four sons has a liver disease. My heart is sometimes sunny, sometimes cloudy. In disaster or with disease, when something happens, I'm tossed about. In a long run, what is life, if not being tossed about? And so, my days go by.

We remember...from a distance

By Nozomi Kawai, teenager, Nagoya

I live in Nagoya. Rarely do I think about Kobe when I am in my hometown. However, when I come to the Kansai area, like now, my memories of Kobe return with clarity.

March 1, 1995, was graduation day at my public high school in Nagoya. But I thought, "That's of no consequence to a freshman like me!"

And so from that day, I decided to skip four days of school. Early in the morning I climbed aboard a Kintetsu Railway express train for Osaka. And I changed to a Japan Railway train there. When I passed through Amagasaki area, I thought, "How in the world could this have happened?" The crushed rows upon rows of homes spread before me.

This was the first time for me to come face to face with the damage from the disaster. Not from a television screen, but from a train window.

I experienced all kinds of work during my five days at the Kobe YMCA. What left the biggest impression in my mind was my first day there, when I helped pitch tents at South Oji Park. On my third day, I went to help in the clean-up project of half-destroyed houses.

It's easy enough to speak of pitching tents. But in that cold air threatening to snow, how much did I really understand about the meaning of living in a tent? I remember only that I was hoping as I laid the polyurethane mats on the tent floor that the inhabitants would stay warm.

To participate in the clean-up project of half-destroyed homes, I rode my bike to Shinzaike in Nada Ward. I had to help gather bedding and other necessary items for people who were unable to live in their own homes. Most of them were unsure whether or not they would be living in temporary housing.

When I pulled an old box out of a closet at an old lady's house, it was filled with children's festival dolls and carp-shaped windsocks. She exclaimed with laughter, "Oh! That brings back memories." I spent very personal time with her. As we ate the convenience store box lunches that had been provided to us, I listened to her story.

Her husband was in the hospital with kidney disease. Her sons were nearby, but being in the same straits as she was, she couldn't depend on them for help. She could do nothing. She had remained in her house since the day of the earthquake, crying every day. I felt that this was a deep wound to her heart. The earthquake's impact seemed much more serious than the scene I saw from the window. I knew that there were more people who suffered from deep scars to their hearts. That day, the old lady laughed.

"I think that from now on I will be able to persevere."

I was overjoyed to see her smile and hear words like that from someone who had been living in tears until then.

On Sunday night, March 5, I had to bid a painful farewell to the companions with whom I had lived and worked, and returned to Nagoya. As my inconsequential daily life returned, I realized that the memories of Kobe seemingly so poignant at the time were fading.

"This is not right," I thought.

On May 27 and 28, I headed back to Kobe.

When I was helping with relocation work, Mr. K from the Disaster Relief Center treated me to ramen noodles and *gyoza* dumplings. At that time, Mr. K said, "I'll pay for it this time. Then, Kawai-kun, maybe you'll come again for us."

I never want to forget these words. Someday I'll return to Kobe because I think it is the best way to remember the scars that have not healed.

(Written on August 23 from "Volunpia Newspaper Np. 3")