

# The Journal of a 20yr old Singaporean in Sendai, Japan

## 8<sup>th</sup> July Friday

We arrived in Narita airport at 8am and after a long car journey we finally reached CRASH Japan's Sendai base! Praise the Lord for his protection on our journey here.

When we reached Sendai base, the other volunteers were having their daily debriefing. A team from America told us to really treasure our two weeks here as they would really pass by so quickly. For them, it still felt that they had just arrived in the base though they were leaving in two days time.

Mayumi, who was the leader of Sendai base, conducted a briefing for our team. She told us to hold out our clenched fists and to think of whatever fears that we had for our time in Japan. After we had thought of whatever fears that we had, we were asked to open up our hands and to release those fears to God. It was a symbolic and meaningful start to our journey here in Japan, as it reminded me to rely and to trust in God that He is in control.



## 9<sup>th</sup> July Saturday

Today our EP Japan Tsunami Relief Team was split into two. Half of our team members went to Ishinomaki to help a fisherman to clean up his house, and the remaining team members helped out at the base. At the base, we sorted out the clothes that people had donated to the tsunami victims and helped to clean the campsite.

In the evening, the team members who went to Ishinomaki shared about their experience helping out at the fisherman's house. On their way to the fisherman's house, they were trying to search for a toilet. But after searching and driving along the roads for 10 minutes, they realized their search was futile as all the houses, convenience stores and petrol stations were completely destroyed by the tsunami. Witnessing the devastation that the tsunami had caused with their own eyes made it more surreal and shocking.

The fisherman also shared with our team members about the dilemma that many of the tsunami victims were caught in. For those that want to return to their homes, they have to pay a rebuilding fee. If they want to stay elsewhere, they have to pay a demolition fee of their existing house and pay another loan for a new house in another area. Either way, they would still have to fork out money and many of them could not afford it. Many of them have lost their jobs and are still living in the evacuation shelters. Even in these evacuation shelters, basic necessities, like electricity and water

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are scarce. Government relief efforts are also slow and limited. This really opened my eyes to the desperation of the Japanese tsunami victims. They really need our prayers!

## 10<sup>th</sup> July Sunday

We went to the Seaside Bible Chapel for service today. The Seaside Bible Chapel was destroyed by the March 11 tsunami, and they were using a café as a makeshift place for their weekly services. The church also opens the café daily to reach out to survivors living in the nearby evacuation shelter. The church had a few members, a small worship band and a small premise. Despite this, it was heartening for me as I sat through the service as I could feel the sincerity and earnestness of the hearts of the Japanese people as they worshipped the Lord.

After the service, we drove to the site where Seaside Bible Chapel used to be before the tsunami happened. As we were driving in the area, we saw the destruction that the tsunami had left in its wake. Houses were torn apart, and some of the houses were completely washed away as only the foundations of the houses were left. There were many mangled cars strewn around and in some areas, the ground was just bare as the entire house had been swept away. At that point of time, it was just scary to imagine how it had been like when the tsunami came and how terrifying it must have felt.



## 11<sup>th</sup> July Monday

We spent our off day making preparations for the Singapore Day at Seaside Bible Chapel café on Wednesday. We made a flyer to advertise for the Singapore Day and bookmarks as souvenirs for the visitors. Each of the bookmarks had verses on it in Japanese and all of them have different designs! Some of our team members also prepared kaya from scratch to serve on Wednesday!

We practiced songs that we were going to present on the day itself. We practiced "You were born to be loved", "Power of your love" and another Japanese Christian song. It was hard for us to practice these songs as the lyrics were in Japanese but it was worth it! Mayumi, who was the base leader of the camp, was so encouraged and thankful for our effort and love for the people of Japan!

## 12<sup>th</sup> July Tuesday

We went to Ishinomaki to help to clean up tsunami sludge. As we drove through the town of Ishinomaki, the aftermath of the tsunami seemed more real to me. I could really see how much

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destruction the tsunami had caused. Houses, factories, shops and petrol stations were badly destroyed. As we passed by many schools, we saw that the clocks of all the schools stopped at 4pm which was the time that the tsunami happened on March 11. It made me empathize with how the victims must have felt when the tsunami struck as they were caught totally off guard. It made the fact that peoples' lives, homes, jobs and possessions were lost more poignant.

We helped an elderly man remove tsunami sludge from his home and factory. Even though it has been 4 months after the tsunami, his house looked as if the tsunami had just occurred a day ago. The whole area was covered with tsunami sludge and his furniture and items such as cashbooks and files were strewn all over the compound. Some of the machines in his factory were also toppled on the floor. I simply cannot imagine how long the owner would have taken if he were to clean up his house and factory all by himself. It was already strenuous for our team of twelve to remove the tsunami sludge. It would be immensely tiring for the owner and he would probably have taken weeks if he were to do it alone.

When we took a break, he proudly showed us the second floor of his factory. The tsunami waves only reached the first floor of his factory and thus the second floor remained intact. His factory was a production line for Styrofoam boxes to store seafood. The owner showed us the various machines to produce the boxes and the end product and I could sense his pride in his factory and a certain sense of longing to resume work and to restore the situation to how it was before the tsunami.



We also went to a nearby evacuation shelter for the tsunami survivors for a toilet break. When we were there, an army band was playing for the survivors. The atmosphere was so solemn and I could feel that the people were feeling lost and needed a place for solace, comfort, hope and closure. One of the volunteers at CRASH had told us earlier that one of the survivors shared that it took him 4 months after the tsunami happened to be able to look at the sea again. When he was finally able to do so, the question that constantly crossed his mind was "Why did this tsunami happen?" When I heard this, it also made me question, why did God allow for this tsunami to take away so many lives and cause so much grief? Perhaps, the only "good outcome" of this catastrophe is that it opens a window and opportunity for us to show our love to the tsunami victims and to sow the seeds of the Gospel for Christ.

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## **13<sup>th</sup> July Wednesday**

Our team went to the Seaside Bible Chapel café to host a “Singapore Day”. We cooked our local chicken curry but with lesser chili to suit the local taste buds. We also served kaya toast and the tarik. A few of us also dressed up in our traditional costumes. The Seaside Bible Chapel café had been advertising that there would be a special occasion on Wednesday to draw people to the café. A few of the locals visited the café and they found the local food that we served them delicious! It was a good way to reach out to the locals living in the area as the pastor, his wife, son and a few of the Japanese speakers in our team were able to strike up conversations with the visitors. More importantly, the pastor and his family enjoyed themselves today. They have been busy serving others since the tsunami and they are also survivors having lost their home and their church building. We’re glad that we were able to serve them today.



## **14<sup>th</sup> July Thursday**

Today, we were deployed to Tona to help a family to cut the grass in their paddy field. Every year, the family would send a request to the government to deploy people to cut the grass in their field. However, due to the occurrence of the tsunami, the government has been swarmed with tsunami recovery work and hence, they were unable to attend to other requests.

The grass in the field was really high at about 2 meters tall. Although the field looked small, it was really hard work cutting the grass as it was a really hot day and we had to keep bending our backs to cut the grass. The tsunami had also swept many items into the field and we picked up items such as baseballs, plates, vases, tombstones and even larger debris such as entire slabs of walls from homes. It really reminded me of how drastic the ramifications of the tsunami were and caused the lives of the victims to be disrupted completely. It reminded me to continue to pray for the tsunami survivors to cope with recovering from the trauma of the tsunami.

## **15<sup>th</sup> July Friday**

Today, some of our team members stayed back at the base. We helped to move huge boxes of donated supplies. The boxes were large and heavy and as we stared at them, we simply could not imagine how we could manage to move them all by ourselves as all of us were ladies and some of us

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even had back problems. However, the Lord really granted us strength as we managed to move all the boxes!

During the evening debriefing, one of the teams shared about their day working in a farmer's field. Many teams have been helping this farmer and he always looks forward to the teams coming. It was encouraging to see God using the volunteers to reach out to him. One of the teams that went managed to give him a bible and to pray with him. Please continue to pray for him as he becomes more receptive and curious about Christianity.



### 16<sup>th</sup> July Saturday

I was asked to remain behind at the base camp today and assist with housekeeping duties as help was needed there.

### 17<sup>th</sup> July Sunday

We went to the Rifu Oasis Church for service today. Although this church was not damaged by the tsunami, a number of her members were affected and lost their homes or jobs or both. After the service, members of the team from Saddleback Church (USA) served shaved ice desserts in front of the church to passersby at the adjoining park as well as those who attended the service. I made a new friend today.



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In the afternoon, our team headed to the town of Matsushima for lunch and some sightseeing. Matsushima was also affected by the tsunami but as the town is sheltered by a number of islets, the damage was not as extensive as most of the other coastal towns.

### **18<sup>th</sup> July Monday**

As today was our off day, two of our team members went with one of the Japanese teams to an area that was more badly destroyed by the tsunami. They shared that in that area, the situation was much worse than the areas we have been too and that many houses were completely wiped out and destroyed. Minimal work has been done in that area. Please pray that relief efforts for that area will pick up and God will continue to send volunteers to Japan to accomplish his work.

### **19<sup>th</sup> July Tuesday**

Praise the Lord for cool weather today! We were weeding a garden today but the cool weather helped to make the work less tiring. Though the owner didn't smile much, we could sense his gratitude for our help. It encouraged me that although the work that we were able to accomplish through our two weeks may seem little compared to the amount of work that still needs to be done, the little work that we have done will have made a difference to some of the survivors' lives.

While we were working in the garden, the neighbor next door was holding a funeral for one of the tsunami victims. It was another reminder for me to continue praying for the tsunami survivors to cope with dealing with their losses and for God to heal their hurting hearts and minds.



### **20<sup>th</sup> July Wednesday**

One of the team members and I stayed back at the base to help with the chores. We were helping to prepare dinner in the kitchen and we were able to fellowship with the chef. Earlier in the week on Sunday, I had seen the chef leading worship at the Rifu Oasis Church. He looked so normal and cheerful all the time and so I was shocked when he shared with me that he experienced the earthquake and tsunami too. Although I didn't know how to converse in Japanese, he kept trying to strike up a conversation and perhaps he wanted to share his experience with someone. He was thankful to us for coming to Japan to help even though we were Singaporeans and not locals and shared about how many foreigners fled from Japan when the tsunami happened, and many people

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are afraid to come to Japan because they deem Japan as a dangerous place. He shared about how his restaurant was destroyed because of the earthquake and he lost his job subsequently. Shortly after the earthquake, he and his wife had a newborn baby and he was dismal about how he was going to support his family as he was now jobless. Fortunately, God provided for him as CRASH Japan provided a job for him as a chef in the Sendai base. Yet again, I was reminded to pray for the countless numbers of people who have lost their homes and jobs and for God's protection and provision for them.

The chef also shared about how less than 1% of the Japanese population are Christians. It really reminded me that Japan needs our prayers and the people of Japan need to be reached out to, especially in this difficult period of time.

### **21<sup>st</sup> July Thursday**

Today marks our last day here in Sendai base. I can still recall when we first arrived at the base and the words of the other team to treasure our two weeks here. These two weeks really passed by so quickly. Many of us feel that we have not done much compared to the amount of work that still needs to be done. But we are encouraged by the fact that the little that we have done has made a difference to many of the tsunami survivors. Our time spent in Japan also opened our eyes to the needs of the people of Japan and the dire situations that many of the victims are in and thus the importance of our prayers for this land.

Please continue to pray for Japan as they cope with the nuclear crisis and recover from the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami. Pray that God will continue to send volunteers to help and also pray for a revival in Japan!



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