

WE HAVE TO ADMIRE THE JAPANESE PEOPLE. IN A STOTIC RESOLVE IN THE AFTERMATH OF A MAJOR EARTHQUAKE, TSUNAMI, FIRES, BONE CHILLING WINTER TEMPERATURES, NUCLEAR REACTOR CRISIS, AND RADIATION. IT SOUNDS LIKE THE PITCH FOR A MOVIE ON THE END OF DAYS; FIRE AND BRIMSTONE. BUT THIS REALITY. HARSH REALITY. BUT IN A CULTURE WHERE HONOR AND COMMUNITY IS PART OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT, THERE WAS NO PANIC, NO LOOTING, NO CRIME, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF TRAGIC HUMAN LOSS. MANY SURVIVORS REMARKED THERE IS NO REASON TO COMPLAIN; EVERYONE IS IN THE SAME SITUATION. PATIENCE. CALM. RESOLVE.

When the 8.9 magnitude earthquake hit off the Northern Japan coast line, residents had less than ten minutes to flee to high ground from the oncoming tsunami. A thirty foot wall of water traveling at speeds in excess of 40 miles per hour hit the coastal ports and villages without mercy. It raced through seawalls, buildings, streets and fields for almost ten

miles inland covering the landscape in an nightmare of mud and debris.

We have seen this type of destruction before: the Indonesian tsunami, hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, and various battlefield wastelands. But it is the impersonal, fierce, and horrifying wrath of Mother Nature which seems unnecessarily cruel.

A Japanese television station reported on a man, a volunteer civil defense villager, who upon hearing the tsunami alert rushed to the flood gate. It did not work. When he went back to location of his home, he found his entire family had perished.

Another report told the story of a family running to high ground. The elderly parents were behind them. Looking back when they reached safety, their elderly parents missing in the waters.

Another report showed similar stories of life and death struggles of a matter of few steps. There is a video of villagers fleeing up a path up a hill. Several race

up as the wall of water bears down on them. Several villagers rush down the path to help them over the final crest.

When the wall of destruction ran into a foreground building, it splintered into pieces. It was a several generation owned saki manufacturer. When the earthquake hit, the owner told his workers they could stay, or leave to go home to their families. The employees rushed home on the warning. The owner spent the first days after the destruction wandering the roads and shelters trying to find out the fate of his 50 workers. After days, he could only find 25.

The saki plant owner does not know what he will do next. The sad part, he remarked, was the long family business and its history was now gone.

The golden age of Japanese economic power left the nation in the late 1990s when a harsh recession and third world industrialization put it into a malaise for which it has not recovered; the bank lending rate has hovered near zero since. The national debt is 200% GDP. Much of this is fueled by universal health care and retirement benefits. The nation is quickly aging as the population growth has gone negative.

It is still the third largest economy in the world. It is a barely net exporter, mostly on the high tech computer and gaming industries. But employment is not guaranteed anymore in Japan. Many have had to migrate to Hong Kong or China to find suitable skilled work.

The last thing the country needed was a historic natural disaster and nuclear reactor crisis. It had been left to hold back North Korean, Russian and Chinese aggression on its border is-



lands. The Russians were getting aggressive over northernly islands both nations claim. China was asserting claims over western islands. The mad man in North Korea was trying to start a regional war in order to extract reparations from the U.S. and its allies. There was a tremendous amount of stress in Japan for the last year.

A huge national deficit based upon an aging, retiring population and a declining business sector. A stagnation that has lasted twenty years. Most Americans have not thought about Japan much in those decades. Everything seems to be made in China, India or Mexico. Out of sight; out of mind.

Japan is used to earthquakes. It lies on the intersection of three earth plates. People are used to swaying of buildings and the shaking of the ground. But the large quake off the Honshu coast line of Eastern Japan created the disastrous wall of water which wiped out hundreds of miles of cities, ports, villages and six nuclear reactors.

It is hard to imagine that in ten minutes, half of your city or town's population would be gone; buried by a wall of water, mud and building debris.

NHK showed an amateur video from ground level of the tsunami hitting a town. From a second story landing, the camera shows the water flooding down the narrow streets. It continues to rise in the first minute. Then you see cars and vans being lifted and moved in the rising water. Then you see minor debris pin-balling off buildings. At the two minute mark, the water is nearing the top of the first story of buildings. Vehicles move along like fishing bobs. Then suddenly, at the three minute mark, the current becomes a rapid. The force accelerates as the water exceeds the second story floor line. Building foundations begin to give way, and turn like gears, finally breaking into pieces or floating like houseboats down the street until they crash into each other like bumper cars. The water quickly rises in intensity and force, bending steel street poles and fencing from the ground.

IN a matter of minutes, the landscape is changed into a muddy grayish brown flow. The narrow streets capture and retain the debris fields, damming up the water levels and entombing the fate of those who could not reach higher ground.

More than one million buildings were damaged, more than 600,000 people were homeless, and more than 20,000 missing or dead.

In the aftermath, the evacuation shelters, those structures not directly hit by the water walls, filled to the brim with the homeless. The young began to take care of the elderly; the elderly began to take care of the young children. Water, fuel, food and medicine is in short supply in the hardest hit rural areas. But communities pulled whatever resources they could salvage and took care of each other until aid could arrive.

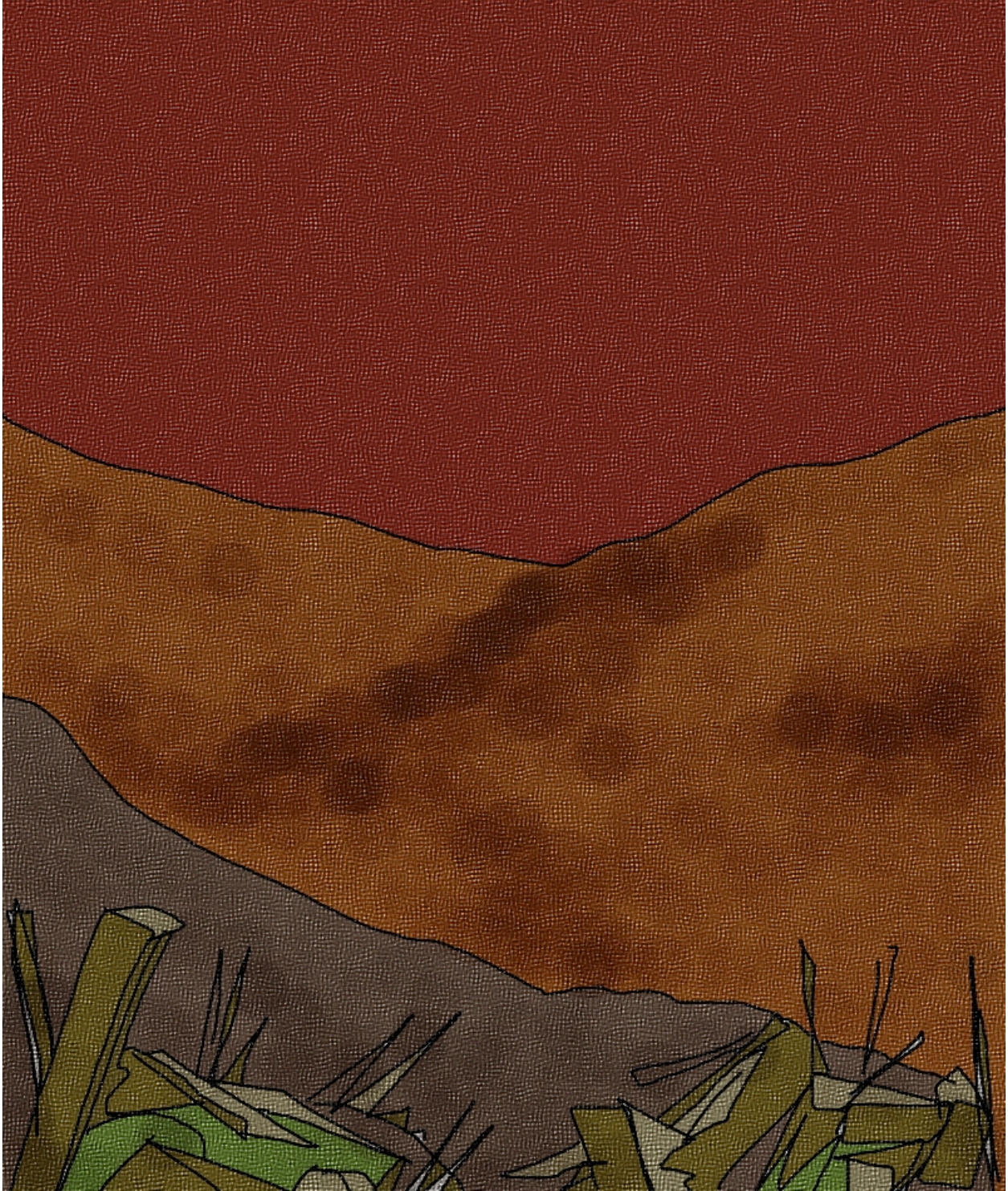


The attention of the world media shifted to the plight of the TEPCO nuclear reactor facilities that were damaged by the tsunami. The reactors shut down during the earthquake, but the three back-up coolant systems for the fuel rods were not functioning properly. The fuel rods were left uncovered causing their heat to rise and the rods to melt. This caused a release of hydrogen gas which caused several explosions, blowing off the top of two reactor buildings.

Radiation levels began to rise. Evacuation areas soon expanded to 20 km from the nuclear plant. But many found themselves without fuel or transportation to leave when the plant's attempt to stop the reactions became critical. Low level of radiation were vented into the air. Seven days later, radiation was found on people, food, milk and drinking water. This was the invisible threat that took this natural disaster to another level.

Toyko has turned into a mild ghost town with the rolling power blackouts, empty store shelves, and closed night businesses like bars and restaurants. Foreigners, if they could afford the rising prices, were attempting to find flights out of Toyko. Anxiety is turning into fear.





We may never know the full extent of the damage raged upon Japan by this current disaster, and the more than 300 large aftershocks (30 measuring more than 6.0). But we did learn that the peo-

ple, in the midst of total destruction, have a calm demeanor of class, fortitude and resolve. This is in sharp contrast to the American bickering, blame game after Hurricane Katrina.