

## The Refugees from Tomioka

Yoshiko Aoki, manageress of the Odagaisama Centre in Koriyama for Refugees from Tomioka, told us that there were 18 deaths in Tomioka caused by the tsunami – a low figure because they had an efficient tsunami escape plan and sufficient warning for people to move before the tsunami hit the town – but that there had been over 300 “disaster related deaths” amongst the refugees since then; suicides and stress related conditions, mostly amongst the elderly (it is still too soon for cancer deaths due to the radiation released by the accident). The refugees from Tomioka are currently split 13.5% in temporary housing (like the six volunteers who spoke to us), 54.5% in locally rented housing, with the remaining 32% now living outside the Fukushima prefecture. Tomioka is 10 km from the Fukushima Dai-ichi site; Koriyama is 58 km from the site.

### Takumi Takano



Her husband worked at the nuclear plant, and he phoned her on 11<sup>th</sup> March to tell her that there was a problem at the nuclear station and she should take the family and leave Tomioka as soon as she could. Her 81 year old father had been one of the Fukushima nuclear power stations' construction workers, and he was now full of regrets. At the time, he was not aware of the dangers of nuclear power. The Fukushima power stations were initially built with a 30 year life-span; when this was extended to 60 years, there was no opposition to the extension. She now doesn't trust the Japanese government to give out true information either to the Japanese people or to the rest of the world, and complained about photos that appeared on television and in the press of an official visit to the area,

which suggested that everything was safe, but which didn't include any suggestion of the fears of the residents.

## Rumyko Kubayashi



A quietly spoken grandmother of nine, her former house is in zone 2 (the “day-time only” zone), on the border of zone 3 (the “no return” zone). She visits to check up on her home and to measure the radiation level: currently 5  $\mu\text{Sv}$  / hour (5 micro Sieverts per hour: the “temporary safe level” for civilians is 0.23  $\mu\text{Sv}$  / hour). She doesn’t want to return to her house: “Because the radiation is so high, I can’t bring my grandchildren to my home and I do not want to live in a place where you can’t see your grandchildren”. With heart-rending dignity, she added “I’m very, very sorry to my ancestors, who lived there for a long time as a family, a chain of generations. I am very sorry to my children and grandchildren because they cannot come back to live in our cherished home. I feel guilty, as if it was me who blew up the nuclear

power station.”

## Tomuko Endo

“Tomioko town developed economically after the nuclear plant was built, but human beings cannot control nuclear reactors”, said Tomuko Endo, who can only visit her home in zone 2 during daylight hours. She and her husband were cattle breeders, and when they were ordered to evacuate their farm, they left with only a shopping bag of clothes each; they put out lots of food out for their six prize breeding bulls, thinking that they would soon be able to return to the farm either to stay or to move their bulls elsewhere. However, they were not allowed to return for 45 days, when they found that their prize bulls had all starved to death.

Surprisingly, their cat Tama had survived by eating rats and birds, and after the cat was measured for radiation levels, they were allowed to take the cat back to her temporary accommodation. They spent the first month of the evacuation in a gymnasium, the second month in a concert hall, the third month in another sports centre, before being allocated accommodation in a 550-household temporary pre-fabricated housing centre in Koriyama. The one-room pre-fab has a cooker and sink at one end, with an alcove containing a toilet and shower; she was given



electrical goods (fridge-freezer, rice cooker, microwave, television, vacuum cleaner, and heater) and a mattress by the Red Cross.

Three months after settling in the pre-fab, her husband was hospitalised with a “disaster-related illness”; he is unlikely to ever leave hospital. She expects in the next year or so to be asked to leave this accommodation, either to return to her house in zone 2, to move into newly constructed flats also in zone 2, or to move into the private rented sector. When asked what she would do, she answered softly “I don’t know”.

## **Nobuo Ikeda**

His house is in zone 3, the “no return” zone, on Cherry Blossom Street. Four months after the evacuation, he decided that he would not return to Tomioka – he is very sad to leave the fourth generation family home, but he “has not long to live now” and the memories are too painful. He is now motivated to live for other people, and he enjoys drawing pictures “which make me feel happy – but many people are very sad all the time”.

Two of his relatives died in accidents at the nuclear plant before the 2011 disaster – one from exposure to high pressure steam, one from leukaemia – but information on previous problems at the plant was never released; he only knows because they were relatives.

