

FUKUSHIMA DESK NEWS

Sendai Diocese Support Center

No. 26, October 2016

On October 1 and 2, “The Dialogue Seminar in Futaba District” was held at Kawauchi Village, Futaba Gun, Fukushima Prefecture, with the cooperation of the ICRP, (International Committee of Radiation Protection).

The participants were the people and the authorities of the village, specialists, and the people connected with the national and international NPO and NGO, who gathered there to share the experience and the effort for recovery.



On the first day of the Seminar, the speaker, Ms. Nana Sato, who was a first year senior high student at the time of the Earthquake, spoke about her experience from the time of the earthquake until today. Ms. Sato is at present studying at a nurse training college in order to pursue her study in radiation, hoping that her personal experience since the Earthquake would help as a background. In future Ms. Sato hopes to contribute to the welfare of Fukushima.

With the kind consent of Ms. Sato, her speech itself is presented below.

My View and Experience since the Earthquake

Nana Sato, a senior student of Nagano College of Nursing

It is my pleasure to give this presentation today, based on my own experience and my thinking.

Let me first introduce myself. I am from Yotsukura, Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture. The city is right next to the village of Kawauchi, where we are gathering today. On the day of the Earthquake at Fukushima, I was 16 years old, a first year student of senior high, who knew nothing about radiation. I spent the rest of my high school years with my family there, until I moved to Nagano Prefecture, for my college life. My home is situated about 32 km from the First Atomic Power Plant. Although evacuation was not compulsory in our area, my sister and I left for our relative's family outside the Prefecture. Since I was under 18 years old at that time, I was classified among the objects of investigation of supersonic wave in the thyroid gland.

NUCLEAR POWER ACCIDENT – OUR STRONG ANXIETY (March 2011)

First let me start with my experience at the time. My strongest memory of that time was a strong anxiety, as we did not know what “radiation” meant. The TV news showed the pictures of the First and Second Fukushima Power Plants surrounded with big circles which grew larger every night. I was simply frightened to see those images, wondering when our house would be included in the circles. Soon, there was a ration of stabilized iodine for those who were below 40 years old. That made me think that only the younger generation will survive. A little later a message came through a telephone network: “Take this medicine when the siren alarm sounds seven times.” I felt something suspicious about it, as there was no relevant information on TV. Something must have been concealed. Then there was an Email message: “Iodine will save your life.” I did not take any, as we did not have any of it available at home, but I passed on the erroneous message to the next persons, thinking someone else might profit from it.

Before I escaped from Fukushima Prefecture, I had been there for the first week. Even to this day I remember the feeling of inexplicable sense of unity with those who were still there at that time. I found myself chatting with total strangers while waiting for the ration of water, or before the supermarket opened.



(Multinational working group.

The woman with her back to us is a simultaneous interpreter.)

“It seems we will be soon told to leave, too.”

“I think this area is already *out* in the mind of the authorities, but we are so many living here in Iwaki that the government doesn’t know what to do with us.”

As I look back now, I can see that I was confused by various conflicting reports. But at that time I was in the midst of worries every day, until finally I chose to escape out of the Prefecture. It was the first time for me to live all alone in a new place. I was lonely. I regretted deeply that I had made that decision.

EXPOSED TO PREJUDICE AND RUMORS FAR FROM HOME *(2013 ~2016)*

I finished high school successfully, and my new life as a college student started in Nagano Prefecture, where I was exposed to prejudice and rumors. “Do you know that we shouldn’t get wet in the rain, because of the accident that happened in Fukushima?” “They say that they can’t eat fish in the sea shore area in Fukushima. It’s dangerous to live there!” “We in Nagano will eat only Nagano products. Only vegetables grown in Nagano!” These remarks were enough to hurt me, though I am sure what they meant was to only protect themselves innocently from unknown dangers. It was even more shocking that these words were coming from my friends

who were preparing to be doctors and nurses. I said to myself that I would never disappoint others because of my ignorance. At the same time, I realized that I was not ready myself to answer those people with precision and conviction. Including myself, I needed to be well informed in medical matters, especially about radiation. If people were hesitant to ask questions about radiation, those of us who are in medical field should be well informed, and be ready to understand the misgiving of patients and residents of the area. This will be a strong support for the reconstruction of the disaster area.

IMPROVEMENT OF MY STANCE TO FACE PEOPLE

(2016 ~)

These pieces of experience led me to desire to know more about radiation in order to be of service for people, and here I am with a definite plan to proceed to the post-graduate course of Nagasaki University. Nagasaki is rich with the accumulation of intellectual treasure of research since the atomic bomb in 1945 as well as that of the atomic accident of Chernobyl. There are also scholars there who have been supporting us since the time I personally experienced the atomic accident of Fukushima. My desire to study under such scholars led me to Nagasaki University.

My conviction as an actual resident is that no matter how painful the event may be, if we discover a lesson in it, one can render service and thus experience happiness. It was also this conviction that led me to stand here and talk to you. The accident I experienced that day was not a single happening for the 2,000,000 citizens of Fukushima Prefecture, but a unique accident which happened 2,000,000 times. I am only a citizen of Fukushima Prefecture. I am not the representative of the prefecture. Each one of the citizens has his or her situation, experience and life. So there are the same number of needs for help. I would like to appeal to all the residents of Fukushima to let us hear your voices. I am not forcing you, but entreating you.

My object as a medical student, which is no doubt shared by all my colleagues is to listen to the voice of each one of you. I shall be leaving Fukushima for two years, but I promise you that your words will be treasured. I shall first start with listening, which will be followed by dialogue. It will then lead to draw a picture of the future of Fukushima. Let us work together. I shall do my best, too.

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