

CBS News "60 Minutes": **Sister Cities after the Tsunami**

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The March tsunami destroyed the Japanese town of Otsuchi, but not its bond to the town of Fort Bragg, CA, which is determined to help save its sister. Bob Simon reports.

The term "sister cities" often connotes little more than handshakes and photos to mark a relationship between two towns. But when Otsuchi, Japan, was decimated by the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, the town of Ft. Bragg -- thousands of miles due east across the Pacific Ocean in California -- came to the aid of its sister city with powerful emotional and financial support. Correspondent Bob Simon reports.

No matter how many pictures you've seen, no matter how many reports you've heard, it's a shock when you get there. It wasn't the nuclear disaster or the powerful earthquake that swept the northeast coast of Japan into the sea...it was the tsunami, a black wave, darker than a nightmare.

No town was hit harder this past March than Otsuchi. In a matter of minutes, at least 1,500 people out of a population of only 15,000 were lost. Otsuchi is so remote, very few people ever get there. But 14 years ago, a group of Americans formed a bond with the town, a bond that has only grown deeper since the tragedy.

The world was so mesmerized by the nuclear accident, that after awhile these coastal towns were forgotten. We went to Otsuchi ourselves to see what has become of a town that's on the brink of extinction

We got there just in time to witness a haunting ceremony - drumbeats for the dead. Buddhist monks marched through the remnants of this 800-year-old town, chanting a requiem.

Otsuchi reminds one of Hiroshima 66 years ago. Nature can be as vicious as an atomic bomb. Ten percent of the population was wiped out. It was a fatal lesson in the fragility of civilization. The earthquake alone was so powerful, it actually lowered the ground level of Japan and moved the entire island eastward by eight feet.

Every day, high tide brings a flood. Even months later, the survivors are still living in temporary housing. But everyone understands temporary can last a long time. This is Otsuchi before the tsunami. And this is when Otsuchi stopped - 3:25 p.m., March 11, 2011.

Ken Sasaki: This is my house...

Bob Simon: That's your house?

Sasaki: Yeah...

Ken Sasaki works for City Hall in a city that has disappeared.

Simon: How long had you been living here?

Sasaki: Uh, over 20 years.

Simon: Now, when you came back here the first time after the tsunami, was there anything of yours left here?

Sasaki: Nothing was left.

Ken was in a meeting near the harbor when the earthquake struck. Thirty minutes later he heard an ominous noise coming from the ocean.

Sasaki: Oh, it must be a tsunami. I have to run to uphill. And then I turn back. That was so...

Simon: It must have looked like hell.

Sasaki: Yeah, it must be the hell.

Nine of his relatives were killed by the tsunami - aunts, cousins - Ken-san, as he's known, had to live out of his car for three weeks.

Sasaki: It was terrible. It was so cold. No gas. No whiskey, no beers.

Ken-san is as unique a character as you'll find in Japan. A music lover and guitar player, he learned English listening to the Beatles.

[Sasaki, singing: Get back to where you once belonged]

The ocean has taken things away from Ken-san before. When he was two, Ken-san's father died off Otsuchi's coast in a fishing accident. When he was a boy, Ken-san would gaze out to sea looking for his father. He always wondered what was on the other side of that ocean. When he grew up, he took out an atlas and traced his finger across the Pacific. It landed on the town of Fort Bragg, California.

Produced by Draggan Mihailovich.

Sasaki: Across the ocean, boom. So there are a city of Fort Bragg....

Simon: A straight line.

Sasaki: Yeah...

Simon: Had you ever heard of...

Sasaki: No, no...

Simon: Fort Bragg?

Sasaki: No, no, no. I've only heard about the San Francisco, California like that. And then, I tried to find out, what kind of city is Fort Bragg.

Simon: What did you find out?

Sasaki: It is the world largest salmon barbeque.

Simon: 'The world's largest salmon...'

Sasaki: Salmon barbeque.

Simon: Barbeque?

Sasaki: Right, right.

Simon: That's quite a distinction.

Sasaki: And then, so, as you see it, our town has a big salmon history.

Simon: Two salmon towns.

Sasaki: Yeah. Oh, it, it's nice.

Ken-san wanted to get to know this Fort Bragg, California...so in 1997, he sent a fax to Fort Bragg's City Hall, inviting the mayor to Otsuchi for a marine convention. Much to his surprise, the mayor said, "Okay."

It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. The two salmon towns started an exchange program. For 10 years, people shuttled back and forth across the Pacific. During their last visit to Otsuchi, the folks from Fort Bragg held their going away party inside a tourist boat, just five months before all parties stopped.

Simon: After the tsunami, did you get messages from Fort Bragg?

Sasaki: So many people send me, many, many emails. That makes me cry, you know?

Simon: Made you cry.

Sasaki: Yeah, I feel so happy to get many message from Fort Bragg, my friends.

One of those friends was Sharon Davis. At our invitation, she came back to Otsuchi - and thought she knew what awaited her.

[Davis: I've seen the pictures and the videos but this is infinitely worse...]

She was particularly concerned about Ken-san, the man who had first brought Otsuchi and Fort Bragg together.

[Davis: Ken-san, it's so good to see you.]

[Davis: I know you lost all your guitars.]

[Sasaki: No way.]

[Sasaki: Playing guitar.]

Last year, Sharon hosted two Otsuchi students, Satoko and Nana, at her home in California as part of the exchange program. They'd survived the tsunami, heard Sharon was in town, heard she was coming to their school.

[Satoko and Nana are giggling, waiting impatiently...big hugs with Davis.]

Davis: That was like the sun coming out from behind the clouds. It was beautiful.

Simon: Girls are okay?

Davis: They are. They're okay. They're strong girls. And for what they've been through, it, it really amazes me.

Sharon brought a thousand letters from kids back in Fort Bragg.

But some of the reunions were tough: so tough that when Otsuchi's school superintendent spotted Sharon, he tried hard to smile, but couldn't pull it off.

Sharon expressed her sorrow in Japanese as she gave Otsuchi's vice mayor a gift. A picture of his former boss, the mayor. Otsuchi's mayor didn't survive the tsunami. He stayed in his second floor office at City Hall, orchestrating the evacuation.

Davis: And he told his staff to evacuate to the roof. And he stayed on the second floor directing people up to the roof and was killed by the tsunami, along with about 20 of his other staff.

Simon: The people who made it up to the roof were saved?

Davis: Yes.

Simon: Can't think of a better word, heroism.

Davis: He died a hero.

Otsuchi, like every village along the coast, had a sea wall. But the sea can always throw up a higher wave. Otsuchi's wall fared no better than a sand castle built by children on a beach. The tsunami was so furious, it picked up boats from the sea and dropped them on roofs. And this one picture of this one boat has come to stand for the entire Japanese tragedy.

Simon: That has become "the boat" hasn't it?

Davis: It's the iconic image from this event.

Simon: And the last time you were here, you were laughing and dancing on that boat.

Davis: We were.

It was the boat that had hosted Fort Bragg's farewell party five months earlier. It won't be seeing the sea again. It's being turned into trash. Occasionally, you spot old people wandering through the wasteland, looking for something they'll never find. But bodies were still being found while we were there, three months after the tsunami. Officially, the death toll in Otsuchi is put at 1,500.

Simon: Think that's accurate?

Davis: I really don't. I don't. And I think that it has a lot to do with, the way the Japanese specify whether or not a person is missing. And until somebody reports them missing, they're not statistically missing. So in this case, if an entire family was lost, there's no one left to report someone missing.

It's not only people, memories are missing, family histories washed up in the rubble. Every Saturday, photographs found in the wreckage are displayed at the high school - a new sister, a haircut. Happiness is recovering one's past.

Clearing all the debris will take years. Sometimes it's lifted by what look like pre-historic creatures, sometimes it's lifted by hand. These people belong to the fishermen's union. They're cleaning up the beach by the seawall that let them down.

This isn't an exercise bike. It's a gas station. Keep pedaling, keep pumping. The signs say never give up. The Japanese never have in the past. But this one is a bit much. They are getting a little help from their friends though. The people of Fort Bragg, population 7,000, have raised \$180,000 for Otsuchi. There was no paper, no cards left in town, so they wrote their "thank you" note on all they had left, a tarp. Looking at the people of Otsuchi, you'd never know what they'd been through. In Japan, exhibiting one's trauma is not considered polite.

Simon: Sitting here, looking at all this desolation. Knowing that you lost everything you had.

Sasaki: Yeah, right.

Simon: Yet, you keep on smiling. How do you do that?

Sasaki: I cannot cry, you know? I don't wanna cry. So, we need smile. We need laughing.

Before we left, Ken-san wanted to show us something sprouting in the dust that was once his home.

Sasaki: Yeah, yeah, look this.....A new hydrangea plant.

Sasaki: This is kind of a hope. It's life...

Simon: You don't know when your house will be rebuilt, but when it is you're going to replant the hydrangea?

Sasaki: Yeah, I hope so. We are living.

Simon: There's new life here.

Sasaki: Yes.

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Also watch.....just click the link.

[Sister City to the Rescue](#)

When the residents of Fort Bragg, Calif., saw their sister city in Japan devastated by the tsunami, they started fundraising. Former Mayor Lindy Peters says 6,000 people raised over \$160,000.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7383176n&tag=segmentExtraScroller;housing>

[Sister Cities across the Pacific](#)

Thousand of miles divide Otsuchi, Japan, from Fort Bragg, CA., but they were sister cities, and Fort Bragg resident Sharon Davis says they even looked alike before the tsunami.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7383174n&tag=segmentExtraScroller;housing>

[Rebuilding from the Ruins](#)

No town in Japan was hit harder by the tsunami than Otsuchi, but resident Ken Sasaki tells Bob Simon that his devastated town will rebuild.

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[The Man Who Stopped the Tsunami](#)

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