

Big applause in the gym!

We cherished that moment of accomplishment at the event.

Since the great earthquake, four years have already passed. On the 11th of March this year, five elementary and junior high schools joined together at a large high school gymnasium. We held a big meeting called the "Hometown Recovery Project." More than one thousand students shared and exchanged their opinions.

My town, Nakayama, is in the north-west part of Sendai, and it was not as heavily damaged from the earthquake. Our lives now seem to be normal again, and the residents have almost lost their interest in the earthquake. However, I know that many people still have a difficult life; I want to do something about it.

At Nakayama junior high school, the student council is very active and we have always tried our best to make our school life better. Our projects have reached areas outside of our school. Two elementary schools and Sakuragaoka area schools have joined together in our greeting and local cleaning project. Soon after, this big five-school "Hometown Recovery Project" came our way.

It started last summer when we visited Yuriage for an earthquake disaster study. Students from five different schools came to learn and listen to the story about the tsunami. We walked through the school building; it was still covered in mud. We also walked through deserted shopping streets with our guide, Ms. Tanno. When we reached the residential area, all we found were the foundations of houses.

Ms. Tanno was a lady who used to live in Yuriage and lost her precious son to the tsunami. She shared her experience in great detail. She also talked about the problems they faced including cases where thieves stole memories from destroyed homes. The entire Yuriage town had to relocate. She told us these things with tears running down her face. I could feel her sadness. We will never forget her story and what we saw on that day. After our disaster study, we all wanted to do something to help.

For the project, we discussed what we could do on our own. Then we all remembered the last words of our guide, Ms. Tanno,

"We may forget about the tsunami, but we cannot forget what the tsunami has taught us all." Our course of action was set. Making our experience widely known- this was our goal to reach out.

When the time came for the project to begin, I was very nervous. In front of one thousand people, I reported and spoke about what we should do, and passed on the words of Ms. Tanno. Also, we made a "Recovery Declaration," a statement of our determination: we will continue to support areas like Yuriage and hand down that story and stories alike from generation to generation. Together all the students spoke the statement aloud. It made our determination stronger and stronger.

"Hand in hand – what we can do now" This was the theme we made for the project. We, as elementary and junior high school students, may not be able to change the past, but through our combined efforts, there surely are things we can do!

As we move forward, I will continue to share with my family, friends, and the people in and around Japan what I have learned from this project.

This is something that only we, who have gone through the tsunami, can do: share our experiences with others.