

Teachers' Struggles during the First Chaotic Days of the Disaster



▲ The staff room blackboard on March 11, 2011. The graduation ceremony had been scheduled for the following day, March 12, and the auditorium had been decorated with a red and white curtain.

Photo courtesy of Miura Syuichi

Approximately two-thirds of Minamisanriku's population lost their homes to the tsunami. Evacuation centers located on high ground were overflowing with evacuees arriving with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

At a school that had escaped tsunami damage due to its position on high ground, teachers were overwhelmed with the jobs of confirming students' and other children's whereabouts, ensuring that they stayed safe, and dealing with evacuees. They worked without access to electricity, water, or communications.

At one school, teachers were forced to carry water from the pool in buckets as the toilets were no longer serviceable. They slept overnight in classrooms with the students and lit the space using candles found in the science room.

The stressful situation the staff faced continued over the following days and weeks as they continued to support the townspeople who had evacuated to the school, building outdoor toilets and patrolling the school building at night.

Some of the staff members had lost their homes. With no information on the safety of their own family members, they slept at the school each night and made preparations for the resumption of teaching. Their focus was devoted to restoring normalcy and a learning environment for the children as quickly as possible.

Those students are now adults, but they still hold vivid memories of the members of staff who were there by their side during those difficult days.