

Jayne Nakata has been an Iwaki resident since 2002, and is the host of Transformations with Jayne - a podcast which shares her learning and interviews with women from all walks of life. Iwaki Vision was able to speak to her about her experience during the Great East Japan Earthquake, and the takeaways that have come from it.



Jayne, enjoying dinner directly out of her rice cooker after the initial earthquake.

IV: First off, a big question: how were you affected by the earthquake?

J: So, on the day that the earthquake happened, I was seven months pregnant with my first child. I had been to visit my obstetrician, and he had actually just commiserated with me because I'm from New Zealand, which had suffered a massive earthquake two weeks earlier.

My husband had gone to file the taxes at the tax office, but had forgotten some paperwork, so I'd gone to bring it to him. Then I went to the nearby Toys r Us to look at baby things. As I got into the car I noticed it shaking. I got out of the car, and tried to stay upright by holding onto it. Looking around I could see people screaming, people crouching because they couldn't stand up.

When it stopped I went and found my husband, and we were able to drive home together. It was very lucky that we were so near each other when it happened. I went home afraid that our house would be a pancake, but when we got there it was fine. A testament to Japanese building standards.

Luckily we were prepared, and the only reason for that was because of Christchurch two weeks earlier - a massive earthquake, in a place where earthquakes were not expected. Seeing that, I bought water, food, and I had topped up on petrol just three days before. The only damage for us was to our mental state, and the fact that we had no water. The clinic where I was due to have my baby had also been closed due to the lack of water, so there I was thinking "If I go into labour now, my baby won't survive..."

Then the nuclear plant melted down - that was a whole other level of concern.

IV: And what did that look like? Being *pregnant* during a nuclear meltdown?

J: Although the initial order was for those within a 10km radius to stay indoors, my husband suggested do the same even though we were 50km away. Two days later, we packed up our car, and headed for my husband's family in Tottori. We took our most important possessions, thinking we might never come back - which turned out to be a reality for a lot of people. I really didn't want to leave, but because I had information coming in from NZ, and all the other factors had lined up, I thought "we have a chance". As a pregnant person, I also thought "I'm just a liability- the best thing I can do is not be here". Eventually we got to Tottori, and then we just had to sit on the sidelines and watch what was happening in Iwaki. I was really glad to hear that in my neighbourhood people were helping each other and sharing food and water. We saw the same thing the other year during the floods - people getting together, doing big cookouts - the only big problem was that in 2011 you really didn't want to be outside during a nuclear disaster.



Onahama's Nagasaki District, March 11th
(Photo by Takashi Sakai, Miraikan #1195)

IV: For a while it was as far north as you could go before hitting the exclusion zone...

Exactly. Iwaki became tarnished with being considered part of that area. Truck drivers didn't want to come here. There was no food, there was no power, so you couldn't buy anything unless you had cash. It was a really tricky situation that nobody had ever imagined or prepared for.

After two weeks, my husband's company reopened. He went back by himself, and lived in our house with no water. And I said I wanted to go back to New Zealand. Thank goodness that I was not too pregnant to fly. I came back in August, with my brand-new daughter, but we still lived with fear of the power station. I would go out with my

passport in my handbag, and my car ready to just drive away at any moment. That's what we were living with every day for months.

IV: I have heard that there is still some stigma toward people with Fukushima license plates who go outside of prefecture, have you had any experiences with that?



The gymnasium at Nakoso Second Elementary served as an evacuation centre for weeks after the disaster (Photo by Kazuhiro Katono, Miraikan #2650)

J: Not personally. But I did have to take myself offline. I was a blogger, and I had this network of blogging friends - and of course everyone was really worried. I did not want to face judgement for my decision to stay.

IV: I can imagine having to gauge whether you trust people enough to have a potentially very vulnerable conversation. Do you find yourself weighing out who you're going to tell?

J: I definitely used to. For the first year or two after the disaster people would be very surprised, and they would judge you if you told them you still live in Fukushima. I think it was 2018 or so when I realized "I'm okay now". Now, ten years later, saying you're from Fukushima is

something that people kind of respect.

IV: What would you say to people who still have this idea of Fukushima as a fallout zone? To what extent does radiation factor into your daily life?

J: At the moment it's a non-issue. We generally don't think about it in our daily lives any more. After the disaster we were initially very concerned about food and water. I remember taking my daughter for her first thyroid screening at age 3 and being grateful for the chance to make sure she was okay but just bereft that I had to do it. We had full-body radiation screenings, and I went and I did it just to see - but the results were nothing to worry about.

Iwaki city did a lot to check where radiation was - took the topsoil off of parks, implemented the monitoring systems. It's something we live with without even noticing anymore - and if you look at the actual numbers there's nothing to be concerned about.

If you visit Japan from another country, chances are you're going to expose yourself to more radiation during the flight than you would if you were to stay in Fukushima for a month. Not to mention, there are cities that have far higher radiation based on elevation. There's nothing to be scared of about Fukushima - either in any of the produce, or in visiting here. There's only about 1% of the prefecture that's still in the exclusion zone. And it breaks my heart seeing that businesses are struggling while they're desperate for people to come and enjoy what we have here.

IV: Are there any things that wouldn't have happened, either for you, or for Iwaki, that you don't think would've come to be if not for this experience?

J: Personally, it made me consider my relationship with Iwaki. So many terrible things happened, so why would you continue to live here? Having that experience really helped me to move from being apathetic about living in Iwaki, to being proud of living here. When I did that, my whole experience with life here changed. Now I love Iwaki - and I'm not saying that to be corny. I love the people, I love the opportunities it has afforded me, I love the lifestyle my family has here. I'm really grateful for it all. That would be my one message from this whole thing - that **I choose** to live here. I'm so proud of Iwaki and everyone doing their best to get on with their lives.



A radiation meter in Yumoto Area displaying microsieverts per hour



Top Left: Observing the wreckage surrounding Aquamarine Fukushima. After the disaster, power would be cut to Aquamarine - tragically resulting in the death of 90% of animals in the aquarium. Thanks to generous donations and the tireless effort of the staff, Aquamarine reopened on time for its 11th anniversary, on the 15th of July, 2011. (Photo Courtesy of John Loynes).

Bottom Left: The same scenery of Aquamarine as the above image, post-reconstruction

Top Right: A traditional dance is held as memorial service for Hisanohama

Bottom Right: Citizens perform traditional dance in teams, at the annual summer festival *Iwaki Odori*

The Future From Here ...

In Iwaki, the impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake remains felt to this day, and while it unites Iwaki's residents, it does not define them. Memories of the disaster are both a shared trauma, and a motivating force for its citizens; a source of hardship, and an affirmation of all the good our city has to be protected, and rebuilt. A reminder of the things Iwaki deserves to be known for beyond this event, and those that we can create from here.

In the decade since 3.11, civic pride has flourished amid Iwakians new and old, with widespread initiatives to revitalise and improve infrastructure in affected communities, and the city overall. Sister city relationships have been expanded, displaced citizens have found new homes, and people have recognised new callings, while contributing deeply to regional revitalisation efforts.

In these ten years, Iwaki has also continued to overcome countless challenges. October of 2019 would see the arrival of typhoon Hagibis, which prompted flooding in Iwaki's Taira area, driving many from their homes and leaving them without water for weeks. At the time of writing, Iwaki City has been implementing COVID-19 prevention measures for more than one year, and is one week away from hosting an expectedly quiet torch relay for the postponed 2020 Olympics.

Although what lies ahead remains unseen, it is certain that Iwaki will continue to overcome these challenges as it has in the past - invoking knowledge gained through past hardships, and the bonds between its own citizens, and friends across municipal and international borders.

Supplementary Reading for Statistics Regarding Radiation Referenced in This Publication:

United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation
Developments since the 2013 UNSCEAR Report on the Levels and Effects of
Radiation Exposure Due to the Nuclear Accident Following the Great East-Japan
Earthquake and Tsunami
(2015)

https://www.unscear.org/docs/publications/2017/UNSCEAR_WP_2017.pdf



S. Gilmour, S. Miyagawa, F. Kasuga, K. Shibuya
Current measures on radioactive contamination in Japan: a policy situation
analysis
PloS One, 11 (2016), [10.1371/journal.pone.0152040](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0152040)
[Google Scholar](#)

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0152040>



Disaster Preparation Resources:

The Iwaki International Association's Disaster Preparedness Checklist:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sc8VlBW16GHHUc4mqDSyNxLfn2iHga97/view?usp=drivesdk>



Japanese Meteorological Agency
Multilingual page including realtime risk map:

http://www.jma.go.jp/jma/kokusai/m_multi.html



Fukushima Prefectural Government's Q&A Regarding Radiation
Screenings:

<https://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/site/portal-english/en01-04.html>



Front Cover Photo:
Aerial View of Hisanohama - Taken by Fukushima Pref Fire and Disaster Prevention team: Iwaki 3.11 Memorial and Revitalisation Museum
(Miraikan) Disaster Archives, #58

Back Cover Photo:
Hisanohama on March 11th, 2011 - Originally published by Kyodo News, Iwaki 3.11 Memorial and Revitalisation Museum (Miraikan) Disaster
Archives, #60