

Japan Earthquake Charity Literature

Shin Fukunaga

ALMOST EVERYTHING
IN THE WORLD

Translated by Michael Emmerich

WasedaBungaku 2011

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

SO THE DAY THIS HAPPENED, IT WAS JUST A REGULAR DAY.

EXCEPT MAYBE IT WAS A LITTLE DIFFERENT. MAYBE SOME PEOPLE WOULD SAY IT WAS A LOT DIFFERENT.

BECAUSE IT'S PRETTY UNUSUAL WHEN A BUS GOES TOTALLY OUT OF CONTROL, RIGHT?

"AHH, I CAN'T DO THIS!" THE BUS DRIVER SHOUTED.

THE BUSES BREAKS WERE BROKEN.

JUST A SECOND AGO, THE BUS WAS JUST DRIVING ON THIS BIG STREET.

LOTS OF PEOPLE GOING TO WORK AND GRANDFATHERS AND GRANDMOTHERS (PROBABLY GOING TO THE HOSPITAL) AND SOME KIDS GOING TO SCHOOL HAD GOT ON AT THEIR NORMAL BUS STOPS AT THE SAME TIME AS USUAL LIKE ON MOST DAYS. LITTLE AKIRA GOT ON TOO. UP TO THEN IT WAS ALL NORMAL.

SO THE BUS WAS GOING ALONG SUPER FAST, TURNING RIGHT AND LEFT AND ROCKING BACK AND FORTH.

"SO . . . SOMEBODY TAKE OVER!"

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

THE BUS DRIVER'S VOICE CAME OVER THE SPEAKERS. HE WAS SO URGENT HE EVEN SOUNDED KIND OF FUNNY, BUT YOU KIND OF FELT BAD FOR HIM.

THE BUS RIDERS JUST LOOKED AT EACH OTHER.

OF COURSE, RIGHT? YOU CAN'T JUST TAKE OVER FOR THE BUS DRIVER WHEN IT'S LIKE THAT, RIGHT?

UH OH. THERE COMING TO A RED LIGHT.

IF THEY DON'T STOP THERE IN BIG TROUBLE.

THEN, WAY WAY BACK AT THE BACK OF THE BUS, SOMEONE SAID "I'LL TAKE OVER." HE SOUNDED KIND OF CUTE, BUT HE ALSO SOUNDED BIG AND BRAVE.

WHEN HE CAME OUT THROUGH ALL THE PEOPLE, IT WAS AKIRA.

"I'LL DRIVE," AKIRA SAID.

HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A LICENSE, OBVIOUSLY. THE ONLY TIME WHEN HE KIND OF DROVE WAS WHEN THE DRIVER OF HIS KINDERGARDEN BUS LET HIM PLAY WITH THE WHEEL SOME. (THE BUS WASN'T MOVING THEN, OF COURSE.)

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

HE ALSO RODE A LITTLE BUS AT THE AMUSEMENT PARK WHERE YOU PUT IN SOME MONEY AND IT GOES UP AND DOWN AND BOUNCES AROUND AND STUFF.

EVEN AKIRA DIDNT KNOW IF HE COULD DRIVE GOOD ENOUGH WITH JUST THAT KIND OF EXPERIENCE, BUT HE WAS REALLY WORRIED, SO HE FELT LIKE HE SHOULD HELP. HE TOOK OFF HIS BACKPACK AND PUT IT ON THE FLOOR.

"YOU REALLY THINK YOU CAN DRIVE THIS THING?" SAID ONE OF THE RIDERS. HE SOUNDED KIND OF MEAN.

"I'LL TRY. I'LL DO MY BEST."

"PL . . . PLEASE! HELP!"

AKIRA WAS HIS ONLY HOPE, SO THE BUS DRIVER SWAPPED WITH HIM. HE GAVE AKIRA HIS HAT, TOO, SO HE PUT IT ON. PRETTY COOL, HUH?

THIS WASNT THERE LUCKY DAY, BECAUSE NOW THIS HUMONGUS TRUCK WAS COMING DOWN THE ROAD. IT KEPT HONKING.

OH NO! THERES NO TIME! IS THIS HOW THE STORY ENDS?

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

BUT AKIRA GLARED STRAIT AHEAD. HE LOOKED VERY SOLEM.

"HERE WE GO!" HE GAVE THE WHEEL A BIG SPIN.

THE BUS JUST BARELY MADE IT, AND IT GOT IN THE RITE LANE. BUT THEY ARENT SAFE YET. IT LOOKS LIKE AKIRA IS HAVING A HARD TIME CONTROLLING THE BUS, BECAUSE HIS FEET DONT REACH THE PEDALS, THEY KIND OF DANGLE.

HIS FORHEAD IS ALL SWEATY, AND HIS HAIR IS STUCK TO HIS FACE.

SO THEN AKIRA JUST PRESSED ALL THE BUTTONS ON THE BUS. HE'S REALLY SERIUOS. YOU CAN SEE IT IN HIS FACE, FROM THE SIDE.

GRADUALLY THE BUS GOT CALM AGAIN. THIS TIME THERE WAS A YELLOW LIGHT, SO THE BUS SLOWED DOWN. THEY WERENT GOING THROUGH RED LIGHTS ANYMORE, SO THEY DIDNT HAVE TO GET SCARED.

"HEY! EVERYTHINGS OK!" SAID AKIRA. HE SOUNDED HAPPY.

THE SCENERY WENT BY SLOWLY OUTSIDE THE WINDOW NOW.

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

THEN THE BUS STOPPED AT THE LAST STOP.

"PHEW." AKIRA WIPED HIS SWEAT.

"THANK YOU, AKIRA!"

"YOU SAVED US!"

ALL THE PEOPLE SAID THANK YOU AS THEY GOT OF THE BUS.

"WHEN YOU GROW UP, YOU CAN BE THE PRESIDENT OF OUR COMPANY!" SAID THE BUS DRIVER. HE SHOOK AKIRA'S HAND REALLY HARD.

THE LAST PERSON LEFT ON THE BUS WAS THE MEAN MAN WHO SAID AKIRA COULDN'T DO IT. HE LOOKED KIND OF EMBARRASSED.

"UH . . . I'M SORRY I SAID THAT." HE APOLOGISED.

"I FORGIVE YOU," AKIRA SAID WITH A NICE SMILE.

THE MAN WALKED AWAY REALLY QUICK, LOOKING AT THE GROUND.

"HEY, YOUVE GOT TO GO, TOO!" THE BUS DRIVER GAVE AKIRA HIS BACKPACK.

"OH YEAH! I'LL BE LATE!"

"HA HA HA! WATCH OUT NOW! SEE YOU LATER."

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

"SEE YOU LATER, MR. DRIVER!"

SO THEN AKIRA RAN OFF.

THE DAY THIS HAPPENED WAS JUST A REGULAR DAY, TOO.

EXCEPT I GUESS IT WAS KIND OF DIFFERENT, TOO.

I BET SOME PEOPLE WOULD SAY IT WAS TOTALLY DIFFERENT.

THE SKY WAS BEAUTIFUL BLUE. AND LOOK, THERES KAZUO AND SAORI! SEE? THERE SITTING TOGETHER ON THE BLEACHERS.

THEY CAME TO WATCH THE BASEBALL GAME.

THERE WAS A BIG BASEBALL TOURNAMENT IN THE FIELD BY THERE HOUSES, ON THE RIVERBANK. SO THERE WERE LOTS AND LOTS OF PEOPLE CHEERING.

EVERYONE ON THE BLEACHERS WAS CHEERING REAL LOUD AND THEY WERE SUPER EXCITED. EXCEPT THAT KAZUO AND SAORIS FAVORITE TEAM DIDNT LOOK SO GOOD. THE PLAYERS WERE JUST STARING AT THERE FEET.

KAZUO WAS WORRIED. "HEY EVERYONE,

WHAT'S WRONG?" HE CALLED OUT.

BUT THEY DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING BACK. SOME OF THE TEAM MEMBERS WERE PLAYING VIDEO-GAMES AND SOME HAD LOTS OF MANGA PILED ON THEIR LAPS THAT THEY WERE READING, AND SOME OF THEM WERE GETTING READY TO GO HOME. EVERYONE HAD THIS GLOOMY ATTITUDE.

SAORI CALLED OUT TO THEM TOO. NOT AS LOUD AS KAZUO THOUGH.

"WE'LL ROOT FOR YOU EVEN HARDER! SO DO YOUR BEST OK!"

"FORGET THIS GAME, IT'S NO GOOD! WE'RE SUNK!"

"I'M NOT SUNK! I'M DRUNK!" YELLED A FAT MAN WITH A RED FACE. HE HELD UP A BEER CAN. HE WAS THEIR COACH, PROBABLY.

THE UMPIRE WENT OVER TO THE BENCH. "WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO? IF IT GOES ON THIS WAY, I'M GOING TO HAVE TO PUT THIS GAME ON ICE."

"HICCUP." THE COACH GAVE A HICCUP. THEN HE GLARED AT THE UMPIRE AND SHOUTED AT HIM.

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

"DON'T WORRY, IT'S COLD ENUF ALREADY!" ACTUALLY THIS MAN DOESN'T LOOK LIKE HE SHOULD BE DOING BASEBALL.

THE UMPIRE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. HE SHOOK HIS HEAD.

"NOTHING I CAN DO, I GUESS. CAN'T HAVE A GAME LIKE THIS."

SO HE TURNED BACK AROUND TO THE FIELD AND SPREAD HIS ARMS, AND HE WAS JUST ABOUT TO SAY, "OK, GAMES OVER FOR TODAY!" WHEN KAZUO PULLED ON HIS SLEEVE.

"PLEASE LET ME PITCH!" SAID KAZUO.

"YOU?"

"YES ME."

"I DON'T THINK YOU CAN DO IT."

THE UMPIRE RUBBED HIS TEMPLES AND LOOKED MORE LIKE HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO THAN BEFORE. SOME PLAYERS WERE SHOUTING FROM THE BENCH. "FORGET IT, KID!" "SOME OF THE OTHER TEAMS PLAYERS USED TO BE IN THE PRO LEAGUE, YOU KNOW!"

BUT KAZUO STILL WANTED TO TAKE THE MOUND. JUST ONE TRY.

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

SO THE UMPIRE LET HIM GO. MAYBE HE THOUGHT THAT WAS A GOOD WAY TO END THE GAME.

BOY WAS EVERYONE SURPRISED BY WHAT HAPPENED THEN!

ALL THE PLAYERS ON THE BENCH AND THE PEOPLE IN THE STANDS AND EVEN A YOUNG WOMAN WHO WAS JOGGING AND A FOREIGNER ON HIS BYCICLE AND AN OLD MAN WALKING HIS DOG STOPPED AND STARED AT KAZUO. (I BET EVEN THE DOG WAS WATCHING.)

ONLY THE COACH STILL LOOKED GLOOMY. "EVEN IF YOU DONT GIVE AWAY ANY RUNS, THERE BEATING US SO BAD WE CANT WIN," HE SAID. "ITS OVER."

"THEN SCORE SOME RUNS!"

IT WAS SAORI! SHE HAD BEEN KEEPING QUITE, BUT NOW SHE WAS RIGHT BEHIND HIM.

THE COACH JUMPED. "LOOK," HE SAID, "THERE THIS MANY POINTS AHEAD OF US! SEE? THIS MANY!" (HE SPREAD HIS ARMS SUPER WIDE.)

THE COACH TALKED SORT OF LIKE HE WAS

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

MAKING FUN OF HER.

YEAH! YEAH! PEOPLE YELLED FROM THE OUTFIELD. (EXCEPT THAT IT WASNT REALLY THE OUTFIELD, JUST BEHIND THE COACH).

SAORI PUT A HAND ON HER HIP AND TOLD HIM. "GIVE ME THE BAT."

SO THE UMPIRE CALLED OUT "PINCH HITTER!" AND SAORI STRETCHED IN THE BATTERS BOX AND BONKED THE BAT ON HOME PLATE ONCE AND POSISHEND THE TIP OF HER BAT IN THE AIR.

SAORI LOOKED LIKE A WUSS, BUT REALLY SHE PRACTICED SWINGING EVERY DAY AND AT NIGHT TOO. NOBODY EVER ASKED HER TO COME PLAY SO SHE WAS A UNKNOWN QUANTITY, BUT SHE LOOKED PRETTY SCARY. THE BIG ADULTS ON THE BENCH DREW BACK WHEN THEY SAW HER, EVEN, THATS HOW TOUGH SHE LOOKED.

AND LOOK AT THAT HOMERUN!

THERE WAS A BIG CRACK AND THE BALL GOT SUCKED INTO THE SKY.

SAORI JOGED AROUND AND JUMPED ON HOME PLATE.

BUT JUST THEN IT STARTED RAINING. IT WAS

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

LIKE THE RAINDROPS WERE CHASING HER WHEN THEY HIT THE DIRT, ONE AND THEN ANOTHER.

IT WAS A SUMMER SHOWER. IT CAME DOWN REAL HARD, AND THEY HAD TO STOP. THE SKY THAT WAS BLUE BEFORE WAS SO CLOUDY IT WAS LIKE IT WAS NEVER BLUE AT ALL. TOO BAD BECAUSE THEY WERE JUST STARTING.

THERE WAS LITENING AND THEN BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO. ALL THE PLAYERS ON THE BENCH SCREAMED AND RAN WITH THERE HANDS IN THE AIR.

"THE WEATHER REPORT SAYS THE RAIN WILL STOP!" SAID KAZUO.

BUT NONE OF THE PLAYERS CAME BACK.

BUT HE WAS RIGHT. WAY WAY AWAY YOU COULD SEE BLUE SKY THROUGH THE CLOUDS AGAIN.

SAORI WAS EMAILING HER FRIENDS NEXT TO HIM.

AND THEN THE RAIN STOPPED.

THE GAME WAS ON AGAIN!

WHAT WAS DIFFERENT THIS TIME WAS THAT NOW ALL THE PLAYERS ON THE TEAM WITH KAZUO AND SAORI WERE CHILDREN.

SOME OF THEM WERENT SO GREAT AT BASE-

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

BALL BUT THEY TRIED REALLY HARD WITH THERE SPESHETIES LIKE GETTING HIT BY THE BALL AND TAKING WALKS, AND THEY KEPT IT UP UNTIL . . . LOOK! THERE CATCHING UP!

KAZUO SLAMMED THE BALL. NOW THE BASES ARE FULL, AND SAORI IS UP TO BAT AGAIN!

AND THATS HOW THE GAME GOT TURNED AROUND AND THE TEAM SCORED AN INCREDIBLE WIN! EXCEPT THEY ALL GOT VERY VERY MUDDY.

SO WHEN THIS HAPPENED, ITS PRETTY DOUBTFULL, LIKE REALLY DOUBTFULL IF IT WAS A REGULAR DAY.

BECAUSE YOU DONT USUALLY HEAR LOUD SHOUTS LIKE PEOPLE ARE MAD OR SOMETHING COMING FROM THE OPERATING ROOM DOOR.

"UWAGH! I SCREWED UP!"

"DOCTOR, THERES NO RESPONSE!"

"THE BLOOD WONT STOP! WHAT SHOULD WE DO?"

THOSE PEOPLE IN THERE ARE SO LOUD ITS LIKE THEY MIGHT EVEN WAKE UP THE PATIENT

WHOSE OUT ON ANASTETIC.

THE GUY WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THE DOCTOR WAS LOUDER THAN ANYONE, BUT THEN HE GOT REALLY QUIETE. EVEN IF PEOPLE ASKED HIM SOMETHING OR SAID SOMETHING TO HIM, HE JUST KEPT HIS HEAD DOWN.

SOMETIMES HE LOOKED UP FOR A LITTLE AND HE WAS KIND OF MUTTERING, SO YOU WENT OVER AND ACTUALLY HE WAS SINGING A SONG.

THEN HE JUST OPENED THE DOOR AND WENT HOME.

EVERYONE ELSE WAS REAL SURPRISED. "HEY, WAIT DOCTOR!" THEY YELLED, AND THEY CHASED AFTER HIM.

WHENEVER SOMEONE WENT OUT, THE DOOR WOULD SWING OPEN AND THEN IT BANGED SHUT. **BANG BANG BANG!**

BUT THEN THEY WERE ALL GONE, AND SO THE DOOR STAYED OPEN. YOU COULD SEE A VERY VERY LONG HALL OUTSIDE.

LOOK! THERES A BOY STANDING IN THE DOORWAY LOOKING IN! ITS TAKASHI WHO HAS BEEN IN THE HOSPITAL A WHILE. HE'S SNUCK OUT

AGAIN.

TAKASHI KEEPS LOOKING BEHIND HIM LIKE HES NERVOUS. HE LOOKS LIKE A SPY OR SOMETHING. EXCEPT HE HAS A COLORFUL FUROSHIKI TIED AROUND HIS NECK. HEY TAKASHI! YOU'LL GET FOUND EASIER THAT WAY!

SO TAKASHI COMES INTO THE OPERATING ROOM AND CLOSES THE DOOR.

WHATS HE GOING TO DO?

EVERYONE IN THE HOSPITAL KNOWS HES A REAL PROBLEM KID BECAUSE HE ACTS UP SO MUCH, BUT THIS IS ACTING UP A BIT TOO MUCH. DONT YOU THINK? SOMEBODY HAS TO FIND HIM AND THROW HIM OUT!

EXCEPT NONE OF THE ADULTS WHO RAN AWAY IS COMING BACK.

JUST WHEN THE LIGHT FROM THE SUNSET IS STARTING TO SHOW WAY DOWN AT THE END OF THE HALL, THERES SOME LAUGHING IN THE ROOM. ONE OF THE PEOPLE LAUGHING IS TAKASHI. OBVIOUSLY.

BUT WHOSE THE OTHER?

ITS THE PATIENT! JUST BEFORE HIS BLOOD

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

WAS COMING OUT LIKE CRAZY AND HIS HEART WASN'T BEATING AT ALL AND HIS BRAINWAVES WERE TOTALLY QUITE. PLUS THE MACHINES HAD NO ELECTRICITY ANYMORE. BUT NOW HES ALL BETTER!

SO THE DOOR OPENED AND HE AND TAKASHI CAME OUT ARM IN ARM.

THEN THE DOOR CLOSED QUIETLY. BANG.

SO THIS DAY WAS JUST REGULAR.

NATSUMI IS USED TO DOING THIS CAUSE IT HAS BEEN A WILE. SHE PUTS ON HER SANDALS AND GOES OUT OF THE HOUSE. SHE WALKS PRETTY FAST. SHES LIKE "LEAVE IT TO ME IVE GOT IT UNDER CONTROL!"

THE SUNS GOING DOWN SO SHE HAS A LONG LONG SHADOW BEHIND HER.

THERES A SQUILLY ELECTRIK WIRE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD HANGING FROM THE POLE. ITS LIKE A SNAKE OR SOMETHING.

WHEN YOU LOOK AROUND. THERES ANOTHER WIRE AROUND THE CORNER OVER THERE. AND ANOTHER OVER AROUND THAT NEXT CORNER.

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

THEY ALL FELL DOWN IN THE LITENING TODAY.

NO ONE IS FIXING THEM. MAYBE THEY HAVEN'T COME YET?

NO. BECAUSE THEY CAME ALREADY. BECAUSE THERES LITTLE NOTES STUCK ON ALL THE WIRES.

THE NOTES SAYS

DEAR NATSUMI.

PLEASE FIX THIS.

FROM THE ELECTRIK COMPANY.

NATSUMI IS A REALLY GOOD CLIMBER. SHE GOES UP JUST LIKE THAT AND PUTS THE WIRE BACK TOGETHER. NOWEDAYS NATSUMI DOES LOTS OF STUFF FOR PEOPLE, NOT JUST THE ELECTRIK WIRES.

WHILE SHE PUTS THE WIRES UP, YOU CAN SEE ALL THE LIGHTS GOING ON IN THE WINDOWS.

THERES A COUPLE OF STARS WINKING NOW.

AND THEN SHE HERES A BRUUUUUUM KIND OF SOUND, SO SHE LOOKS, AND SHE SEES FLASHING LIGHTS. ITS AN AIRPLANE.

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

HAJIME WAS IN THE COCKPIT WAVING. WOW!
HES FLYING AN AIRPLANE!

YOU CAN SEE HAJIMES SISTER IN ONE OF THE
AIRPLANE WINDOWS. SHES GIVING DRINKS TO
THE CUSTOMERS. SHES A FLIGHT ATTENDENT.

AND IN THE WINDOW UP ON THE APARTMENT
BUILDING. THERES MAYUMI IN HER MOMS
APRON. MAKING DINER!

A DELICIOUS SMELL FLOATED OUT OF THE
WINDOW. AND IT MADE NATSUMIS STOMACH
GRRRRRRROWL.

"I BETTER HURRY AND SHOP FOR DINNER!" SHE
SAID.

SO SHE SLID DOWN THE POLE AND PUT ON HER
SANDALS.

SOMEONES STAYING UP LATE WATCHING TV.
WHO IS IT?

LOOK HES NODDING HIS HEAD, FALLING ASLEEP!
EVEN FROM BEHIND, YOU CAN RECOGNIZE HIM.
CANT YOU?

THERE HE GOES, HES TIPPING OOOOOOO HE
JUST FELL OVER ON THE SOFA AND CHANGED THE

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

CHANNEL.

NOW THERE SHOWING THE NATIONAL DIET LIVE.

THE NEWS GUY SAYS THE MEETING HAS BEEN GOING ON SINCE MORNING. THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING SUPER IMPORTANT. THAT'S WHY IT'S GOING ON SO LATE IN THE NIGHT.

THEY MUST GET REAL TIRED DOING THIS.

CAUSE THEY'RE EVEN OLDER THAN DAD, RIGHT?

ALL THE KIDS IN THIS STORY (AKIRA, KAZUO, SAORI, TAKASHI, NATSUMI, HAJIME, AND MAYUMI) HAVE DADS WHO, THE SECOND THEY COME HOME, THEY SAY "WOW, I'M BEAT," OR "HEY HAJIME MASSAGE MY SHOULDERS FOR ME, WILL YOU?" EVEN IF MAYUMI ASKS HER DAD TO COME HAVE A BATH HE JUST SAYS "OKAY OKAY BE RIGHT IN" AND LIES DOWN AND THEN HE'S SNORING. I BET ALL THESE DADS HAVE BEEN FAST ASLEEP FOR AGES NOW.

SO IT'S NOT THEIR FAULT IF THOSE OLD POLITICIANS WENT HOME AND LEFT THEIR SEATS EMPTY.

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

LET'S KEEP WATCHING TV. HEY LOOK, ONE OF THE EMPTY SEATS ISN'T EMPTY ANYMORE BECAUSE YASUHIKO IS SITTING IN IT! SEE HIS LEGS WITH LOTS OF SCABS ALL OVER STIKING OUT OF HIS SHORTS? HES GOT THEM CROSSED LIKE A PRO, AND HES LOOKING REAL HARD AT ALL THE REFERENCE MATERIELS.

AND NEXT TO YASUHIKO IS LIONEL! HE JUST PUT UP HIS HAND AND SAID "ME! ME! CALL ON ME!"

SO WAKANA WHOSE THE SPEAKER SAYS "LIONEL YOU HAVE THE FLOOR" AND PUSHES UP HER GLASSES LIKE SHE DOES. WAKANA IS THE CLASS PRESIDENT AT SCHOOL TOO.

AS THE DEBATE GOES ON, ALL KINDS OF IDEAS GET PROPOZED. YASUHIKO HAS AN ADDISHEN TO MAKE SO HE DOES SCISSORS AND RAISES HIS HAND. IN YASUHIKO'S CLASS, THEY DO SCISSORS WHEN THEYVE GOT SOMETHING TO ADD AND ROCK WHEN THEY ARE AGAINST IT.

THE NEWS GUY AND THE COMENTATER TALK ABOUT WHAT KIND OF PROPOZEL IT IS. THEY SAY HOW IMPORTANT IT IS AND HOW NO ONE

ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

EVER THOUGHT THIS COULD EVER BE PASSED IN A MILLION YEARS. THEIR VOICES SOUND KIND OF CUTE AND PREPUBESSENT BUT THEY WERE ALSO VERY SOLEM.

THEN THE SCREEN BLACKS OUT. MOM CAUGHT DAD ASLEEP.

SO MOM CARRIES HIM UP TO BED. HES DROOLING. "OH JUST LOOK WHAT A MESS," MOM SAYS LOOKING DOWN AT AKIRA, BUT HES REAL TIRED. OBVIOUSLY, AFTER ALL THAT HAPPENED TODAY!

KIDS TOOK OVER ALMOST EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD.

THERE WERENT REALLY ANY JOBS ONLY ADULTS COULD DO.

THERE WERE LOTS OF PROBLEMS.

EVERY DAY, EVERY NIGHT, SOMEWHERE, THERE WAS SOME KIND OF REALLY SUPER BIG MAJER PROBLEM.

SO THE KIDS TRIED THEIR BEST TO FIX IT. NO NEED FOR ADULTS.

THEY LOOKED KIND OF BORED, BUT TOO BAD. KIDS WROTE ALL THE STORIES NOW, TOO.

Shin FUKUNAGA

Shin Fukunaga was born in Tokyo in 1972, he dropped out of the Kyoto University of Arts and Design. He began his career when he published the novel *Yomioete* ("After Reading") in 1998. With the novel *Acrobat Zen'ya* ("the Previous Night of Acrobat") published in 2001 he brought the horizontal writing style, uncommon in conventional Japanese novel writing. Where usually the reader reads in columns from the right, in this novel the reader is led back to the 2nd sentence of the 1st page, flipping through pages in an unexpected way. He has collaborated with artists in many projects, writing art reviews and publishing works which constantly redefine the textual perspectives of story telling. *Acrobat Zen'ya* has been described as "Significant short stories where the writer brings to us the utmost imagination and sophistication. He rightfully manifests the true meaning of the word 'Acrobat'. It is here we find the utopia and liberty in fiction writing".



Michael Emmerich

He received his PhD in East Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University in 2007. He is the editor of *Read Real Japanese Fiction: Short Stories by Contemporary Writers* (Kodansha International), and the translator of books by Yasunari Kawabata, Banana Yoshimoto, and Gen'ichirô Takahashi. His most recent translation, Hiromi Kawakami's *Manazuru* (Counterpoint), was awarded the 2010 Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prize for the Translation of Japanese Literature. Emmerich teaches Japanese literature at the University of California-Santa Barbara.

Waseda Bungaku's charity project:

Japan Earthquake Charity Literature

The earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on March 11, 2011 claimed the lives of more than 15,000 people, displaced many more times that number from their homes, schools and workplaces, and triggered a nuclear accident whose effects are sure to last for decades. These unprecedented events have forced people in Japan to think and act in new ways. We recognize our responsibility to mourn the dead and do what we can to help the people whose lives have been turned upside down. We realize that we are victims ourselves – both of the short to mid-term damage from the earthquake and the long-term damage from the nuclear accident. We cannot escape the fact that we are somehow

responsible for the effects that the contamination from the nuclear accident will have on current and future generations both at home and abroad.

In towns where street lights and neon signs have been dimmed and where air-conditioning and the number of trains running have been reduced, everyone – regardless of whether they were directly affected or not – has been thinking about what they can do as well as what it means to use nuclear energy. Writers are no exception. Jean-Paul Sartre once famously asked what literature can do for starving children. Each one of us began to ask ourselves similar questions: What can we write or not write? What can and should we be doing other than writing? What is it that we really have to offer? The damage wrought by the disaster and the reconstruction process that followed on the one hand, and the accident at the nuclear power plant on the other, each raised issues that had to be thought about quite separately.

In responding to the first, we searched for words to mourn the dead and encourage survivors who were trying to get back on their feet. Some tried to write pieces that would bring solace to these survivors, while others composed re-

quiems, just as Shoyo Tsubouchi, one of the founders of Modern Japanese literature, did in 1923 following the Great Kanto Earthquake. It is often said that “authors always arrive last”. Some made a conscious decision not to write, choosing instead to write about these events as history one day. There were those who questioned the value of writing fiction, while others did not hesitate to write when asked to do so. Some considered it their duty as a writer not to be moved by it all and chose to go on as always with daily life.

It was (and continues to be) terribly difficult to find the words to offer those who have been directly affected by the disaster. Faced with the continuing effects of the nuclear accident, some shed tears thinking of the people in Fukushima they had grown up with; others joined demonstrations calling for the government and the electricity company to be held responsible for their mismanagement; still others began to rethink the way they had lived, dependent on electricity supplied by nuclear power; and some even called for the need to reevaluate the modern era that had “progressed” in that direction.

Such reactions naturally extended beyond the borders

of Japan. We all imagined, lamented, and felt anger at the thought of the many devastating disasters that have shaken our world, the accidents that all kinds of technologies have caused, and similar events that are sure to happen again in the future, as if they were happening to our neighbors, our friends, and to ourselves. We think of Hemingway rushing to Madrid with rifle in hand to report on the Spanish Civil War as we head to Fukushima armed not with rifles, but buckets and shovels.

But for those of us who make a living by writing, it is clear that the biggest contribution we can make is through doing what we do. (Standing in front of a mound of rubble and debris with shovels, we are far less useful than local high school students.) Although they have used different methods and approaches, all the authors who participated in this project chose to try to do something for the areas and people affected through their writing. They all struggled in different ways as they wrote these short pieces that have been made available in English through the efforts of a number of translators.

This program aims to give serious thought to the disaster

and accident, then bring these words that were born, directly or indirectly, through this thought process, to people across the world. We hope that after reading these texts you will choose to make a donation to the Red Cross in Japan or in your country or to another charity.

We hope that these pieces, written for ourselves as much as for anyone else, will reach people around the world, and eventually, in some small way, also serve to help the people in northern Japan who are now working hard to rebuild their lives.

Makoto ICHIKAWA (literary critic / director of The WASEDA bungaku)

September 11, 2011

This story was written primarily for use in *Waseda Bungaku's* charity project for the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011 and for distribution via the *Waseda Bungaku* website in PDF form. An e-book publication of this story will also be made available in Japan. All proceeds from sales will be donated to the families of victims and survivors in areas affected by the disaster.

PDF files of all the stories in this collection will be available to download from the website until March 2012. Sending these PDFs to third parties via e-mail, and posting the URLs to third-party sites, is permitted. (though *Waseda Bungaku* will take no responsibility for the content of such third-party sites). However, reproduction, in whole or in part, of the data on these PDFs in any printed media by any unauthorized third parties is strictly prohibited. Data alteration is likewise strictly prohibited. We hope that after reading these texts you will choose to make a donation to the Red Cross in Japan (details below) or in your country or to another charity supporting disaster relief. In case of data transfer, we suggest you send

us notification beforehand.

Donation Bank Account 1

Name of Bank: Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation

Name of Branch: Ginza

Account No.: 8047670 (Ordinary Account)

SWIFT Code: SMBC JP JT

Branch Number: 026

Address of Bank: Ginza Joint Building 6-10-15 Ginza Chuo-ku
Tokyo JAPAN

Payee Name: The Japanese Red Cross Society

Payee Address: 1-1-3 Shiba-Daimon Minato-ku, Tokyo JAPAN

Donation Bank Account 2

Name of Bank: The Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ, Ltd.

Name of Branch: Tokyo Government and Public Institutions
Business Office

Account No.:0028706(Ordinary Account)

SWIFT Code: BOTKJPJT

Branch Number: 300

Address of Bank: 3-6-3 Kajicho Kanda Chiyoda-ku Tokyo JA-
PAN

Payee Name: The Japanese Red Cross Society

Payee Address: 1-1-3 Shiba-Daimon Minato-ku, Tokyo JAPAN

Donation Bank Account 3

Name of Bank: Mizuho Bank, LTD

Name of Branch: Shinbashi Chuo Branch

Account No.: 2188729 (Ordinary Account)

SWIFT Code: MHBK JP JT

Branch Number: 051

Address of Bank: 4-6-15 Shinbashi Minato-ku Tokyo JAPAN

Payee Name: The Japanese Red Cross Society

Payee Address: 1-1-3 Shiba-Daimon Minato-ku, Tokyo JAPAN

(All bank accounts above are open until March 31, 2012.)

Participants of this charity project

(*English translations will be made available):

▷ Authors:

Hideo Furukawa*, Kazushige Abe*, Mieko Kawakami*, Toh En-Joe*, Shin Fukunaga*, Yasuhisa Yoshikawa*, Jungo Aoki*, Aoko Matsuda*, Sayaka Murata*, Fuminori Nakamura*, Akio Nakamori*, Furukuri Kinoshita*, Mayuko Makita*, Maki Kashimada*, Kiyoshi Shigematsu*, Mitsuyo Kakuta, Mariko Asabuki, Masahiko Shimada, Hikaru Okuizumi, Hiroki Azuma, Toshiyuki Horie, Akiko Akazome

▷ Critics:

Minami Aoyama, Koji Toko, Shigehiko Hasumi, Naomi Watanabe, Minako Saito

▷ Translators:

Michael Emmerich, Satoshi Katagiri, Lucy North, Ginny Tapley Takemori, Ian MacDonald, Jocelyne Allen, Allison Markin Powell, Michael Staley, Angus Turvill, David Boyd, David Karashima

▷ Staffs: Tatsuya Kuboki, Saki Fukui, Ayane Yokoyama, Takuya Sekiguchi, Keisuke Ouchi, Mayako Tsuruoka, Kaede Ienaga, Kenichiro Tobaru, Hirotaka Yamamoto, Moonsoon Park

Copyright by Shin Fukunaga 2011
Copyright by Michael Emmerich 2011
Published by wasedabungaku 2011