

## **Not My Fault: Now for some good news**

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard  
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2020 has been a rough year. It's time for a reminder that even in times of disaster, we can come together and make things better

Had this been a "normal" year, the Tokyo Olympic Games would be starting this week. The sports section of this paper would be speculating on how many events Dominique Dawes would win, Ryan Lochte's quest to overtake Phelps' medal count and where the US and other countries would emerge on the Leader Board. I would be excited for a very different reason. Somewhere in the ten days of coverage, NBC would air a documentary with special meaning to me.

Back in February 2019 I got a phone call from David Picker, Senior Producer of NBC Sports. NBC Sports? I've gotten calls from a variety of places but sports has never been one of them. He explained that he was responsible for some of the content for NBC's Olympic coverage.

It quickly dawned on me. "You are calling about Kamome?" Yes, David responded. NBC has provided exclusive coverage of the summer Olympics in the US since 1988. In addition to the events, they feature background about the athletes and always highlight one story illustrating a special relationship between the host country and the United States.

Kamome is the small boat that belonged to a school in Rikuzentakata that beached in Crescent City two years after the 2011 Japan tsunami. Del Norte High students helped to return the boat, leading to student exchanges and finally a formal Sister City agreement between the two communities. David had been assigned the task of producing the "special relationship" video.

We talked for at least a half hour. I recounted the steps in the voyage of Kamome and how so many people and organizations volunteered to assist in the boat's return and the subsequent exchanges. I could feel his growing enthusiasm for the story over the phone. David had lived in Japan for a number of years and quickly grasped what an unusual story this was. I told him to call Amya Miller in Japan. The Kamome return and connections between the

two cities would never have happened without Amya's role in facilitating Rikuzentakata's communication with the world, part of which included monitoring non-Japanese content on the City's Facebook page. It was my post of Kamome photos on their page that Amya saw that began the process.

By the following week, David had been sold. Kamome would be their story and would air during the games in late July 2020. He had a big budget and was quickly off to Japan where he met Amya and started laying the groundwork for the documentary. In subsequent months, he would revisit Rikuzentakata a number of times, interviewing Mayor Toba and other city officials. He also managed to speak to Katsumi Yoshida who knew Kamome better than anyone else. He was a Marine Science teacher and used Kamome three times a week to teach students about fishing and harbor maintenance.

I connected with David and crew about six months ago on one of their trips to Crescent City. I've done interviews with a number of production groups including Nova, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Discovery Channel. Hands down David and the NBC crew were the most prepared and the most on top of what they wanted. It was a real pleasure to work with them.

Fast forward to March 24, 2020 when the International Olympic Committee postponed the Tokyo games for a year. I figured the postponement would affect the production of the Kamome video too. I was surprised to get another call from David in late May with a few questions. He said they were on schedule and the documentary would be finished in July. True to his word, it was released on the NBC streaming site Peacock TV this week.

I've watched it from start to finish twice and you can too, either on your phone, tablet or computer. It's free to subscribe - you will need to sit through a couple minutes of ads, but the wait is worth it. David managed to capture exactly the right feel - the similarities between these two small cities on the opposite sides of the Pacific, the enthusiasm of the students and the kindness exhibited in so many ways that has connected Rikuzentakata and Del Norte County.

Logic would have stopped this story at so many points. The last thing Rikuzentakata needed back in 2013 was a piece of tsunami debris. Their town was destroyed and they had no place to put people, let alone a damaged boat. But Mayor Toba, with a little prodding from Amya Miller, quickly became convinced of the symbolic

importance. It would have been easy for Del Norte High to say no to that first invitation to travel to Japan. This was something way out of their comfort zone, but they eagerly took on the challenge. It would have been easy for Mayor Inscore and Crescent City/Del Norte officials to focus on the other problems of their community and decide a Sister City relationship was too much additional work..

I continue to be amazed at Kamome and how a small boat has touched so many lives and brought out the best in people. Another round of applause to everyone on both sides of the Pacific who has been part of the story. Thank you David Picker and the NBC crew, you are now in the boat too.

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Lori Dengler is an emeritus professor of geology at Humboldt State University, an expert in tsunami and earthquake hazards. All Not My Fault columns are archived at <https://www2.humboldt.edu/kamome/resources> and may be reused for educational purposes. Leave a message at (707) 826-6019 or email [Kamome@humboldt.edu](mailto:Kamome@humboldt.edu) for questions/comments about this column, or to request a free copy of the North Coast preparedness magazine "Living on Shaky Ground."

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