

Amy Uyeki –

My involvement with the East Japan earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, was one of a world bystander, along with billions of others on this earth and especially those along the Pacific Rim, who watched in horror as so many lives in Japan were lost or devastated by this one-two punch of natural disasters. My first thought was – are my relatives and friends in Japan all right? And they were, but forever affected by the continuing unfolding of this tragic event, emotionally, psychically and economically. Residing in an earthquake/tsunami prone region, one always wonders when a similar situation could happen here.

My family's other tangential connection with a tsunami was finding out about friends in Sri Lanka who had survived (and those who had perished during) the 2004 Sumatra Andaman earthquake and subsequent tsunami that had affected nearly all of the coastlines of Sri Lanka. We had spent the year in Sri Lanka and left a few months before the tsunami. The recounted stories of friends fighting for their lives while searching for family members is still a vivid memory.

But my strongest connection to the East Japan disaster came two years after the tsunami with the arrival of the small boat from Rikuzentakata. Hearing about it on the local news immediately brought a sense of wonderment, to think that this small boat had gone through so much, surviving the tsunami and then taking two years to get to our shore. The remarkable relationships that developed as a result of students cleaning up the boat and getting help to have it returned, and the subsequent exchanges between Crescent City and Rikuzentakata that are still happening after so many years is a testament to both of the communities, their resilience, their kindnesses and their resourcefulness. It is indeed a heartwarming story that I was lucky enough to document by illustrating the children's book written by Lori Dengler and Amya Miller. This journey has been a rich and rewarding one for me that included a trip to Japan in 2016, visiting Rikuzentakata and seeing hope and a community being re-born. While even five years later the devastation that had wiped out most of the town was still so apparent and humbling, the openness and generosity of the people of Rikuzentakata was also in plain sight. Sharing the book with kind townspeople at the bus-stop was a memory I will never forget. I include those photos here:

