

MR. KENICHI HASEGAWA



Date of birth:
June 11, 1953

Currently living in:
Date City, Fukushima
prefecture, 15km north-
east of Fukushima City
Central

Originally living in:
Iitate village, Fukushima
prefecture

Profession: former dairy
farmer in Iitate

Married, two sons (34, 33),
two grandchildren

Kenichi Hasegawa used to record the first snow of the year with chalk on a wooden board inside his cowshed. The dates are neatly categorised. The last entry is for 2011. Now, the former dairy farmer records the changes to his former hometown with hundreds of photos and video. The data is in slight disorder. He started on April 22, 2011, when Iitate was evacuated.

No end to his documentation is in sight.

Iitate is one of many communities in the Fukushima prefecture forced to evacuate. The radiation levels make it unsafe. The only continuity he can provide himself now is through “pinpoint recording” from the same spot. “From there I can overlook the whole area, see how houses and rice paddies are changing with the seasons.”

He also films events in the temporary housing in Date City where he has lived with his wife and their parents for almost three years now. The temporary housing area has 126 victim households. Only 24 families are from Mr. Hasegawa’s area; the other 30 families are dispersed throughout the country.

What does he miss the most? “To live together with my whole family and to be in the same house with them. All family members used to start the day together at six in the morning. We looked after the cows, did kitchen work. My family is spread all over the place now. My younger son lives somewhere else in Date City. My older son lives in Yamagata prefecture with his kids. We last saw them on New Year.” Four generations lived in his traditional house, just next to the cowshed and with a view of rolling hills and rice paddies. “My home country is destroyed. I am a farmer but cannot harvest. I cannot start to describe what we lost in this disaster.”

He was the first to speak out about the level of radiation the authorities tried to hide when people evacuated to Iitate, not knowing that it was highly contaminated. "The refugees from other districts had some sense it was problematic." But the Central government sent what he calls "propaganda professors" to Iitate. Professor Yamashita from Nagasaki University gathered people and gave what Mr. Hasegawa describes as "radiation safe lectures". "He assured people that it is safe to stay here." Asked about the impact of radiation on children, the professor answered: "Limit their play to one hour outside." He went on: "The government is saying the right thing. You must believe them. I am a doctor and scientist. You must believe me." To conclude: "Radiation likes the negative people. If you worry, it will affect you." This still makes Mr. Hasegawa very angry: "This is unforgivable. And they are still saying this now." Back then he returned his health questionnaire to Professor Yamashita with a message: "I will not become your guinea pig."

He kept track of the sequence of events in a book. Key dates: March 16, he evacuated his children, telling them they might need to give up the cows. March 19, his milk was declared unsafe. "There is no evacuation order for Iitate, only the sale of milk is stopped." April 16, Iitate became a designated evacuation area. April 22, the evacuation order was issued.

Radiation levels aren't his only concern. It is their situation as victims. "Now they say, the disaster has already ended. There is no reporting on the situation of victims anymore. To keep reporting on the victims' situation means, people don't forget about us. One needs to remember that nuclear is the most terrible thing. We should not be sending this dirty thing to the next generation." He finds it most important "how the government and the authorities responded, how they exposed people to unnecessary radiation."

He has a message for the outside world: "Please open your eyes and look behind the scenes" to find out what is going on.

The afternoon sun falls into Mr Hasegawa's abandoned cowshed. A plain, light and pointed piece of wood with Japanese characters leans on the first stall with the words "human disaster, suffered, exposed to radiation, cows." It is a traditional Buddhist composition of wood for the dead, usually placed at the back of their graves. Mr. Hasegawa made it for his cows. Where his 50 cows used to be, sad reminders of better days now reside. Spider webs on six big silver fans, on the electric panel and on switches highlight the inactivity. Written with chalk, in the Japanese way of calculating time, is 23-3-11, the date of the disaster, followed by 2:46, the time the earthquake started, with an unfathomable catastrophe to follow.

Conventional ways to measure time don't seem to help anymore for those kicked out of time: the people of Fukushima.



Kenichi Hasegawa's empty cowshed in Iitate village, Fukushima prefecture. Before the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, he owned 50 milk cows.



Kenichi Hasegawa walks in an area of temporary houses in Date city, 15km away from Fukushima city central.