

PEOPLE

Quake survivors bounce back

by **BARRY ALLEYNE**
in Matsushima, Japan

THEIR WORLD WAS ROCKED in the space of a few hours six years ago.

But not only have things returned to a semblance of normalcy for Shiga Kumi and Kyo Amano, they have picked up the pieces and stuck them back together again in an effort to put their little seaside town back on the tourism map.

Both Kumi and Amano live in the Japanese town of Matsushima, part of the larger Myagi prefecture, one of Japan's most beautiful and largest tourism-driven areas, with its seafood and historic temple built by a Samurai warlord more than 400 years ago, being the main attractions.

Massive earthquake

Both have a similar story to tell.

They were both at work, about a mile apart in Matsushima, one on land, the other on water, when Mother Nature played an evil joke, coming up with a massive 9.0 magnitude earthquake on March 11, 2011.

Amano had just said goodbyes to a group of customers at her vegetarian restaurant Umagi after 2 p.m., when the earth suddenly got angry and sent everything falling from the shelves violently.

In the space of minutes, her restaurant and almost every building around it was in ruins.

Kumi, a tour operator on a ferry a half-mile down

the road, was at work telling tourists about the beauty of the numerous islands within the Matsushima archipelago, when a sudden noise from beneath the boat left visitors speechless, thinking that Armageddon was upon them.

"I knew it was an earthquake. I could feel from the force of the water it was coming from the sea bed," she said through a translator in a quick interview between tours over the weekend. "But I was glad I was on the water. I knew the people on the land would be in a much worse position."

Two hours later, her worst dream became a reality.

Her home on the mainland had no chance when a 25-foot wall of water from a resulting tsunami tore through the streets of Matsushima, coming to rest a mere 40 feet from the city's most treasured asset, the Zuiganji Zen Temple, a structure dating back to before 1600.

But not everyone in Matsushima was that lucky on the fateful day.

The earthquake had taken dozens of lives, and virtually most of the housing stock was demolished. Since the authorities had warned of the pending tsunami, most villagers left their earthly belongings and fled to higher ground behind the temple.

Residents later learnt they were saved from a worse fate because the many islands nearby had helped reduce the wave



SHIGA KUMI speaking to tourists on one of the ferry boats which take visitors around the Matsushima Bay. (Picture by Barry Alleyne.)

size of the tsunami from 30 feet.

No business

Back on land, Amano, faced with a crushed restaurant and every visitor fleeing the city, was forced to fire her 12 employees.

For almost 12 months, she had no business, and made no money.

But then in the middle of February 2012, a desperate Amano noticed a special flower called fuki spreading from an earth that had been barren since the disaster.

"When I saw the first flower growing, it inspired me. It made me feel that if Mother Nature can restart

with this growth, I can restart with the business," Amano told a six-strong group of journalists from the Caribbean and Pacific, part of a special programme organised by the Association for Promotion of International Cooperation and Foreign Press Centre Japan.

Amano revealed that a couple of her staff had been

killed in the earthquake, but she quickly called the other workers and informed them of the fuki flower and how she was intent on reopening.

Now those same workers shuffle through the restaurant serving guests in a much more strong and earthquake-protected building.

Kumi, too, has restarted



RESTAURANT owner Kyo Amano had to wait almost a year before rehiring 12 workers at her seafood establishment.

(Picture by Wakaphotos.)

her life in a new home, and is once again behind the microphone, telling tourists not only about the beauty of the Matsushima islands, rated as one of Japan's three best scenic sites, but also retelling the tale of what her countrymen now call 3:11.

In the face of both women, behind those worldly wrinkles, soft smiles and glimmering eyes, is a resilience to never let anything stop Matsushima from being the best it can be.


And now there is a hustle and bustle in the city once more, even as a super typhoon approaches. Matsushima residents may be wary of Mother Nature but go about their everyday lives ready to build back better once again, if need be.

NOTICE

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Notice is hereby given of a Special General Meeting of Barbados Police Co-operative Credit Union Ltd to be held at the Prince Cave Hall, District "A" Complex, Station Hill, St. Michael on **Thursday October 26, 2017 at 5:00 p.m.**

AGENDA

- (1) Ascertainment of Quorum and Call to Order
- (2) Prayers
- (3) Amendments to By-Laws
- (4) Adjournment

Refreshments will be served

Members are asked to note that our office will close at **12:00 noon** on the day of the meeting.

By Order Of
SECRETARY
Keith Hope