



REBUILDING HOPE

Yu (Ito) Towery's Story of Helping Her People

On March 11, 2011, one of the greatest natural disasters in modern history hit the tiny islands of Japan. Instantly, the proud and orderly nation was left in chaos with the world watching. DBU graduate Yu (Ito) Towery '05 and '08, her husband Michael, and their two-month-old son Luke were stranded in the middle.

For years after the couple first married, they knew they would one day move to Japan to help with ministry efforts there. Yu was raised in a Christian family in the portside town of Sendai, Japan, although she met Michael (a graduate of East Texas Baptist University) while studying at DBU.

In November of 2010, the time was right, and the Towerys moved their life and then-pregnant Yu to Sendai. In January 2011, their first child, Luke Kai Towery, was born. In March, the disaster hit.

The epicenter struck only 80 miles from the Towerys' new Japanese home. Immediately, they lost power, water, and all phone service. It was snowing outside, and they tried to stay warm inside while the dangerous tremors of aftershocks continued for hours. The only source of outside communication was a little radio in their house, where they heard shocking reports of the devastation.

Life everywhere in northern Japan was suspended. The losses were astonishing (eventually claiming more than 19,000 lives). But the Japanese people are a nation of great resolve and determination.

They were patient in aiding each other, and Yu, likewise, was set on helping her people.

After their water came back on 24 hours later, the Towerys stood in line at the grocery store for hours on end, trying to buy food that could be sent to the disaster areas. With the manpower and resources they had available, they tried to do everything possible to help. But soon the situation in the Fukushima prefecture became too dangerous for them to stay.

Radiation was leaking into the air and water, and the U.S. Embassy urged all Americans in the area to leave. The rest of Yu's family would remain behind, but they all knew getting baby Luke out of dangerous air was the priority.

"Before we left the city, we stopped at my dad's office," Yu explained. "My dad has been so supportive from the beginning, and he kept reminding us that God would take care of us ... He wanted to pray for us, and he cried as he asked our Father to protect us. He held our baby boy one more time, and we left with such heavy hearts."

Their final destination was set to be Seoul, South Korea, but they couldn't leave the country until they had obtained an emergency passport for baby Luke. Rushing to get out of harm's way, they flew from the west coast down to Okinawa in southern Japan where they would be able to visit the U.S. Consulate.



Reunion in South Korea: (Left) DBU graduates Gracie Ha (middle left), along with her husband and daughter; April Mick (middle right); Erik Palmarchuk (right) help host the Towerys (far left and far right) during their stay in South Korea.

One of the first stops they made while waiting was to see friend and fellow DBU alumna, Noriko Wada '08 and '10. Noriko, who became a Christian while studying at DBU, now teaches at a local Christian school. "We attended the chapel service at her school," Yu wrote on her blog. "We had an awesome time of worship, and God reminded us how great He is. When we sang, our hearts were filled with prayers for the people of Japan. We want them to know our God who is greater, stronger, and higher than any other."

From there, the Towerys were able to get on a flight to Seoul, where they were greeted by the staff of Dr. Billy Kim's Far East Broadcasting Company. They were taken to the church where they would be staying and were greeted by more familiar faces from DBU, Yu's friends Gracie Ha '09, Erik Palmarchuk '08, brothers Max '10 and Marty '10 Lee, and April Mick '08.

Of course, as Yu expressed, "There was not a single day when we did not think about Japan during our evacuation period in South Korea. We felt like we left our heart in Japan. We were certain that God had called us to Japan to share His love and hope, but we thought about the Japanese people who were hurting and grieving without knowing Him."

In the midst of their displacement, however, the Lord continued to give the Towerys opportunities to share on behalf of the Japanese people. From April's classroom, to the church where Max and Marty's father is a pastor, to a chapel service at the Far East Broadcasting Company, Michael and Yu were overwhelmingly touched by the kindness and powerful prayers of the Korean people they met along the way.

When it was safe for them to return to Japan, they went back with the prayers and support of many Korean Christians, whose aid helped them fund the on-going disaster relief. Michael and Yu now travel several times a month to the devastated area, delivering fresh fruits and vegetables, food items, medicine, heaters, furniture, clothes, children's toys, and Bibles. Their relief work is made possible through donations of items like vans from the Baptist General Convention of Texas to the Japan Baptist Convention; boxes of clothing from their home church

First Baptist, Arlington; and of course, volunteer teams who have given up their time and money to come help plant seeds of faith and rebuild lives.

"When we first took boxes of clothing to the temporary housing areas, we wondered how they would share everything," Yu said. "We were amazed to see the people only take what they needed, not what they wanted. Many told us that they were okay and they wanted us to give what we brought to others who might need more than them."

The patience and kindness of those in temporary shelters have taught Michael and Yu to consider every day of life as a gift from God, as they seek to be good stewards of the time and message they have been given.

Looking back over the past year as rebuilding efforts in Northern Japan continue, it is clear the Lord has been moving and working in the hearts of those who have lost so much. Yu and Michael are encouraged by those they have seen turn to faith in Christ, and also by the constant prayers, love, and support they have received from Texas Baptists. As the next year of rebuilding begins, the Towerys continue to pray—that above all—they will be used as faithful messengers of the Lord's hope and love for the Japanese people.

Visit the Towerys' blog at:
www.blog.gcpn.org/thetowerys/

Helping Hands: (Top) DBU graduate Yuta Motegi '07 (left) and Michael Towery help a local man (center) clear debris from his house that was partially destroyed.

Evacuation Areas: (Middle) Yu Towery and her son, Luke, visit with a new friend and her daughter who live in a temporary shelter.

Relief Work: (Bottom) Michael, Yu, and Luke Towery in front of fresh fruits and vegetables that will be delivered to families in Northern Japan, who have been living in temporary housing since the earthquake.



心を尽くして主に信頼し、自分の分別には頼らず常に主を覚えてあなたの道を歩け。そうすれば主はあなたの道筋をまっすぐにしてくださる。Proverbs 3:5-6