

Choked With Sorrow

Written by Kimberly Morgan

Tuesday, 29 March 2011 13:32 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 March 2011 11:15



A Beaufortonian living in Japan reflects on the country she's grown to love as its people cope with overwhelming tragedy.

On September 11, 2001, I was driving to my job at a local newspaper in South Carolina. On the radio, I heard that a plane had crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers. I thought it was just a horrible accident, and when I arrived at work went into the Editor's office and told him the news.

Within thirty minutes, my life, and those of all Americans, was changed forever.

Choked With Sorrow

Written by Kimberly Morgan

Tuesday, 29 March 2011 13:32 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 March 2011 11:15

On March 11, 2011, I was at home in Japan watching TV. About five minutes before 3:00pm, I heard the wail of an emergency siren and an announcement in Japanese. My husband was at work, so I called him to be sure of what the siren was for--I thought it was a drill. He confirmed that it was a tsunami warning and that there had been an earthquake. I turned on NHK (Japanese news station), and was horrified at what I saw.

Within thirty minutes, my life, and those of all Japanese, was changed forever.

In the days since, I have struggled to organize my thoughts in a manner that can be properly articulated. It has been a blur of watching the news and communicating with loved ones, and grieving the losses this wonderful country has suffered.

First, we are safe. We live in Yamaguchi Prefecture on the southern part of Honshu Island. The affected areas are over 500 miles to the north of us. I also want to emphasize that we too are over 500 miles from the Fukushima nuclear power plant. To be blunt, we hit the geographical jackpot and escaped unscathed from the massive earthquake and resulting tsunami that ravaged the Japanese seashore.

Choked With Sorrow

Written by Kimberly Morgan

Tuesday, 29 March 2011 13:32 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 March 2011 11:15

The weekend after the earthquake and tsunami was spent watching the news, shocked and horrified. The phone systems were not working, and the internet was slowed to a crawl. We received an incredible number of emails and Facebook messages from loved ones trying to ensure we were alright.

As the news spread to America, the emails and messages became increasingly concerned. The American media is sensationalizing things to a level that is irresponsible. Much of the media is just fear mongering. It angers me and frustrates me as it is instilling panic in my family. Don't believe everything you read, and know if I were in any danger at all, my husband would buy me a ticket on the first plane out of here. Many people are convinced the governments of Japan and the US are lying to us about the threat we face, but I trust him and have faith that he will keep me safe.

Life for us has gone on as normally as possible. "As possible" means we continue to go to work, school, shopping, etc. but most of us have a pit on our stomachs. A pit from feelings of shock, anger, and sorrow. One of my English students put it best when she said we are all "choked with sorrow" over what is happening in Japan.

Many of the feelings I have now are very similar to the feelings I had after 9/11. Initially, fear; then, an overwhelming desire to help those in need and who are suffering. And finally, a strong determination to go on with life and not let the horrible things that are happening destroy our lives completely.

Choked With Sorrow

Written by Kimberly Morgan

Tuesday, 29 March 2011 13:32 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 March 2011 11:15

The Japanese people have been incredibly kind and warm to me. When I first arrived in this country, scared and not knowing a soul, they reached out to me and treated me like one of their own. Even though I lived less than a hundred miles from Hiroshima, site of so much suffering, they embraced me. Even though I'm the complete physical opposite of them, with very different social norms, they embraced me. They are very close to my heart, and I love them as the family they have become. To see them suffering as they are breaks my heart in a way that is physically painful at times. But what will not help them is pity and despair. They are also a very strong and resilient people, so I am trying to be the same way.

At the moment, much of the operations to help those up north are still in the rescue and recovery stages. Other than monetary donations, not much else can be done. The infrastructure, including transportation, has been destroyed, so it is logistically impossible to get material donations up to the worst areas. But take heart that the governments of Japan and the US (and other nations, too) are doing everything they can to assist the Japanese. The best way to help is to make a monetary donation to the Red Cross, or to donate blood at a local blood bank.

The images I have seen on the news have seared into my brain and make it difficult to sleep. The pit in my stomach has lessened my appetite. I am a little paranoid that every little bump and rattle I feel from jets flying overhead is an earthquake. But even in the face of all the sorrow and uncertainty, I cling to what I know for sure:

I am alive and OK. Those I love are also alive and OK. What I fear the most (another devastating earthquake) has not happened yet. I still have time to prepare (have a disaster kit ready, my important papers gathered, etc.). My husband always tells me the truth, so I can always count on him to let me know if I am in danger.

Choked With Sorrow

Written by Kimberly Morgan

Tuesday, 29 March 2011 13:32 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 March 2011 11:15

Until then, I keep the people of Japan close to my heart and pray for them. I have donated to the Red Cross and my husband is also doing his part with the efforts to help up north (as are all the Marines here). I am living my life as normally as I can, spending money in the economy and keeping a positive attitude. Just as the events of 9/11 changed my life in America, the events of 3/11 changed my life here in Japan. But just like 9/11, I choose not to give in to the fear and sorrow. I choose to carry on, with a stronger sense of purpose and keen sense of appreciation for all I have in my life. My husband has fought in wars and thus learned what is important in life: people you love. I have not fought in Iraq or Afghanistan, but the events of 9/11 & 3/11 have been my war in that they have taught me the same lessons.

Thank you all for your concern and love, but please give it those who need it the most: the Japanese people of northern Honshu Island and the Kanto Plain areas. May they find some peace and comfort in the face of overwhelming tragedy, and if they have lost loved ones, hope they may they be able to bring them home and put them to rest.

Don't believe everything you see or read on the American news.

And above all else, appreciate the love and people you have in your life, and carry on with a positive attitude.

Choked With Sorrow

Written by Kimberly Morgan

Tuesday, 29 March 2011 13:32 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 March 2011 11:15

Godspeed.

Kimberly Morgan is a native of Beaufort and has lived in Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan for the past two years. Her husband is active duty in the United States Marine Corps, and she teaches English Conversation in Hiroshima, Japan.