

Fukushima's Stolen Lives: A Dairy Farmer's Story of How Nuclear Power Destroyed a Community and a Way of Life

By Kenichi Hasegawa

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Chapter One

All of a Sudden, We Were Radiation Victims

Friday, March 11

—The Great Earthquake—

2:46 p.m., March 11, 2011: At the moment the Great East Japan Earthquake struck, I was driving my large tractor, tilling the ground in a field near my house.

I was a dairy farmer in a village in Fukushima Prefecture called Iitate (pronounced “Ee-tah-tay”). Every spring I plowed the fields and planted the grass that I would later feed to my cows. As I worked, the first thing I heard was the shrill ring of my mobile phone. It was an earthquake warning. I stopped the tractor, and immediately felt the ground beneath me begin to violently shake.

It was obvious that this was a major earthquake, and it continued for what seemed like an exceedingly long time. Soon, the field looked like an ocean, heaving with waves. Cracks opened up in the earth, one after another, in rapid succession. A huge, 50-meter fissure ripped across the land, followed by another and then another, surrounding my tractor. I sat, stunned and in awe, as the ground beneath me was tearing apart. I had never experienced anything like this before.

At last, I was able to climb down from the tractor and run—until I was seized by the fear that the tractor could easily disappear into a rift in the ground. A single tractor costs several million yen. I couldn’t afford to lose it; so, with the ground trembling beneath me, I rushed back to the tractor, climbed up and drove at top speed out of

that field, finally stopping where it seemed relatively safe. Leaving the tractor, I ran to my car and drove home. I was frantic with worry for my family and home.

As I drove, I saw more cracks both in and beside the road. In places, the ground had completely collapsed. My house is about 500 meters from the field where I had been working. The first sounds I heard as I got close to home were the loud, distraught cries of my own terrified cows.

My parents, wife, and eldest son's wife were all at home. Thankfully, no one had been injured. The damage to my house was limited to several fallen roof tiles.

The area where I lived is a hamlet, or sub-unit, of litate known as Maeta (pronounced "Mah-eh-ta"), and is located in the northern part of the village. I was the kuchō, or administrative leader, of Maeta, and so it was now my responsibility to go into the community to assess the extent of the damage caused by the quake—both to people and to property.

It was later confirmed that the earthquake had registered a magnitude of almost 6 in litate. Going door to door, I found the occupants of every home gathered outside; among them, several sat trembling inside cars that they had moved out of their garages. Fortunately, in our area, not a single person had been injured. Among the homes, several had been damaged from tiles falling from the roof ridge beams and there were stone fences that had completely collapsed. I remember thinking, *Repairing all of this is going to take a huge effort and a lot of time.*

After going over the entire area, I could finally go home. Once there, I met some employees from the Village Hall who had driven to my house. Because both mobile and landline phone service had been interrupted, the local government had sent them to communicate directly with the community. They asked me to verify any damage that had occurred, and since I had already done that, I told them what I knew.

Throughout the entire region, phone and electric lines had been cut off the moment the earthquake had struck, and were completely unusable. At magnitude 6.0, it was an incredibly strong earthquake. I didn't think that the power or phone service would be restored any time soon.

The TV didn't work. Over the radio, I heard the blaring of a tsunami warning played over and over, like a broken record. A tsunami would only prolong the power outages. As a dairy farmer, the first thing I worry about when the power goes out is

how I'm going to milk my cows. The milking is done by machine and must be done every day, morning and evening. Otherwise, the cows suffer from painful infections like mastitis, which is a big problem.

Luckily, I owned a large generator. I had never had to use it before, and I wasn't sure how to wire it up to my barn. But, I had a cousin who ran an electrical shop in town. I couldn't call him, of course, so I drove over to his place and asked for his help. Together, we got electricity to the barn and milked the cows. After that, I wired the generator to the house. The lights came back on, and we turned on the TV to see incredible images of the tsunami that were being filmed from a helicopter.

The tsunami was surging onto the Fukushima coast. The cities of Sōma and Minamisōma, to the east of Iitate, clearly had suffered extensive damage. The details were scarce. I desperately wanted to call and check on my friends and acquaintances in Minamisōma, but since the phone lines were down, all I could do was worry.

Once again, I got in my car once and rushed to the Village Hall, hoping to use a phone there to contact friends, but the power was still out. Later, I realized, that even if I had been able to use the Village Hall's phone, the friends that I wanted to talk to would not have had access to a phone, anyway. Nobody at the office had any more information that I had.

A task force had been set up in one of the Village Hall's rooms. Beneath the light of a dangling, naked bulb powered by an emergency generator, village leaders, including the mayor, were discussing how to respond to this disaster.

The tremendous aftershocks continued into the evening. My daughter and her children took refuge at our house. Not knowing when another earthquake would strike, we went to bed in our street clothes. We spread out our futons in the middle of the living room. We slept side by side: my father, my mother, my wife and me, my daughter and her family, my eldest son and his family, and my younger son.

A moment before the first earthquake struck, earlier that day, my daughter-in-law was standing in the doorway. The wife of my eldest son, she had just arrived home from an appointment with her OB/GYN. She was pregnant. This was some wonderful news.

That night, surrounded by my family, I felt very fortunate. We had all made it safely through the day.

Saturday, March 12
—Explosion in Reactor Unit 1—¹

I think few people realized that TEPCO (the Tokyo Electric Power Company) has nuclear reactors in Fukushima Prefecture, since Fukushima gets its own electricity from the Tohoku Electric Power Company. That is to say, all the electricity generated at Fukushima Daiichi went to Tokyo, while the electricity used in Fukushima comes from Tohoku Electric.

The next day, March 12th, we still didn't know when power would be restored, nor did we receive any information from Tohoku Electric. News on TV provided only minimal information, such as which areas remained without power. But of course, this information was hardly useful since most households waiting for the restoration of power couldn't watch the news anyway, since few of them had access to generators.

After finishing the morning milking, I loaded my generator in the car and took it to the farms of other dairy farmers in the area. I realized that they were probably extremely anxious about being unable to milk their own cows. And I was right. After helping out at one farm, I took the generator to the next one, and was thus able to visit several households.

Actually, I owned two generators, a large one and a small one, so I used the large one for milking and the small one to power the TV, which became our most critical lifeline for information.

After the earthquake, I also started visiting the Village Hall several times a day. On the morning of March 12, people from coastal areas such as Minamisōma and Namie arrived in litate in droves. They were fleeing the devastation of the tsunami, and an evacuation center had been set up in the village for these evacuees.

To cope with the influx of refugees, all the women's associations in the village were mobilized, and we dairy farmers also donated milk. Our brand's milk plant— Rakuō

¹ At 3:36 p.m. on March 12, a hydrogen explosion occurred in Reactor Unit 1, blowing the roof off the building. Another hydrogen explosion occurred at 11:01 a.m. on March 14, this time in Reactor Unit 3. Around 6:00 a.m. on March 15, an explosion occurred in the spent fuel pool of Reactor Unit 4. Around the same time, there was another explosion in Reactor Unit 2. From March 11 to March 15, a series of explosions occurred at Fukushima Daiichi resulting in the release of large amounts of radioactive materials into the atmosphere.

Dairy— located in nearby Kōriyama, had been badly damaged in the quake. In addition, trucks used for milk collection couldn't be sent out because of a severe fuel shortage. This was a major blow to our business, and left us with no option but to throw away most of the fresh milk. However, we thought that the evacuees might appreciate some of it, so we donated it to them. And because that day was particularly cold, we served it to them warm.

We also prepared a giant pot of wild boar stew. In addition to dairy cattle, I also raise wild boar on my farm, so I provided the boar meat, while others brought winter vegetables, and together we made a stew called “Botan Nabe.” Its name comes from the shape of the pot in which it is cooked, which is said to resemble a *botan* (peony) flower. The women made about 300 servings, which fed everyone at the center, a meeting hall in front of the Village Hall called the Ichibankan.

At this point, of course, no one in the village was yet aware of the emergency unfolding at Fukushima Daiichi. All the evacuees in Iitate had fled the tsunami, and so there was no mention of the plant. Those fleeing the nuclear accident arrived in Iitate a little bit later. We in Iitate knew that it was possible that some people might decide to stay in the village, and we talked about building new housing to accommodate a possibly growing population. But that was the extent of our speculation and conversation about the future.

My house in Maeta is about 43 kilometers northwest of Fukushima Daiichi. The area of Iitate closest to the plant is the hamlet of Nagadoro, approximately 30 kilometers away. But most of Iitate lies beyond a 30 kilometer radius of the plant.

We learned on TV that the plant had also lost power, leaving those who worked there unable to cool the nuclear reactors. On the previous night (the 11th), the government had issued an evacuation order for residents living within a 3 kilometer radius of Fukushima Daiichi. At 6 a.m. the following morning (the 12th), it was expanded to include a 10 kilometer radius. Radiation had begun to leak from the plant.

And yet, on TV, Yukio Edano, who was then the chief cabinet secretary in Prime Minister Naoto Kan's cabinet, as well as other experts, kept repeating the same statements:

“There is no immediate health risk.”

“There is nothing coming from the plant that constitutes an immediate health risk.”

Even after the hydrogen explosion in Reactor Unit 1 on the 12th, they didn't call it an "explosion," but rather "a loud noise," or "some kind of explosion-like event." Because of these turns of phrase, we in Iitate initially believed that everything would be fine, since the village lies at least 30 kilometers away from the plant.

We mainly watched NHK (Japan's public broadcasting station), but NHK didn't broadcast any images of the explosion as it had occurred. Instead, they replayed images of the reactor with its roof blown off and its framework exposed. As strange as these images were to me, I couldn't imagine in my wildest dreams that shortly thereafter, we also would be forced to evacuate.

Sunday, March 13 to Tuesday, March 15

—Exposed—

One problem with small generators is that their voltage can fluctuate greatly. At one point on the 13th, a voltage surge from my generator burned out my TV. Unable to access my only source of information, I had no choice but to travel to Fukushima City on the 14th to buy a new one.

Most of the large electronics retailers had been damaged by the quake and were thus closed. Fortunately, however, one home center called "Cainz Home" was open, and they happened to be selling TVs.

So I was once again able to watch TV, but by now, the news had completely shifted from images of the tsunami to news about the plant. The situation there was becoming more and more worrisome. After the hydrogen explosion in Reactor Unit 1 on the 12th, another large explosion occurred on the 13th in Reactor Unit 3 at about 11 a.m., which was right around the time that I was out buying my TV. I heard the first reports about this explosion on the radio. The accidents were cascading.

Once again, I headed to the Village Hall after milking my cows. By then, power and phone lines were beginning to be restored.

At the evacuation center in front of the Village Hall, Iitate residents continued to take turns seeing to the evacuees. I also brought some more milk for them to drink.

At the task force office, I ran across an employee who was also an acquaintance. "Hasegawa-san," he said, "Do you have a minute?" He then told me that every radiation measurement he had taken with his dosimeter inside the building exceeded 40 microsieverts. He showed me the dosimeter (also known as a Geiger

counter), which was a large hand-held type with a silver sensor that resembled a microphone. The prefectural government had also set up a stationary monitoring post in the building, but those readings showed no significant increase in radiation. However, the hand-held dosimeter was consistently showing levels exceeding 40 microsieverts at every hourly reading.

At the time, I didn't understand the significance of the information, and could not appreciate how abnormal it was to have a reading in excess of 40 microsieverts.² But I immediately understood that, without a doubt, the nuclear plant accident was already affecting our area. TV newscasts had also been frequently reporting that readings directly around the plant had reached levels of “several hundred microsieverts,” and “several thousand microsieverts.” So I knew that something awful was happening.

This employee tasked with taking the measurements was a Village Hall employee who was the most knowledgeable about radiation. He also told me that he had taken the dosimeter home to measure radiation levels inside his house, and had found that they were about one-half of the levels measured outside.

As I left the task force office, he stopped me once more. “Hasegawa-san,” he said. “I just need to ask you not to mention these numbers to anyone. The mayor told me to not tell anyone under any circumstances.”

“But that's ridiculous!” I responded. “This is an emergency. People need to know.”

With that, I left. When I looked at my watch, it was already past 9 p.m.

My hamlet of Maeta, which has 54 households in total, is further divided into five sub-hamlets. Now that the phones were working, I telephoned the leader of each sub-hamlet and asked them to contact the residents and request that everyone

² As Tomohiro Osaki of the Japan Times notes, “The reading of 40 microsieverts per hour was far higher than the government-designated threshold of 0.23 microsievert that triggers decontamination.

“A reading of 0.23 microsievert per hour, which includes radiation emitted from the natural environment, translates into 1 millisievert per year — the upper limit recommended for the general public by the International Commission on Radiological Protection — and is used worldwide.”

(<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/04/11/national/iitate-farmers-cautionary-tale-translated/#.U0fcpFfY-1J>)

come to the Maeta meeting hall the following evening (the 15th) at 6:30 p.m. for an emergency meeting to discuss radiation levels in the village.

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The Maeta meeting hall was about 3 kilometers from my house.

Around 4 p.m., it started to rain; by the time the meeting started at 6:30, the rain had turned to sleet.

On the 15th, the government issued an order for the evacuation of everyone within a 20 kilometer radius of the plant, as well as an order for residents living within 20-30 kilometers to remain indoors. Part of Iitate was subject to the order to remain indoors, and this area later became known as an “Emergency Evacuation-Ready Zone.” On the morning of the 15th, the news reported that sounds of explosions had again been heard at Fukushima Daiichi, this time at Reactor Units 2 and 4.

The emergency meeting began exactly at 6:30. I told everyone everything that I had learned up until then from the TV news and from the Village Hall. Naturally, I also shared with them the information about hourly radiation readings exceeding 40 microsieverts.

In short, I told them not to needlessly go outside. I stressed that, in particular, children should not be allowed outside under any circumstances. If you have to go outside, I said, you need to wear masks, as well as clothing that completely covers your skin. When you return home, take off your street clothes immediately and bathe right away, washing your skin thoroughly. And under no circumstances should you eat vegetables that have been stored outside your house. Also, turn off your ventilation fans.

Some of my dairy farmer friends who lived within the 20-30 km “remain indoors” area had already left their cows and evacuated.

The meeting ended in about an hour. When I left the meeting hall, the sleet had changed to snow. That night, it snowed more than five centimeters.

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When I think back on it now, I wonder if I made a great mistake by asking my neighbors to come to a meeting that night. I simply wanted to give them accurate

information as quickly as possible. But beginning on the afternoon of the 15th, a northwest wind brought air from the southeast, directly from the direction of the plant. On that day in particular, a dense cloud of radiation was enveloping the village as I held an emergency meeting in the rain. I feared that I had exposed them all.

Takashi Morizumi, a freelance journalist and photographer who came to Iitate to interview the residents, later told me he had measured radiation levels of up to 100 microsieverts on his dosimeter around the Maeta meeting hall on the afternoon of the 15th. Levels may have been even higher, but his dosimeter only measured up to 100 microsieverts. And that location is exactly where I had asked my friends to gather on the very same day.

However, at that time, the country's evacuation order and order to remain indoors only applied to residents living within a 30 km radius of the plant. Even as late as the 15th, not a single person or agency had told us that radioactive contaminants had spread beyond that area.

To prepare for a possible nuclear accident, the national government had previously invested 10 billion yen into creating a nuclear contamination prediction system known as SPEEDI (System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information). With SPEEDI, the government was apparently able to accurately calculate in advance how much radioactive material could travel as far as Iitate in the event of an accident. However, we in Iitate—who were presumably the ones for whom this kind of information was most necessary—were told nothing. Why is that? If this technology is not used during such critical times, what exactly is the point of investing large amounts of taxpayer money into it? Suffice it to say, we were not even aware of the existence of SPEEDI until after we had been turned into radiation victims.

Wednesday, March 16 - Friday, March 18
—Temporary Evacuation—

The highest official radiation reading published by the Iitate Village Hall was 44.7 microsieverts on March 15th. This value was measured on a dosimeter installed by the Fukushima prefectural government. However, I was highly suspicious of the accuracy of this number. I had read a newspaper article about a reading of 100 microsieverts in the vicinity of National Highway 4, and it was already 40 microsieverts at the Village Hall on the previous day (the 14th).

I suspected that radiation had already arrived in Iitate as a result of the explosion in Reactor Unit 1 on March 12th. I also suspected that additional radiation came after the explosion in Reactor Unit 3 on the 14th.

Even if the wind was blowing toward the ocean during the day, it could have easily shifted direction in the evenings and thus affected the measurements. I wondered if nighttime winds might have carried even more radiation to Iitate.

A day later, on the 16th, I asked the mayor of Iitate, Norio Kanno, about his order to employees two days earlier not to divulge the information about dosimeter readings exceeding 40 microsieverts. But he wouldn't admit to issuing the order. "No, I never said that," he said.

Perhaps he was worried about panicking the residents. Or perhaps he suspected the dosimeter was malfunctioning. But the employee tasked with performing the tests clearly told me that the mayor had ordered him to keep quiet, and not to divulge this information under any circumstances.

The most important thing at that moment should have been to immediately prepare for evacuation, but instead, an information blackout had begun.

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On the 16th, one day after the emergency meeting at the Maeta meeting hall, I informed evacuees who had come to Iitate from elsewhere that radiation levels in the village were exceedingly high. Many of these people had suffered losses in the tsunami, but after hearing about the radiation, they once again began to evacuate, this time to places even further afield. Most of them were gone within a day.

When I realized that radiation levels were as high as they were, I knew that I had to get my children and grandchildren out of Iitate as soon as possible. Even I knew that small children were especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of radiation. And now we, who had only days before taken in refugees, were in the unenviable position of becoming refugees ourselves.

I contacted my younger brother who lives in Sakura, Chiba Prefecture, and my younger sister who lives in Mobarra, Chiba, to see who of my family could go where. Then, I siphoned the gas out of my car and filled the tank of our minivan.

Eight members of my family left Iitate that day: my father (80), my mother (81), my eldest son and his wife (31, 26), their child (2), my daughter's husband (34) and their two children (5, 3). But my eldest son's wife was pregnant, so perhaps it's more accurate to say 8.5 people?

My daughter was employed by the village, and had to remain behind to work for the task force. I decided to stay in Iitate with my wife (we were both 57), daughter (34), and youngest son (29). My son stayed to help with the cows. I had over 50 head of cattle and it was impossible for my wife and me to take care of them alone.

We left Iitate at around 10 a.m. I had arranged for my younger brother in Chiba meet us halfway. He also drove, and brought extra cans of gasoline. I asked him to do all this because I had no idea what we might encounter on the way to Chiba. I had been getting all my news from the TV, which provided absolutely no information about areas outside the 30 kilometer radius of the plant. Likewise, we had received no instructions from the village or the national government beyond the instructions that residents within 20 kilometers should evacuate, and that residents between 20 and 30 kilometers should remain indoors.

People in the village seemed to be waiting for guidance from the prefecture and the national government. But everything from them was too little too late. And while the government spun its wheels, children in the village were exposed to more and more radiation. I finally decided that enough was enough, and so I sent my family away myself.

In the end, I based this decision on what I'd learned the day before at the Village Hall about the dosimeter's persistent reading of 40 microsieverts. In truth, I probably knew at that very moment that I would need to evacuate my family. I might have known even earlier, on the 14th, after I had learned about the second hydrogen explosion. Then again, on the 14th, we still didn't know that radiation would likely spread as far as Iitate.

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In response to the nuclear accident, an emergency meeting of hamlet leaders was held at the Village Hall on March 17th. Things were only getting worse. Coordinated efforts to respond to the accident finally started on the morning of the 17th as a Self Defense Forces helicopter attempted to drop seawater into one of the reactors.

There were 20 hamlet leaders in the village of Iitate, and all of them attended the meeting. I was the leader of Hamlet 19, Maeta. The topic of the meeting was “temporary evacuation.” The Fukushima prefectural government, in consultation with the village, had arranged for a group evacuation to the city of Kanuma in Tochigi Prefecture. The village was preparing buses, but asked us leaders to conduct an emergency survey of residents in our hamlets to ascertain whether they would prefer to evacuate together as a group to Kanuma, or to evacuate independently to different areas. I returned to Maeta immediately and distributed the surveys to our five sub-leaders, telling them I would return in the morning to collect them.

By this time, most residents understood that the village was being exposed to radiation, and households with young children were particularly anxious. So we surveyed the entire village population to find out who wished to temporarily evacuate. However, unlike the forced evacuation order given by the national government (and based on the Act on Special Measures Concerning Nuclear Emergency Preparedness), this evacuation plan would be made, to the extent possible, by the local government.

At 5 p.m. the next day, the 18th, the village convened temporary evacuation information sessions in each hamlet.

Residents who elected to evacuate on their own would have to do so by relying on relatives and friends in other areas. This plan obviously had significant drawbacks. After several days or weeks of relying on loved ones, awkward and uncomfortable feelings were bound to develop and, depending on the situation at the plant, it was possible that evacuation would become long-term.

Even though I evacuated my own family, I did so before the issue of “group evacuation” had been raised. If it had been possible to evacuate as a group soon after the accident had occurred, I would have elected to go as a group to Kanuma.

At the meeting I urged everyone to evacuate as a group.

“Please consider going with your families to Kanuma,” I said.

In the end, however, most residents elected to evacuate on their own. In Maeta, out of 350 residents, 35 voted to evacuate as a group while the rest chose to go it alone. It was also decided that around 50% of residents in all hamlets would evacuate temporarily by the end of March.

And what about me? I decided to stay in Iitate until the very end. As the leader of Maeta, I couldn't entertain the idea of leaving before anyone else. At that moment, and with full conviction, I decided that among us all, I would be the last to go. I said to each resident of Maeta, "Whether you decide to leave on your own, or whether you decide to leave as a group, make sure you let me know about your plans. Don't leave without telling me."

Saturday, March 19 - Saturday, March 26 —Contamination—

Group evacuations were to be carried out on the 19th and the 20th, with a bus coming to Maeta on the the 20th.

On the 19th, the prefecture announced that the level of radioactive iodine in milk from Iitate cows was 5,000 becquerels (Bq) per kilogram. This was more than 16 times the provisional limit set by the national government (300 Bq per kilogram). Milk from Iitate could no longer be shipped out. From this day on, we dumped fresh milk that could no longer be consumed into the fields. As dairy farmers who found our purpose in life by producing safe food, this was an utter humiliation.

Meanwhile, at Fukushima Daiichi, efforts to cope with the accident began in earnest as Tokyo Fire Department hyper rescue teams set up a water cannon to spray water on Reactor Unit Three, which had been flattened by a hydrogen explosion.

On the 20th, thirty-five residents from Maeta left on an evacuation bus headed for Kanuma in Tochigi Prefecture. One day later, on the 21st, authorities tested the village's water supply for radioactive iodine. They detected 965 Bq per kilogram, which far surpassed the government's provisional limit of 300 Bq per kilogram.

All the water, including well water, was contaminated and couldn't be consumed. As a result, residents who had opted not to evacuate now needed bottled water. I assisted with the distribution of bottled water since, as the leader of Maeta, I knew how many individuals remained there. I communicated to the Village Hall exactly how much water was needed, and then delivered it to each home.

Hamlet leaders were given cars to use, and gasoline secured by the village was distributed for free. This was necessary since at this point, even if I had wanted to buy my own gas, there was none available at the stations. Thankfully, however, with the village car it became possible to move around.

On the 21st, the government announced that shipments of spinach and *kakina* [Japanese mustard plant] grown in Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma, as well as milk produced in Fukushima, would be temporarily suspended. In every area of eastern Japan, vegetables approaching harvest had been contaminated by radiation. Radioactive iodine levels reached 15,020 Bq near the border between Ibaraki and Fukushima, more than seven times the provisional limit of 2,000 Bq per kg.

I felt a tremendous sense of loss about the *kakina*, which has deep ties to Fukushima, and is a plant synonymous with spring. Generally it is eaten after being boiled in water flavored with soy sauce. This spring, however, it had become inedible. And perhaps not only *this spring*—I realized that we may never be able to eat it again. For some reason, this thought really brought home to me the seriousness of TEPCO's crime against us.

On the 22nd, an emergency session of the Fukushima Prefecture Dairy Cooperative (known as the Kenraku) was convened. Since I was also serving as the director of the cooperative at that time, naturally I attended the session, during which the national government issued an order to stop milk shipments. This stoppage applied not only to Iitate, but to all dairy farms in Fukushima Prefecture.

A special meeting for Iitate hamlet leaders was also held on this evening, where it was decided that the village would provide 20 liters of free gasoline that it had previously secured to residents who wanted to evacuate but could not do so because of a lack of fuel. However, the gasoline came with a condition: Whoever got free gasoline had to evacuate. Responsibility for distributing the gas coupons again fell to us as hamlet leaders. It was also announced that a lecture would be given three days later on the 25th for any and all residents who had remained in the village. The speaker was a professor from Nagasaki University—Noboru Takamura—an atomic bomb scholar and expert in radiation exposure. Professor Takamura had also been recently appointed as the “Fukushima Radiation Health Risk Management Advisor.”

Over two days—the 23rd and the 24th—I traveled around Maeta to hand out the gasoline tickets and lecture flyers that had been distributed at the hamlet leaders' meeting. But to my complete surprise, I saw that many of the temporary "voluntary evacuees" were starting to return to town. That is to say, just as I was distributing gasoline coupons and telling residents to leave, other residents who had previously evacuated were starting to return.

Despite the fact that high radiation levels had been confirmed in areas as far as Iitate, nothing in the landscape had fundamentally changed. The danger could not be seen. You cannot see radiation, and no one in town felt any physical effects. So people gradually began to return, with their children in tow. (Incidentally, however, those who had left together as a group did not come back.) What I had feared was starting to come true. And as a result, after this, the village leadership stopped actively trying to convince people to leave.

Meanwhile, on the 25th, Noboru Takamura of Nagasaki University gave a lecture at the Ichibankan, which was attended by about 600 people.

The crux of his speech was this: there is nothing to fear. *Nani mo mondai nai desuyo*. No problem whatsoever. You may carry on with life as usual as long as basic precautions are taken such as wearing a mask when going outside.

Mayor Kanno received the lecture with gratitude and relief. "Thanks to you, we are reassured," he said.

I, however, couldn't buy it. I couldn't at all believe the notion that everything was fine when it was becoming evident that the contamination was so severe that local water and milk were undrinkable. What lodged in *my* mind was suspicion—suspicion about "scientists" and "experts" like Professor Takamura. I couldn't accept the idea of resuming life as usual, with this lecture as the reassurance. For me, it was not at all fine. And I knew that if we were going to act in a way that we would not later regret, what the town needed was accurate information. I also knew that we needed *more* information in order to make the kind of judgment that Takamura had made.

Iitate had been flooded by the mass media ever since groups had started to evacuate. As the village, humming with activity, attempted to tackle the various problems that arose one after another, it also became necessary to respond to the

media and their questions. After a while, however, the Village Hall and dairy farmers' association started declining to meet the media, in part because it just wasn't feasible to grant all of their requests.

But I wanted to talk. I told officials at the Village Hall and the dairy farmers' association to send reporters to me if they started to become a nuisance. I said, "Tell them that Hasegawa in Maeta would be happy to talk to them." In truth, what I really wanted was information from *them*—all the newest information on the accident, and details about radiation exposure.

So after the 26th, people from various newspaper and television outlets started to regularly visit my house. I was surprised that reporters from as far away as the New York Times came, as well as German and French TV stations. I never refused to give an interview. I talked to everyone who came, and that's how I started gathering my own information. That's also how I later came to know that there were other experts who didn't think everything was *daijōbu*—"fine." For one thing, I learned that the US had already issued an advisory that all Americans living within 80 kilometers of the plant should evacuate.

There had been several reports on TV saying that entry into areas within a 40 km radius was prohibited. My house in Maeta is about 43 kilometers away from the plant, and many of the TV outlets had come to my house after being told that they couldn't visit the Village Hall, which is within a 40 km radius. Many of them looked so young—in their early twenties—and I couldn't help but worry about their health.

Saturday, April 2 to Monday, April 11
—A False Peace of Mind—

Included in some information given to me by a reporter was a radiation distribution diagram using data collected by an American reconnaissance satellite. Looking at it, I began to realize that the response measures being taken by the Japanese government were strange indeed.

The diagram showed the concentric circles around Fukushima Daiichi representing the government's initial response advising everyone within a 20 km radius to evacuate, and everyone between 20 and 30 km to remain indoors. It lay inside and to the northwest of the 30 km radius, like a protuberance from the circle.

When I looked at radiation distribution diagram, I could clearly see that the radiation was scattered, rather than contained within the concentric circles. There were places within 30 km where contamination seemed to be low. But I could also see that there was heavy radioactive contamination in areas to the northwest of the plant.

The radiation extended all the way to Iitate. The image was striking, looking almost as if a line of contamination was moving straight for Iitate.

I immediately tried to imagine what a radiation distribution diagram within Iitate would look like. Where were the especially contaminated areas, and what areas remained relatively free of contamination?

At my house, I had a large map of the eastern third of Fukushima prefecture—known as the Hamadori region—that I had previously gotten at a hamlet leaders meeting. So I grabbed that map, and colored in the part of Iitate that protruded from the 30 km circle. Then, when reporters came, I faced the microphones and cameras and pointed to this map.

“Highly radioactive contamination is extending beyond this 30 km circle,” I said. “It’s coming all the way here to Iitate. Why does the government ignore this fact? Why do the government’s response measures only extend to the areas inside the 30 km circle? Why isn’t *all* of Iitate included? If it were, we could accelerate the evacuation of residents.”

It was precisely on this point that I wanted to appeal to the government, via the media. In interviews, it was this point that I stressed the most. But on TV, this portion of my interview was always cut in its entirety from the broadcasts. In the end, for whatever reason, not a single media outlet asked my question: “Why isn’t all of Iitate included?”

Only Takashi Morizumi, the freelance journalist and photographer, was different. Morizumi first visited my house on March 27th. He had arrived in Iitate on March 15th, when, as you’ll recall, he measured radiation levels around the Maeta meeting hall at around 5:30 pm, and recorded levels as high as 100 microsieverts, maxing out his dosimeter. Although I didn’t know it until later, this happened to be just around

the time that I had convened an emergency meeting in that exact spot. I was appalled.

In the course of his career, Morizumi had also covered the Chernobyl accident, and he was able to give me detailed explanations about the dangers of radiation, and about what had happened within the 20 km radius of Fukushima Daiichi shortly after the accident. This was exactly the kind of information that I most wanted to know.

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On the 29th, thyroid examinations were conducted in the village for children under the age of 18. That said, all they really could do was examine whether or not iodine-131 was present in these children's bodies by placing dosimeters on their necks and measuring the radiation.

The half-life of radioactive iodine is eight days. Twenty-nine days had passed since the hydrogen explosion on the 12th, and over two weeks had passed since radioactive contamination in litate was confirmed on the 14th. It would have been much more useful to examine them immediately after the 14th. With the passage of so much time, even if they had been exposed to harmful levels of iodine-131, there wasn't likely to be much left now. Even I, a complete amateur, understood this. And unsurprisingly, all of the children examined were found to exhibit "no abnormalities."

With this result, litate's residents seemed to completely submit to the reassuring belief that everything was okay. The radiation hadn't just disappeared, and yet a strange feeling of relief settled into the village, and grew by the day. More and more, people started resuming their daily lives.

Around this time, relief goods started arriving in litate from all over the country— instant ramen, vegetables, and so on. Aside from vegetables harvested in the village, local milk, and tap water, there were no further restrictions about what could be consumed. As a hamlet leader, I delivered relief supplies to each household in Maeta.

It was just around this time that another expert, Professor Tetsuji Imanaka from the Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute, came to litate and measured radiation

levels around the village.³ I later learned that Professor Imanaka had spent two days (March 28th and 29th) measuring radiation levels in the air and soil. He used a car owned by the Village Hall and was accompanied by a local official who served as a guide.

At this time, the highest measurements were recorded in an area in the southern part of Iitate known as Nagadoro-Magata. Even at this late date, over two weeks after the hydrogen explosion, hourly readings were apparently as high as 30 microsieverts. Places in which hourly readings are 30 microsieverts or higher are known as “high dose rate areas,” and are usually areas—such as in nuclear reactors—where even highly qualified researchers are not allowed to enter without a compelling reason. While radiation levels in excess of that swirled around our town, Professor Imanaka watched as residents carried on with their daily lives as if nothing had happened, apparently feeling as though he had entered a strange new dimension.

Professor Imanaka told Mayor Kanno of his findings. In response, the mayor had one request: don’t publicize the data. Imanaka told him that it was extremely unusual for people to be living in a place with levels as they were in Iitate. Mayor Kanno, in tears, apparently responded by asking him whether there wasn’t *some* way to make it safe to stay despite the radiation raining down on the village. When Imanaka said *No, that’s just not possible*, the mayor reiterated his request to not publicize Imanaka’s findings. I heard about this conversation later from another professor who had been there, Koji Itonaga from the College of Bioresource Sciences at Nihon University.

Because of this conversation, and because of the mayor’s attempt on the 14th to hide the hourly 40 microsievert measurements taken at the Village Hall, I can only conclude that he intentionally tried to keep the truth from Iitate residents. And in fact, the mayor didn’t inform residents of Professor Imanaka’s findings via any kind of public announcement.

But keeping the truth about the contamination hidden was not something that could be done. To make matters worse, Professor Imanaka’s data had already been broadcast on Nippon TV’s network news, among other outlets. If the data had not

³ http://www.cnrc.jp/english/newsletter/nit153/nit153articles/02_Earlystagedose.html

been published, people would have blamed Professor Imanaka and his associates, and judged them harshly.

Apparently, Imanaka had told the mayor that they would wait just one day before publishing their findings. The following day, Kanno called Professor Itonaga with the same request to not publish the data.

I'm told that the findings were published via the internet on April 4th. But of course, the news didn't reach Iitate residents for quite some time later, since very few of us were frequently checking the internet for such data. Thus, this information, which was again most vital to Iitate residents, was not immediately conveyed to them.

I myself only learned of Professor Imanaka's data several days after it was published. I heard about it from Kenta Sato, my neighbor, one of Iitate's young leaders who is now fully consumed with the work of addressing the health problems of children who have been exposed to radiation.

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While Mayor Kanno was trying to conceal the data that Professor Imanaka had collected, he was at the same time putting great effort into hosting lectures by radiation experts. On the afternoon of April 1st, Professor Shunichi Yamashita (now retired) of Nagasaki University came to the village, where he earned the dubious nickname "Mr. 100-millisieverts." For this lecture, village councilmen and hamlet leaders gathered in a conference room on the second floor of the Village Hall. Naturally, I also attended. However, the media were denied access, and audio/video recordings were strictly prohibited. Ordinary citizens were also prohibited from attending. The fear that the substance of Yamashita's talk would somehow leak to the outside was extraordinary.

Yamashita's basic message was: "What the government is telling you is correct, and so you should follow their instructions. I am an expert, and so what I am telling you is also correct. If you listen carefully to what I say, there won't be any problems."

"It's okay, it's okay." His talk amounted to a parade of these words. My gut reaction was disgust. I thought to myself, this man has come here to give a talk without

knowing anything about the actual details of radioactive contamination in Iitate. And if that wasn't it, then what? Then he was just a man with the title of Expert, telling lies.

On March 30th, two days before Yamashita's presentation, the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) measured radiation levels in Iitate's soil and found that levels of iodine-131 were around 20 megabecquerels per square meter, which was twice that of the evacuation level set by the IAEA (10 megabecquerels per square meter). This information was broadcast widely in newspapers and on TV. Of course, the data was more complex. Discussions included comments observing that "the overall average is below the IAEA evacuation criteria if we take the average of all 15 locations," and comments noting that, nevertheless, "there are still places where levels exceed the evacuation criteria." Still, Yamashita didn't seem to care about any of these numbers, and thus declared everything to be fine. It was nothing short of astonishing. But the radiation wasn't disappearing from Iitate, no matter how earnestly Yamashita declared it to be "okay." Nothing changed the fact that our town was contaminated.

The only fact that emerged from Yamashita's speech was the fact that many people who heard it were relieved as a result. First among them was Mayor Kanno. Following his talk Mayor Kanno said to Yamashita, "Well, that is such a relief. Thank you very much." Saying this, he bowed his head deeply in a gesture of flattering respect. But for the residents of Iitate, there could have been no greater misfortune.

After Yamashita's talk I headed to Fukushima City to start looking for an apartment. I had decided that it would be impossible to live in the village any longer. My eldest son and his family had already evacuated to Chiba Prefecture, where my younger son lived, but I knew they couldn't stay there indefinitely.

Unfortunately, however, I wasn't able to find any good properties. Every decent place was already occupied by evacuees from within the 20 km radius of the plant. The only choice left was for my eldest son to remain in Chiba.

Saturday, April 2 - Monday, April 11
—Our Hometown, A “Planned Evacuation Zone”—

Stoppage of milk shipments in Iitate had continued since March 19th, when radioactive iodine was detected at levels in excess of regulatory levels.

On April 2nd, an informational meeting was held for village dairy farmers. Naturally, everyone was anxious about what was going to happen next. We invited executive and staff members from the prefectural dairy association, as well as representatives from JA [Japan Agriculture], with the aim of discussing the present situation as well as future expectations. I told them all of the information that I knew.

By that time, I suspected that continuing to farm in Iitate would likely be impossible. And precisely because of this suspicion, I wanted to broadly ascertain what was currently happening in Iitate, and so I actively publicized the meeting and opened the venue up to the media.

One totally unexpected response came from an individual from Yokohama who approached me directly the next day with a donation of money, saying that he wanted to help Iitate’s dairy farmer families.

Knowing that I couldn’t keep his gift all for myself, my wife and I together later went out to distribute the donations, which we divided up according to how many head of cattle each household had. When we visited the home of Masakazu Tanaka, a farmer in Nagadoro where radiation levels were especially high, he told me that the journalist Morizumi had just been in the neighborhood taking radiation measurements. Morizumi had told him that levels were ridiculously high—up to 1 millisievert an hour—at the bottom of the storm gutter of a neighboring house.

One millisievert is the equivalent of 1,000 microsieverts. I was astonished.

As I looked around, stunned by what had come to pass, I saw children playing outside. I saw laundry hung out to dry at so many houses. Adults, too, carried on as usual in the fields. Now completely out of patience, I got in my car and hurried to the task force office at the Village Hall.

The mayor wasn't in. However, the chairman and vice-chairman of the Village Board were, and I gave them a tongue lashing.

"I've just been to Nagadoro. They're measuring radiation levels of 1 millisievert at the bottom of rain gutters. Children are playing outside like nothing's wrong. Why aren't you evacuating them? What exactly *are* you planning to do? The children are being exposed to even more radiation. How are you going to feel when these children grow up and get married and have children of their own with all sorts of illnesses and problems? Are you going to take responsibility for that? How *can* you? If their risk could be at all lowered by evacuating them, why wouldn't you do it?"

The chairman said to me, "Hasegawa-san, even NISA (the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency) came to litate and said that everything is fine. Distinguished professors have come too. Everyone is telling us to relax, that there's nothing to worry about. What else do you want us to do? We need to just carry on farming, and if it's revealed later on that the rice has been ruined by radiation, then we can ask for compensation."

Nobody had ears for what I was saying, particularly after the distinguished officials and professors came to town telling everyone to relax. They had been completely brainwashed. I gave up, realizing it was pointless to try and convince them.

The next day, April 4th, I heard that integrated dosimeters from the Ministry of Education had arrived at the Village Hall. Integrated dosimeters are wearable dosimeters that quantitatively measure how much accumulated radiation a person has received. I went to the Village Hall right away to ask them to let me wear one. It was shaped like a pen that one sticks in one's breast pocket, with a large seal on it saying "Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology."

However, there were major problems with this dosimeter. For one, the batteries died after about only a month. What's more, the kind of batteries it required weren't readily available, so after it died I never used it again. An integrated dosimeter is useless if it doesn't constantly monitor radiation, if it doesn't continuously work for three to four months without a battery change, and if it doesn't take standard batteries like AA. Now that the reality of the accident was becoming clear, I realized that I needed a better solution.

Because I was living in an area contaminated with large amounts of radiation, I realized that I needed a Geiger counter for my own personal use. I searched for one, but they were sold out everywhere. Then I decided to borrow one from a friend in Fukushima City, but it only measured up to 10 microsieverts, which meant that it turned out to be useless in Iitate. When I turned it on, it always read “9.99 microsieverts.” In other words, Iitate had been exposed to abnormal levels of radiation. It was early June before I got my hands on a Geiger counter I could use in the village.

Morizumi-san had told me to look into getting Ukrainian-made Geiger counter, since Ukraine had had its own experience with a nuclear disaster. So I asked him to order me one on the internet. It was a machine that measured up to 100 microsieverts and it cost me 85,000 yen.⁴

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“Our community is under siege.”

These were the words of Katsunobu Sakurai, the mayor of neighboring Minamisōma, as he spoke in a video posted on YouTube, pleading for outside assistance.⁵ This was at the beginning of April, when the situation in Fukushima started getting more attention in Japan, and of course in foreign countries as well. I heard that Mayor Sakurai was originally a dairy farmer. Supplies of food and everyday goods had been cut off in Minamisōma since those outside the area, afraid of radiation, dared not venture in.

And yet, radiation experts continued to arrive in Iitate, one after another. On April 16th, the Fukushima Prefecture Radiation Health Risk Management Advisor, Noboru Takamura, came to town again, and gave a talk to the residents of Nagadoro and Warabidaira, two areas where high levels of radiation had been detected. Because this talk concerned different areas, I didn’t attend, but fellow dairy farmers who did told me that he gave the exact same speech—a barrage of “Everything is fine.”

However, on the very same day, a report issued by the Fukushima Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries stated that radioactive cesium at levels in excess

⁴ Around \$1,040.00 (2011 yen-dollar conversion rate)

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsbjfoynNiA>

of 5,000 becquerels per kilogram had been detected in fields in both Maeta and Nagadoro. At this time, provisional values about acceptable levels of “soil radioactivity concentrations” to serve as a guideline for planting crops still did not exist, and the Dept. of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries was still working on creating such regulatory values.

On March 25th, farmers in every region within the prefecture had been asked to postpone planting. In anticipation of the publication by the national government of provisional regulatory values, the prefecture had analyzed the soil in every region of Fukushima. However, the “5,000 becquerels per kilogram” level of contamination found in Iitate later became the government’s threshold level, and planting was prohibited in fields where contamination was found to be in excess of that number. Later on, fields with radioactive cesium levels of 22,000 Bq/kg were found in Iitate.

This is the reality of what Iitate had become. Farmers must not live in places where they cannot farm. As the so-called experts paid lip service and declared everything to be fine, the future of farming in the village was becoming more and more dire.

On the next day, April 7th, a meeting for the town’s hamlet leaders was held, which Mayor Kanno also attended. On that occasion, I said to the village, “Don’t keep dragging patronizing scholars into town who can only keep saying it’s safe, it’s safe, because we also need to listen to people like Professor Imanaka.”

It seemed that quite a few of the other hamlet leaders were sympathetic to my view. Then I argued that children should be evacuated immediately.

“Aren’t we taking a too-rosy view about what’s going on here? Is that it? If not, what exactly *are* we doing?” I asked.

On this day, integrated dosimeters on people who had continued to remain in the village—both adults and children—were in excess of 6 millisieverts. Government criteria had stipulated “shelter indoors” areas as places where integrated radiation exposure amounts due to the accident exceeded 10 millisieverts. That is to say, those were areas where people were prohibited from going outdoors. But it was just a matter of time before we exceeded the accumulated radiation exposure limit of 10 millisieverts.

Nevertheless, “temporary evacuation” remained the primary focus of the village leadership. In a meeting of hamlet leaders, a plan to send pregnant women and children under the age of three to a hot springs area outside of the village for a month was proposed, but this measure didn’t account for children over the age of three. Ultimately, however, due to considerable opposition, the proposal was not adopted.

On April 9th, I went to look at a single family house for rent in Nankōdai, Fukushima City. By this time, I felt that the only option left was to evacuate on my own. However, after calling my eldest son and his family back from Chiba, I realized that Nankōdai was also contaminated with high levels of radiation, so my son would once again evacuate, this time to a city in Yamagata Prefecture called Nagai. At this time, I was most preoccupied with the fact that the young people of Iitate needed to be evacuated.

This was also the day that the Agriculture Minister, Michihiko Kano, came to Iitate. I went straight from Fukushima City to the Iitate Village Hall. As a dairy farmer, there was no way that I could go without speaking to Minister Kano. I forced my way into the venue where the Minister was holding a conversation with members of the Village Council, and said to him,

“Minister, terrible things are happening in the village now because of the accident. The milk is no good. We can’t sell it, so we pour it into the ground. Is the government going to buy our cows? The cattle feed is also contaminated. But cows produce milk even if they’re not fed, so they are getting emaciated. As a dairy farmer, I can’t bear to see them like this. Since the government is responsible for the fact that their feed is contaminated, won’t you at least pay for that?”

“I understand,” he replied. “And we have retained 200 tons of feed.”

Astonished, I was at a complete loss for words. What was he thinking? Two hundred tons of feed is the amount that one dairy farmer will give to his cows over the course of a year.

However, there was one useful outcome from this meeting. An official from the Livestock Technology Office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries who had accompanied the Minister approached me as they were leaving, gave me

his business card and said, "We'll take care of everything." So I now had a direct connection with the national government, and I later used this official as my pipeline to engage in various negotiations for myself and other dairy farmers.

The stress that farming families in Iitate were under during this time is beyond imagination, and it touched my own family as well. On April 10th, the day after I met the Agriculture Minister, my 81-year old mother, who had returned from Chiba on April 7th, suffered what seemed like a heart attack. As her body grew colder, we called the ambulance, which took her to a hospital in Fukushima City.

The catalyst for her attack was the seemingly endless earthquake aftershocks, which caused her to develop a severe case of "earthquake phobia".

Added to that was the stress of radioactive contamination. In the several years before the nuclear accident, my mother had led a very predictable life. But then suddenly, because of the radiation, she was no longer able to. Everything was different; we couldn't even eat the vegetables in the fields in front of us. That she would be overwhelmed by stress was only natural.

She had also been taken to the hospital by ambulance once when she was in Chiba, but while undergoing testing she recovered enough to go home. She wasn't hospitalized overnight this time either. But I thought that it would be better for her to be in Chiba, and so I sent her and my father back once again.

My eldest daughter who worked in the Village Hall was also under an enormous amount of stress, and because of the accident, she was now living separately from her small children. I'm sure the children in Chiba were under a considerable amount of stress as well but it seemed to be hardest on their mother.

She spoke with them every night on the phone. "Mama, I miss you!" they would say, and she would cry. She called me once, frantic and crying.

"I can't live like this. It's intolerable."

Seeing her like that was hard on me too.

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The day my mother collapsed, yet another scholar beholden to the government came to town. This time it was Professor Nobuyuki Sugiura from Kinki University. He gave a talk about radiation to parents and guardians in the auditorium of the litate Junior High School.

As the same phrases were repeated - "It's safe," "Everything is okay" - it became increasingly difficult for other voices to be heard, such as the voices that said "No, it's dangerous" and "We need to evacuate." To me, this was a terrifying thing. They say that "If you tell a lie 100 times, it becomes the truth," but that, of course, is just complete brainwashing. It was around this time that a strange atmosphere enveloped litate, one in which viewing the radiation as dangerous was considered wrong.

However, on the same day, April 10th, Mayor Kanno was unofficially informed at a meeting at the prefectural governor's residence that all areas of litate were to be designated as part of a "planned evacuation zone." Ordinary citizens in litate learned of that designation on the following day, April 11th.

A "planned evacuation zone" was an area in which integrated dosimeter readings were expected to be 20 millisieverts or more per year. The original report stipulated that, after a preparatory period of about one week, the government would prepare buses to evacuate residents living in the planned evacuation zone. And litate was specified in this new evacuation area.

To be honest, I didn't expect it to come to this, where the village was specifically named for evacuation. I thought that it we would simply receive instructions to stay indoors. I was surprised, but at the same time, I found it hard to suppress the anger simmering in my stomach, and it soon boiled over.

Until the very day before, a seemingly revolving door of self-serving academics had pronounced that everything was fine; they had given their expert seals of approval on the prospect of continuing to live in the village.

And yet now it was as if none of that had even happened. Suddenly the government was saying, “It’s not safe to continue living here, so you must evacuate.” What’s more, an entire month had passed since the accident. When I thought of how I and all the good people of Iitate had patiently withstood everything, I lost my temper. How dare they play with our lives like that!

For what purpose had all those “radiation experts” like Professor Yamashita from Nagasaki University come to Iitate? If Iitate was indeed as safe as they had said, why didn’t they now come out, backed up by their impressive credentials, to vehemently oppose the government’s “planned evacuation zone”?

I am not a man who understands complicated things, but to me they seemed nothing like experts, and everything like complete clowns. How incredibly careless.

The only thing I know for certain is that they did not come here for the sake of the people of Fukushima. The fact of their coming, the information they shared with us—in the end, none of that was of any use to us, the victims of the nuclear accident. Perhaps they thought no more of us than they did of the guinea pigs in their laboratories. But I decided then and there that I was not going to become Professor Yamashita’s lab animal.

On the next day, April 12th, the Fukushima Daiichi accident was rated a Level 7 event on the international rating scale, making it as bad as the Chernobyl accident. Immediately after the accident on March 11th, it had been at Level 4. On the 18th, it was raised to Level 5, equaling the severity of the 1989 nuclear accident at Three Mile Island. But on this day, it finally ranked with the world’s worst nuclear accident.

Very little about what was really happening had been made clear to us, whether about contamination, the scale of the accident, or what had actually occurred at the time of the accident. At first everything was downplayed, and then, little by little, more was revealed.

In this situation, what were we—the ordinary citizens—to do? Whose words should we have trusted? What could we have done then, to not regret those choices in the future? After the accident had occurred, the choices that were made based on what the government or patronizing experts wanted us to believe, could not be unmade.

They were not at all trustworthy. And this is what nuclear plant accidents are like. I guess you could say that these were the lessons that the victims of the Fukushima disaster had to learn for themselves. Those lessons are here, plainly written, for the sake of future generations, for our children and grandchildren in the 21st century.