

The following story was written by the madam who ran a seashore hotel in Tsurishihama in Fukushima Prefecture. The hotel was swept away by the tsunami, but it's a true story she heard from a fisherman who used to visit the hotel. Now, this madam is visiting many places with her picture-story show as a storyteller to share his experience. Now, I would like to introduce this for everyone as well.

### **The most important thing next to life itself**

1. That day, March 11.

After the big earthquake a big tsunami warning was given.  
I hurried to the beach to sail out to the off shore.

2. For fishermen, the most important thing next to their own life is their ship.  
We must save our ship first of all.

The shallower the water, the bigger the tsunami.

The best way to save a ship is to sail it to the off shore.

If we can save it, we can fish again from tomorrow. We can sustain our lives.

For fishermen, what is most important is the ship. The ship is the most important above all.

3. The waves in the port already began to ebb.

If the water ebbs completely, you can't sail. I was impatient.

I hurriedly untied the rope which moored it, and headed my ship to the off shore at full steam.

I knew the ships of my colleagues would follow, one after another. Everyone was desperate to save his ship.

4. "Tsunamis are coming. They come from the North."

My colleagues informed me over the ship's wireless radio.

I rushed to look North, then I saw a big wave.

Wow. I have been a fisherman for fifty years, I have never seen such a big wave.

It was like a building made of water was towering over me.

Great fisherman that I am, I was scared! How could I ever get over this wave.

5. Intuition based on experience told me that if I went straight over the wave, the ship would break into pieces when it fell from the top of the wave.

So, over the wireless I said, "Everyone, listen to me carefully. Cross the wave climbing at full steam aslant at 45 degrees. When you get to the top, turn off the engine. Be sure to turn off the engine, otherwise you will fly over the wave."

Some of them were young fishermen without experience. But with that, we could overcome the first wave.

6. Before I could feel relieved, the second wave came. The second was small, so we were okay.

As I was feeling we had made it, I heard a voice scream from the wireless radio. "Look south!"

When I looked south, I was speechless.

What was reflected in my eyes was not a wave anymore. It was a wall of water.

I had never seen such a wave. However fast I climbed it, I could never get over. I was resigned.

7. My life would come to an end. At that time various things came to mind. I laughed to myself.

"It's said memories race through the mind like a spinning light. It was the truth. "

It wasn't a time to laugh, but I was laughing. I didn't know why.

Remembering, my life had been pretty good. There were all sorts of things, but I can say it was a good life.

I tied my body with a rope to my ship.

8. At least I wanted people to find my corpse. Then I called the names of my family one by one.

Grandchildren, daughter, son, wife of my son.

"Thanks for everything." And, last, I called my wife's name.

"Tetsuko! Thank you. I was happy married to you. Thank you. I leave everything up to you now."

After shouting like that, I was ready myself for death. And I ducked my ship into the water wall at a right angle, at full steam.

9. After that, I wonder how much time passed.

It seemed like that I lost consciousness under the impact at the moment I entered the tsunami.

When I came to myself, I looked around.

There was a scene like I'd never seen before. The surface of the sea was covered with white bubbles like in a bubble bath.

"I must be dead...?"

When I pinched myself, I don't know why, but I didn't feel anything, so I figured I must be dead. .

"Ah! So, this must be the River Styx. "

I had never seen such a sea, so I figured I must be crossing the river Styx. Unconsciously I turned to the side, and I saw my colleagues' ships.

10. "Ah, that guy died, too. We are crossing the River Styx together. "

I thought I was dead, so I figured he must have died too..

"Are you OK?" When I heard the voice of my colleague from a wireless radio,

I realized I was still alive. Up to that moment, I was convinced I was in the other world.

I tried to touch my body here and there. "I am alive....I really am alive..."

I will never forget the joy of that moment.

11. But I couldn't just sit there being pleased!

Because the tsunamis attacked one after another.

The fifth wave, the sixth wave, and in between, attacked from behind by the receding waves.

When the ebb wave came, I turned the bow 180 degrees; when the tsunami came, I turned it back.

Over and over again, how many waves I overcame. Like a man in a trance.

12. Before long it became dark around us, and the tsunamis got gradually smaller.

Navigating at night is dangerous, so we stayed on the sea all night.

I felt helpless, I was lonely. We colleagues encouraged each other over the wireless radio.

"Hold out until dawn." "A little longer. Hold on. "And before long, the sky was white with daybreak.

13. I don't care. Even if my ship is destroyed, I don't care.

I pushed through the debris. Sometimes I crashed my ship into debris. I hurried to the port.

"Here... Where... This isn't the port of Tsurishi! No, it is the port of Tsurishi... Tsurishi..."

14. Arriving at the port, I could hardly believe my eyes.

Because there were no houses and no town, nothing was where it should have been .

There was only debris covered with mud.

I was wrong.

I had thought next to a fisherman's life, the important thing was his ship.

So, I saved my ship by sailing it out to the off shore, at the risk of my life.

But ...but...

15. I came back and found my house and my family had been washed away...

My son's family was saved, but my wife was found ten days after she was washed away...

Her corpse...

The most important thing next to life itself is not a ship, no. There was something more important.

Why didn't I stay by my family, why didn't I protect my home. Why, oh why did I leave my family alone to save a ship!?

16. Fishermen of Tsurishihama beach saved their ships.

Thanks to this there were 36 ships left, only 10 ships were washed away.

Among the destroyed ports, it was only Tsurishihama that had so many ships left. That is a miracle.

We saved our ships by risking our own lives.

So we have ships left. What can we do with them?

17. Because of the nuclear accident we aren't allowed to fish a single fish. Fishermen who don't fish. We're not fishermen. You can't call us fishermen.

I apologize to my wife every day and every day with my hands pressed together. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Every day and every day I cry. I regret. I am sad. I suffer.

People comfort me. Time passes and one day you will forget everything, they say. But I don't forget.

I was wrong. About what's most important.

I want to forget but I can't. I am thinking that I must not forget.