

The Harrowing Account of the Man Who Was... Swept Out To Sea

The horrific tsunami that struck Japan on March 11, 2011 left more than 15,000 people dead. Those who barely escaped spoke of the miracles that saved them. This is perhaps the most amazing survival story of all—the harrowing account of one man who was swept out to sea by the monstrous waves and spent days stranded on the roof of his home, floating miles from land. Yet, he somehow lived to tell about it.



A massive earthquake struck off the coast of Japan on Friday, March 11, 2011. Measuring an astounding 9.0 on the Richter scale and lasting six minutes, the quake triggered a far more deadly force. The massive shock that hit the Pacific Ocean near the shore of Japan unleashed an enormous tsunami.

The ocean waters retreated abruptly from the shoreline, only to return with a vengeance. A wall of roiling water dozens of feet high came crashing down, flooding hundreds of miles of land with terrific force. It charged inland with frightening speed, sweeping up anything that stood in its way with a deafening roar.

The images that appeared in the media after the tsunami struck are shocking. Cars drove along the streets, their drivers confident that they were safe after having survived the earthquake. By the time they saw the wall of seawater rushing at them, it was too late. The ocean was rushing far faster than the top speed their cars could achieve. And the colossal walls of water reached 133 feet high in some places. Just

the noise that accompanied the tsunami was paralyzing.

Photos taken by reporters show huge ships being tossed around like toy boats and smashed into bridges by waves 10 stories high. Tall buildings were flattened like huts while people and cars disappeared in the mass of water that flooded in. The force of the destruction resulted in dozens of fires that raged uncontrolled, and Japan's nuclear facilities suffered hair-raising damage.

Confirmed deaths surpassed 15,000 while approximately another 7,000 people were hurt, and 3,287 were never accounted for.

A Lumberyard Worker

Hiromitsu Shinkawa lived in a village of Japan's Fukushima prefecture. The region is economically successful, and in Shinkawa's neighborhood, most people earned their living in the fertile rice paddies or by fishing. Others worked in the lumber industry, chopping down the trees from the neighboring mountains and milling it into usable wood.



The tsunami carried this boat onto land and deposited it on a rooftop.



Japan was hit by flooding and then by fires.

During their leisure time, the villagers enjoyed a fantastic view of nature. The rich soil was covered in greenery as far as the eye could see while the clear waters of the sea shone a deep blue. Life was a virtual paradise for those who worked to enjoy it. Shinkawa himself was a fourth-generation resident of his hometown. His father was a successful rice farmer, and Hiromitsu followed in his father's ways, enjoying his own success.

Shinkawa lived in a home he built with his own hands one mile from the seashore. Unlike most homes in the village, Shinkawa's house was constructed of cement poured around a metal frame. It was designed to stand firm in the face of the worst tidal waves the sea might disgorge, and its owner felt completely safe inside. Outside, a lush garden gave forth varied fruits and vegetables. Shinkawa earned more than enough to comfortably support his wife, daughter and himself.

On the night before the tsunami struck, Shinkawa sat on a chair in front of his home and relaxed by feeding rice to the pigeons he raised. Even as a young boy, Shinkawa had enjoyed observing pigeons and playing with them. The older villagers used to call him by the disparaging nickname "the father of the pigeons." His reverie was disturbed by the



People watch the frightening tsunami from the roof of a building.



Members of Japan's National Diet (parliament) react fearfully to the tremors of the earthquake (the prime minister is in the center).