

Director films lives of evacuees

The Yomiuri Shimbun

FUKUSHIMA--Documentary film director Hiroshi Shinomiya, moved by the plight of people displaced by the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, has made a film about the daily struggles of villagers forced to leave their homes in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture.

The director is known for his 1995 documentary "Scavengers," which tells the story of garbage-collecting children at the garbage site dubbed Smoky Mountain in Manila. The original title of "Scavengers" is "Wasurerareta Kodomotachi" (Forgotten children).

Shinomiya's new film is titled "Wasurenai Fukushima" (We'll never forget Fukushima).

The 90-minute film chronicles the daily lives of victims forced to live far away from their hometown; it makes the case for the importance of leading a simple, quiet life.

Shinomiya, 54, was born in Sendai and debuted as a director in 1986.

He previously garnered praise both at home and abroad for "Scavengers" as well as his 2001 film, "Kami no Kotachi" (God's Children), which received the grand prize at the Cinemambiente environmental film festival in Torino, Italy.

In April last year, immediately after the March 11 disaster, Shinomiya visited Iitate for the first time.

Earlier he visited disaster stricken areas in Miyagi and other prefectures and saw the extent of the damage.

But the spectacle of Iitate village with its storefronts shuttered and no children to be seen shocked him.

He made up his mind to produce a film to document the changed reality of the village and its residents.

By traveling back and forth between his office in Tokyo and Fukushima Prefecture,

Shinomiya filmed more than 100 victims of the disaster.

He especially focused on a family with six members who lived in the Itoi district of Iitate. After the family took shelter in a house in Kawamata, Fukushima Prefecture, at the end of May last year, the mother was too exhausted to care for basic household

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affairs.

The eldest daughter said: "I don't like towns. I want to live in a quiet place where I can hear the sounds of animals."

Later, the family moved to a temporary housing unit in Fukushima. The father, who worked as a construction worker, was involved in an accident in January, and became physically disabled.

At the hospital, Shinomiya was asked by the family to stop filming, and he obliged.

But he was determined to include the family's tribulations he had captured so far in the film.

"[I thought] I have to show people the unfair situation this family had to deal with," he said. "They were forced to move from their hometown, and the bonds the family formed in the community were torn apart."

Shinomiya also traveled to Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, to film the family of a dairy farmer who committed suicide after he became discouraged about the future.

The film also depicts another dairyman from Namie in the prefecture, who steadily conducts a street campaign calling for payment for the suffering caused by TEPCO in front of Tokyo's Shimbashi Station.

Shinomiya asks: "What's truly important? And when people lose it, what will happen to them? What happened in Fukushima Prefecture is a question that all Japanese people have to solve."

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