

My Message for the 23<sup>rd</sup> Touhoku Occupational Therapy Congress in Japan June 17, 2011

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Title: My memory of 20 years ago

There is a proverb “Ten years seems like ancient history”, so this memory is from a very long time ago. It was the early morning of Saturday, September 28, 1991. I woke up to a noise which resembled an explosion. My wife got up a little faster than me looked outdoors. She shouted, “our car is about to be smashed”, and I rushed up to the window to have a look. Outside the window, a huge tree was only a few inches from falling onto our car and flattening it. We were being invaded by what was later called Typhoon 19 – the apple typhoon. In the storm, I lost myself in trying to find safety for our precious car.

It was the day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tohoku Occupational Therapy congress in Japan, (Tohoku OT congress) which was held in Hirosaki city hall, Aomori. I was the executive secretary for this congress, and went to the meeting place at full speed during a rain interval. The apple field on the way to Hirosaki city hall seemed to be "a red carpet" with all the apples having just dropped right before the harvest. Traffic signals and trees had fallen down in many places in the city, a lot of tin roofs had been blown off and were caught on several electric wires, and obstacles were scattered all over the road. Of course electricity over the whole the city was down and I needed to drive with extreme caution when crossing any intersections.

Members of the executive committee gathered at the Hirosaki city hall one after another and discussed if we could hold the Tohoku OT congress or not. Because of the blackout, the lavatories of this hall were not able to be used as well as the illumination and the slide apparatus, too. Fortunately, we found that there were public lavatories only 500 m away from the hall in the Hirosaki Castle parking area. Meanwhile, because it was necessary for us to secure some lighting equipment, we bought a lot of candles, candela and rental dynamos.

As a result, we listened to special lectures and oral presentations without any slides and illumination; under the light of only candles we had the evening banquet; the second party, in Kajimachi, had the added bonus of electricity being finally restored, creating a major uproar among all the party members, and the blue sky which greeted all the participants the next morning, all these things seemed to bring all the Occupational Therapists of Tohoku together as one. A lot of people gathered in Hirosaki city from many places within Tohoku at great risk to themselves and with the possibility of the congress not even being held. The memories from this event stay close to my heart. “Tohoku are as one!” This phrase has been revived from my memory from over 20 years ago! In the Tohoku area, natural environment is very severe. Therefore, our Tohoku people have both the will power and kind feelings to make actions speak louder than words. Let us make good on our promise. We are doers, not talkers! I thought that 20 years ago and I have those same feelings now.