



January 20, 2006  
Disaster Reduction Forum  
TeLL-Net Kick-off Assembly  
at JICA Hyogo International Center

**Keynote Lecture**

**Facing Disasters:  
The Importance of Telling the Story**

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# The Importance of Telling Disaster Stories

Reviving dim memories in those who have forgotten

Enabling people who have never experienced disaster to experience it vicariously



The power of raw words

Determination to prevent such a tragedy ever happening again



Motivating people to improve disaster-preparedness

# Changes in the Mode of Telling

Raw  
material

Original experience (feelings that cannot be put into words, experience of mental and physical trauma)  
**“the indescribable”**

Original experience is  
objectified

Experience is articulated  
and processed

**A Storyteller is born (the story is formalized)**

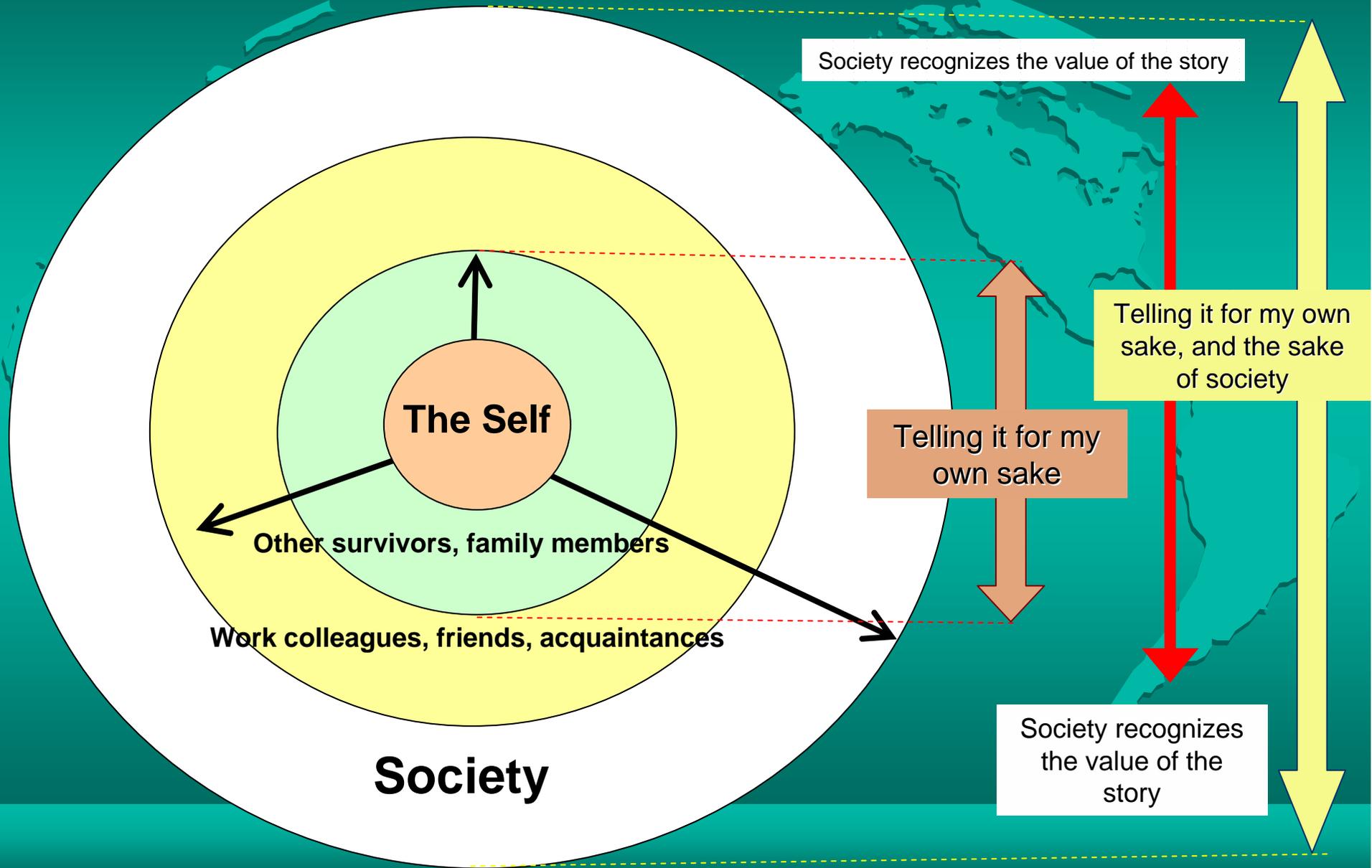
**Personal stories of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, the Battle of Okinawa, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake**

The story takes root and becomes  
universalized

Processed  
material

**Art (poetry, novels, pictures, music etc.)**

# Widening the "Audience" (from the Self to Society)



# Why Society Needs Storytellers

Survivors' original experience is forgotten in a short time.

Memories of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake are fading.

Respondents Responses	Residents of rebuilt apartment blocks	Residents of restored housing
They have faded quite a lot	41%	29%
They have faded a little	50%	49%
They have not faded much	9%	15%
They have not faded at all	0%	5%
No response	0%	2%
Total	100%	100%

(From a survey carried out in December 2005 by Kyodo News)

## Things that are important in terms of stopping memories of the disaster from fading

Responses	Respondents	Residents of rebuilt apartment blocks	Residents of restored housing
The activities of storytellers, and the activities of the survivors themselves, such as telling children about their experience of the disaster		24%	23%
The continuation of restoration support measures by the government		20%	26%
Disaster-preparedness education activities		24%	7%
Ongoing reporting by the mass media		9%	13%
Support for disaster-stricken areas in Japan and other countries, and activities making use of Japan's disaster experience, such as dispatching personnel		8%	9%
Continued memorial services attended by top-level local government representatives such as the Prefectural Governor and the Mayor		9%	6%
The holding of various gatherings by NPOs and other private-sector bodies		4%	6%
Other		2%	5%
No response		0%	5%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

(From a survey carried out in December 2005 by Kyodo News)

# The Great Hanshin Flood (July 1938, 68 years ago)

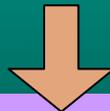
A seasonal rain front caused record torrential rain to fall on the Rokko mountain range. The ground collapsed at many points alongside the mountains. Streams of mud from the steep mountainsides formed a landslide which hit urban areas.

Casualties: 925 dead or missing (1 in every thousand citizens of Kobe)

72.2% of Kobe's population (then 964,000) were affected by the disaster.

72.1% of households were affected.

The roads were blocked. The municipal streetcars, the JNR (Japan National Railways) lines and the Hankyu, Hanshin and Sanyo private rail lines were down. Kobe was cut off, full of disaster victims.



**Could a flood like this happen nowadays?**

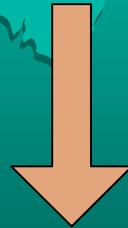
## The Kobe Bombing (mostly in 1945, 61 years ago)

Between April 1942 and immediately after Japan's defeat in 1945, Kobe suffered 128 bombing raids.

125 of these took place in 1945.

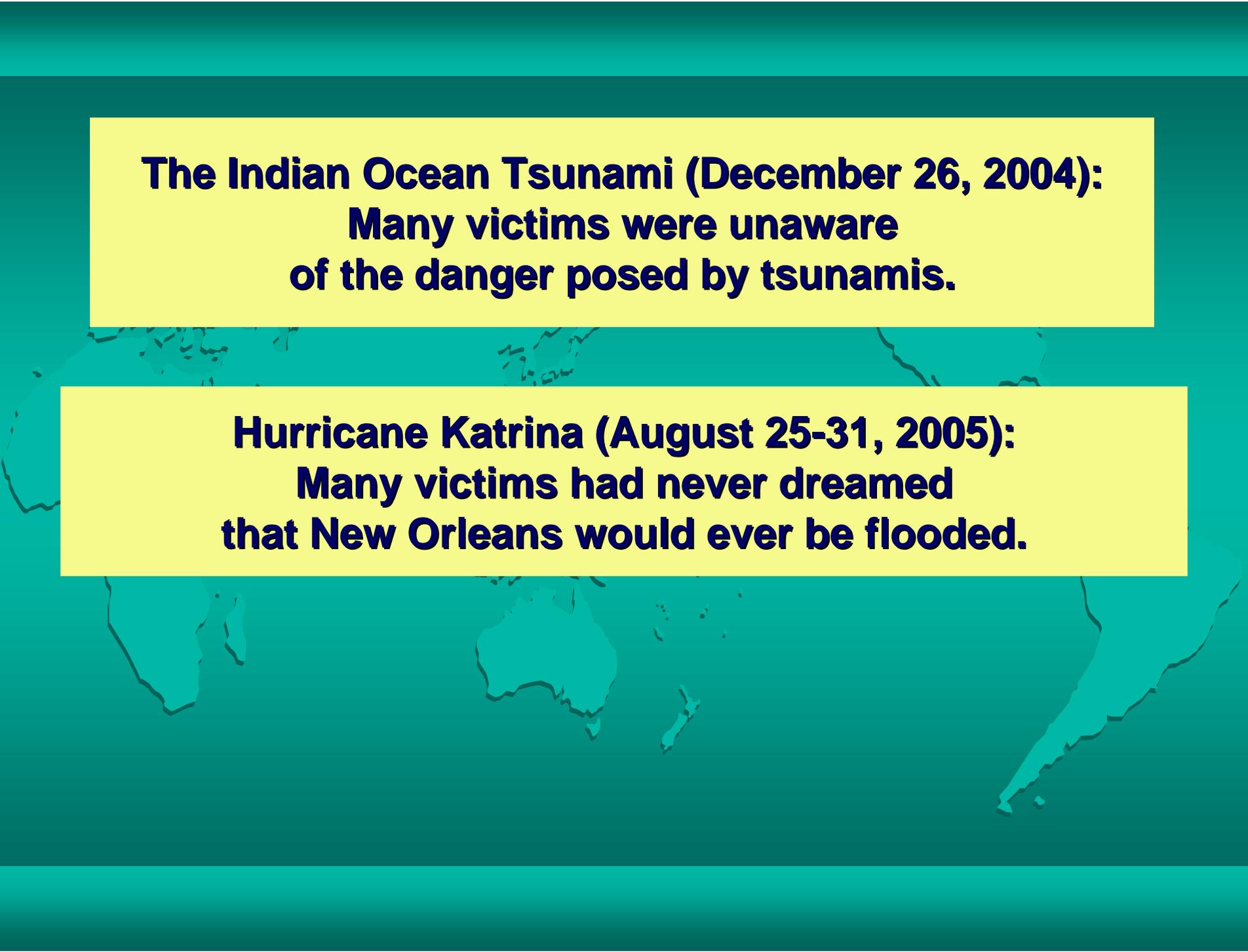
Casualties: 7,491 dead (1 in every thousand citizens); 17,014 injured.

The postwar recovery from the disaster caused by the bombing took many years. The municipal government's postwar recovery program terminated in 1994, the year before the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake.



The long road to reconstruction

**A forgotten disaster?**



**The Indian Ocean Tsunami (December 26, 2004):  
Many victims were unaware  
of the danger posed by tsunamis.**

**Hurricane Katrina (August 25-31, 2005):  
Many victims had never dreamed  
that New Orleans would ever be flooded.**

# The Benefits of “Telling”

The survivor:

(Suppressing the traumatic experience of disaster, and pain that would be incomprehensible to others)

Providing a forum for storytelling

Inviting the storyteller to tell the story

Providing a safe environment for the storyteller

↓

Recounts his/her individual experience of disaster  
(traumatic memories are objectified by recounting)

↓

The story acquires social value transcending the limits of the individual

The listeners:

Are moved, affected (spurred on to improve their disaster-preparedness)

↓

Feedback

The Storyteller:

Gains a sense of self-efficacy, feels validated as useful to society