

## Sky Camp in Yoshima

We had our third Grief Camp, "Sky Camp in Yoshima" at the end of March. Yoshima is a small island. Our choice to use this site is another challenge for us.

### Outline of the Sky Camp in Yoshima

**D a t e s :** from 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> of March, 2013

**V e n u e :** Kobe YMCA, Yoshima Field Activity Center (Kagawa)

**C a m p e r s :** 17 Children (ages 9 to 17) who lost parents in the Great East Japan Earthquake

Organized by National Camping Association of Japan, National Council of YMCAs of Japan and Asahi Shinbun Social Welfare Organization

### It's difficult traveling to the island

Campers of the Sky Camp are living across the country because the affected area is very broad and some of them live with their relatives far from their hometowns. So every time we have a camp, traveling is a headache-maker.

This required seven different means of transportation -- train, airplane, bus, ferry, bus and boat!! It was a long-long journey. To make matters worse, the flight was delayed two hours. So, the ones who live in the farthest place had to travel more than twelve hours.

### Resuming friendly ties with the sea

Of course, there is a good reason we choose this site.

Yoshima is the name of an island in the Seto inland sea. This site is in a very small island on the very quiet sea.

Most of the campers had lost their parents by the Tsunami. Many had lost friends, a place to live...their ordinary life. So they could be afraid of the sea, hate the sea or want to cut ties with the sea. But we want them to resume friendly ties with the sea because their former life was strongly tied with it.

We hoped that playing in a fun atmosphere would make them feel comfortable being by the sea, but it was a big challenge for us. In fact one girl canceled because she felt afraid to be by the sea. This cancellation shook us up, and we wondered if it was too early to have a sea camp.

In conclusion, our choice was good.

They enjoyed the camp and also some sea activities such as sea kayak. For the little girls, rowing the canoe was a little bit too difficult. During the camp some expressed their scary feelings, telling us, "We are not safe if a Tsunami comes now". But no one stop playing by (in) the sea.

The sea has many aspects. Of course, the Tsunami is an aspect of the sea, but it's just one of many aspects. During the camp they rediscovered other attractive aspects of the sea. It's a very nice place to have fun activities. It shows the beauty of the earth. It cradles many fish!!

I wondered if this camp could make a difference in the campers' feelings about the sea. I hope that their fear or hatred of the sea will be much less now.

Yoshima pictures in Facebook



Yoshima Island



Practice of Canoe



Fishing from the pier



Hunting in the tide pool



Camp T-shirt

### I'll never talk!! (on a humorous note)

Ryota is a high school boy who has come to every camp. He is one of the children most influenced by this camp. In the first camp he found his role model, little girls who enjoyed the camp a lot and live cheerfully. In the second camp, he started to talk more and more.

In this camp, before the therapy session he wasn't as willing to join in. A staff member told him, "You don't have to talk if you don't want to, so join the session". He replied "OK, then I'LL NEVER TALK!" on a humorous note, and he went to the session.

He already knew that it's good for him to express his mind in the safe atmosphere of this camp, but at the same time, it's a little bit uncomfortable to remember his experience of loss. Of course, for a boy of his age, it's also not so cool.

Then he found his own method to express his true feelings with a humorous tone. I'm sure he will find soon that it's cool to share what he really thinks.

### My Friends, The Sun and The Mercy

During the camp, there were many opportunities to sing -- in the flag ceremony, before and after the meal, and around the campfire. At first, they hesitated to sing loudly, but singing became a very common behavior very soon.

The favorite song for them is "Tomodachi, Ohisama, Yasashii-Kokoro (My Friends, The Sun and The Mercy)".

*It's not the first time for me to come camping.  
But every time it makes me nervous.  
I put in my bag, change of clothes and some unwillingness to come*

*But when you talked to me,  
I got a feeling something good would happen.*

*There aren't that many precious things for us.  
My Friends, The Sun and The Mercy.*

On the way back home, in the access aisle from the airport to the train station, some girls sang the adaptation of this song, saying, "We had a good time. So we don't want to go home". I was moved so much by their voices, wishing at the same time that they would keep silence in the crowded train!!

I really hope that they will find in this camp these three things which last long in their mind.

### Never Perfect

For the first-time staff, Grief Camp is full of confusion. It takes time to learn how to talk to the campers. Although there aren't many differences from other camps, they can't help but be careful, sometimes too much. It was so stressful for some staff in the early part of the camp.

I think that we will never be completely successful in preparing the perfect Grief Camp. The most important thing to make it better is to be sensitive and cheerful. It's the most basic of basics for good organized camping. Operating the Grief Camp is a good lesson for us to go back to basics.



Ryota with S'more



Flag ceremony



Therapy session



Sand Covered Staff (!!)



See you again, \*waves\*

We ask you to...

- Provide information about previous grief camps
- Donate to support the project visit the ICF website: <http://www.campingfellowship.org>

Contact : National Camping Association of Japan

Executive Director, Tatsuya Kanayama e-mail : [kanayama@camping.or.jp](mailto:kanayama@camping.or.jp)



ARIGATOU means "incredibly rare", thus it's MIRACLE.  
It's a miracle that we have you in the camping community. ARIGATOU!!