

Survivors

Earthquake evacuees reflect on their fate as they struggle to cope with the disaster's aftermath

By KENZO MORIGUCHI
and CAMERON HAY

Some remember the earth jumping up and down like a great piston. Others liken the experience to being on a ship tossed in a storm. One woman recalls grasping frantically for a flashlight just feet away but being unable to grab it.

As people caught in the tragic earthquake begin to rebuild their lives, memories of the past fuel fears of the future.

Sachiko Yoshida, 71, woke up about 20 minutes before the quake, but went back to bed. A lucky break.

"If I had gotten out of bed, I would have turned on the kerosene stove and that would have set the house on fire," she says.

Her two-floor wooden home in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, now leans precariously and about two-thirds of its roof tiles have slid off. But at least it is standing, she said.

When the quake struck, Yoshida, who lives with her daughter, was on the first floor. She covered herself with a futon before a wardrobe and a household Buddhist altar crashed down on her. Her daughter came down with a flashlight and helped pull things off her, then the two escaped outside wearing only their coats.

Ryozaburo and Kazuko Shiga lost their two-story house in Ashiya, Hyogo Prefec-

ture, but say they are happy to be alive. The night before the quake, their son, who lives in Tokyo, happened to stay at their house.

So Ryozaburo, 77, a music college professor, and Kazuko, 73, hoping to get an earlier start in the morning, slept in a dif-

ferent room than their first-floor bedroom. When the quake hit, he ducked under his futon as a wardrobe fell on top of him.

He did not realize how big the quake was until he saw the house from outside. The second floor, where he had been sleeping, had slid sideways and crashed onto part of the first floor where his parents and sister were sleeping. His sister managed to escape injury because the spot where she was sleeping was in a space between the ceiling and the corner of a desk.



Homeless woman and girl KYODO

ferent room than their first-floor bedroom.

If they had slept in their regular bedroom, a grand piano right on the floor above would have smashed through and crushed them, Kazuko says.

Their second son, who lives nearby, rushed to find his parents shortly after the quake. At first he feared they were dead.

As he and neighbors tried to locate them in the debris, Kazuko kept hitting the keys of another piano near her.

About an hour later, she and her hus-

band managed to crawl out of the demolished house. They moved to Iwakuni Elementary School. The couple were unable to retrieve anything from their house, because it was too dangerous to enter.

Kazuko was annoyed at the shelter because they had few changes of clothes.

"My husband has no suit or shoes to wear — not a single one. For me, a woman, I don't want to wear the same clothes for too long," she says.

"I never imagined such a terrible thing could happen to us at this age. We have to start from scratch again, and we cannot waste anything. We have to live together, helping each other for the rest of our lives," she says.

Taihei Matsumoto, 22, a senior at an Osaka university, took refuge with his family at Konan Elementary School in Kobe's Higashi-

Nada Ward.

When the quake hit, he ducked under his futon as a wardrobe fell on top of him.

He did not realize how big the quake was until he saw the house from outside. The second floor, where he had been sleeping, had slid sideways and crashed onto part of the first floor where his parents and sister were sleeping. His sister managed to escape injury because the spot where she was sleeping was in a space between the ceiling and the corner of a desk.