

After Matsumoto got out of the house, he and his neighbors got busy digging people out of collapsed homes. Despite their efforts, some neighbors died under the rubble.

"I don't have many complaints about the assistance provided by authorities from Day 2. But I wish there had been more people helping those buried under the debris on the first day," he says.

Bernard Mendonca, a Portuguese-Japanese, remembers lying half awake in his Nishinomiya house when the earthquake struck.

"For some reason, my wife and I couldn't sleep so well that night. Maybe it was some kind of premonition. Normally there are small preshocks before earthquakes in Japan, but this one struck so suddenly. Before we knew it, everything was destroyed," Mendonca says.

After he located his two children in the



Fire victim rescued KIMIO IDA

pitch dark of their house's second floor, the family made its way to the stairway.

Now they live in Umeda, Osaka, at one of Mendonca's two language school offices. He planned to move back to a new apartment in Nishinomiya so his daughter

and son can return to their elementary school and kindergarten when they open.

"I think it's better for the kids to talk about this and work it out with their friends — to be a part of the readjustment effort," Mendonca says.

Stunned

Not all of Kobe's residents can come to terms with the disaster that has befallen them

By MASARU FUJIMOTO

Life has been cruel to Chiyo Umeda.

At 73, she is alone.

A stairway landing in a Hyogo High School building is her home for now and the indefinite future.

She no longer owns anything except her late husband's "ihai," or Buddhist memorial tablet, which she cherishes and keeps in a plastic bag.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake flattened her wooden house. She crawled out of the rubble near the school in Kobe's Nagata Ward, where the temblor and subsequent blazes killed at least 617 people and razed 3,670 houses, apartment buildings, shops and factories in a nearly 440,000-sq.-meter area.

Provisions and water are now plentiful at the school, which is serving as a temporary shelter for about 3,000 evacuees from the neighborhood.

But Umeda said she has not eaten much since the quake.

"I'm not hungry," she said, sitting on her blanket.

Her only sister, who had lived alone near Umeda's house, was killed in the quake.

"I dreamed of her the night before (the quake). She might have wanted to tell me something."

Before moving to Kobe about 25 years ago, she and her husband lived in Hiroshima. She recalled how 50 years ago she had to run from other fires, those triggered by the atomic bomb.

"Nothing's been good to me," she said. "I don't even know how many days I've been here now."

It has been a week.

Some owners of shops in a Nagata Ward arcade have returned to the site of their businesses to check if any merchandise is salvageable, while workers at small factories that escaped the fires are clearing debris from streets.

Locals who refuse to stay at designated shelters are cooking food under blue plastic tarps made into lean-tos outside the rubble of their homes.

An elderly woman under a lean-to propped up by boards gathered from the

debris said she takes turns with her neighbors keeping a vigil on their property.

"We don't want anyone to steal our firewood," she said, warming her hands over a makeshift stove.

She said her group sleeps on a bed made from three stools. Others sleep in their cars, turning on the engine occasionally to keep warm.

Despite the constant fear of a major aftershock, many evacuees have started returning to homes on the verge of collapse to retrieve valuables or other items, risking their lives in the process.

Cleanup efforts in the Hanshin area are in full swing.

Shovel cranes are busy tearing down half-demolished buildings and collapsed sections of once-elevated highways while bulldozers push debris into, in many cases, pungent piles. Utility workers are removing poles that block streets and clearing away jumbled wires.

"As we learn more about the damage, we are realizing it is beyond imagination," Kobe Mayor Kazutoshi Sasayama told reporters.

Many believe it will take years or even decades to restore the city to the way it was only seven days ago. (Jan. 25)