

A woman saved her life by holding to this fence after being swept away in a swift current for a hundred meters, at 3:00 a.m. on September 4, 2011 during the Kii Peninsula Great Flooding.

紀伊半島大水害
激流百m流された女性ここに引っぱり一命を留め
2011年9月4日午前3時頃





I live in an area, home to rich nature and the World Heritage Site "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range". When the disaster occurred, I lived with my husband and daughter in a house located right next to a police box in Iseki community along the lower Nachi-gawa River.

On September 4, 2011, Typhoon Talas brought torrential rain to this area.



I was watching a TV news reporting the approaching Typhoon Talas. Around 2 a.m., there was an announcement from administrative radio system. As I could not hear it well, I called the town office.

"What was the announcement about?"

"Evacuation order was issued."

"How high is the water level of the Nachi-gawa River?"

"We are not sure."



I went to see the Nachi-gawa River. The water was flooding over the bank. I realized that it was a serious situation. Then, I headed to Ms. Iwamoto's house to tell her the situation as she lived alone.



On the way, I passed by the house of Ms. Kusumoto, who is visually impaired. As I knew that she always evacuates to her sister's house when typhoons approach, I did not knock on her door. I truly regret it. Later, I heard that she was still in the house at that time. She lost her life because of this flooding disaster.



At Ms. Iwamoto's house, I told her the situation. But, she said she would not evacuate. I went back to my home not knowing that would be the last time I would see her. Minutes later, she was swept away together with her house.



When I got home, I heard my daughter screaming "Water is coming in!" My house was already flooded above the floor.



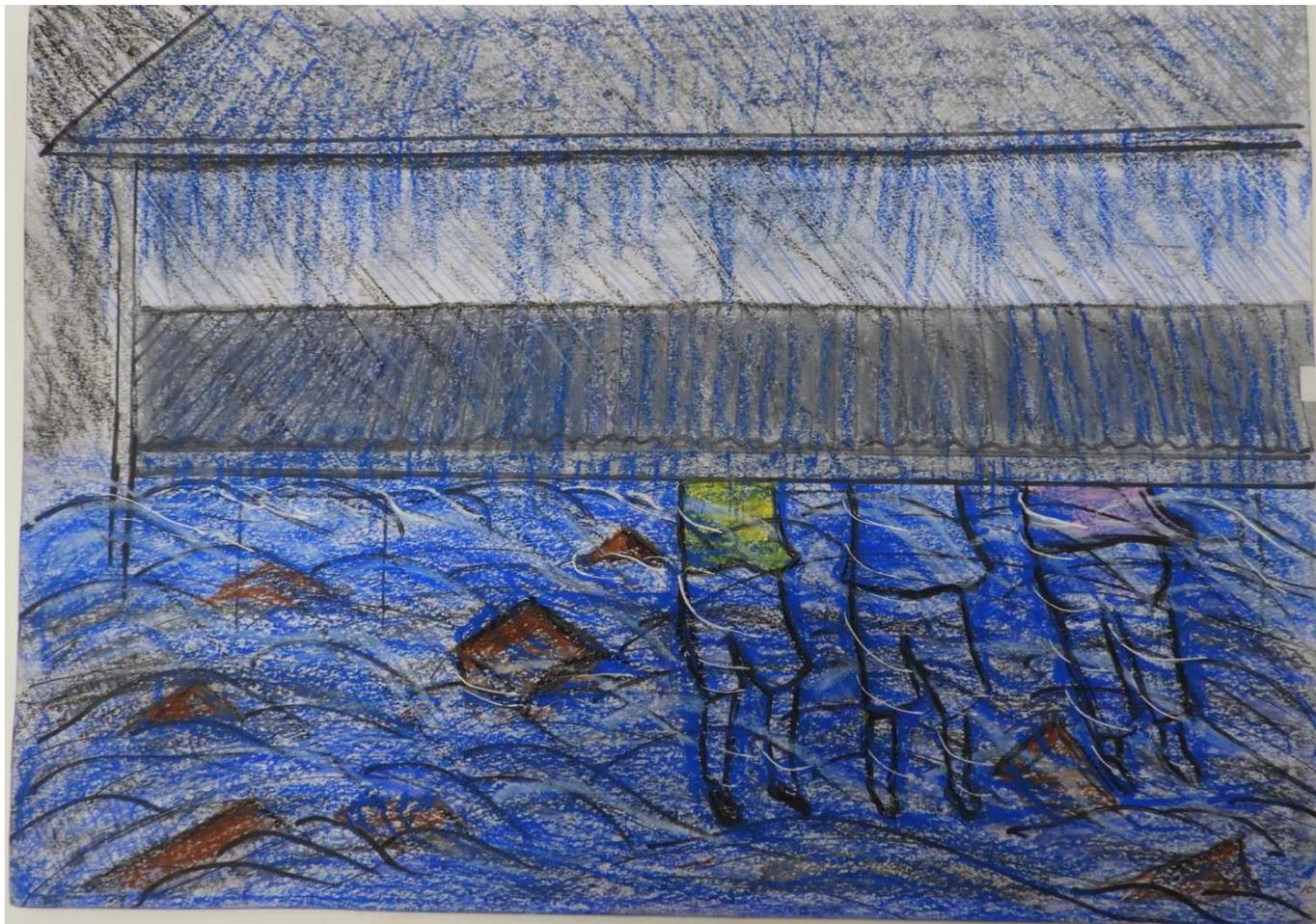
My husband hurried to pick up valuables kept in the inner room. While we were waiting for him to come back, the water level rose to my chest.



We could not get out from the front door anymore. We managed to go out from a window. The current of water was running stronger. We gripped the roof gutter in order not to be swept away.



Then, my daughter got washed away by a water current . Fortunately, she got caught on something like a hook. She dove in the water, got herself off the hook, and somehow managed to come back to where we were.



We were hanging from the roof gutter. The water level kept rising. We could not go up onto the roof. We kept shouting "Help!"



I made up my mind and decided to swim to the police box.
It was only 3 meters away, but I could not reach it and was carried by the floodwater.



In order to rise up to the surface, I tried to hold an object which my daughter passed me, but couldn't.



Trees and debris were floating.

I held on tight to a floating tree with both hands and tried but failed to go back to my house.



I knew that I was being carried downstream. In my mind, I said to myself.

"I don't want to die."

"I will die if I breathe in the water."

"I will hold my breath no matter what."



While trying never to drink water, I kept making strokes with my arms towards the surface.



Suddenly, my body floated to the surface and I could take two breathes. But, I soon sank underwater.



I grabbed a floating stick, but it did not help me float to the surface.

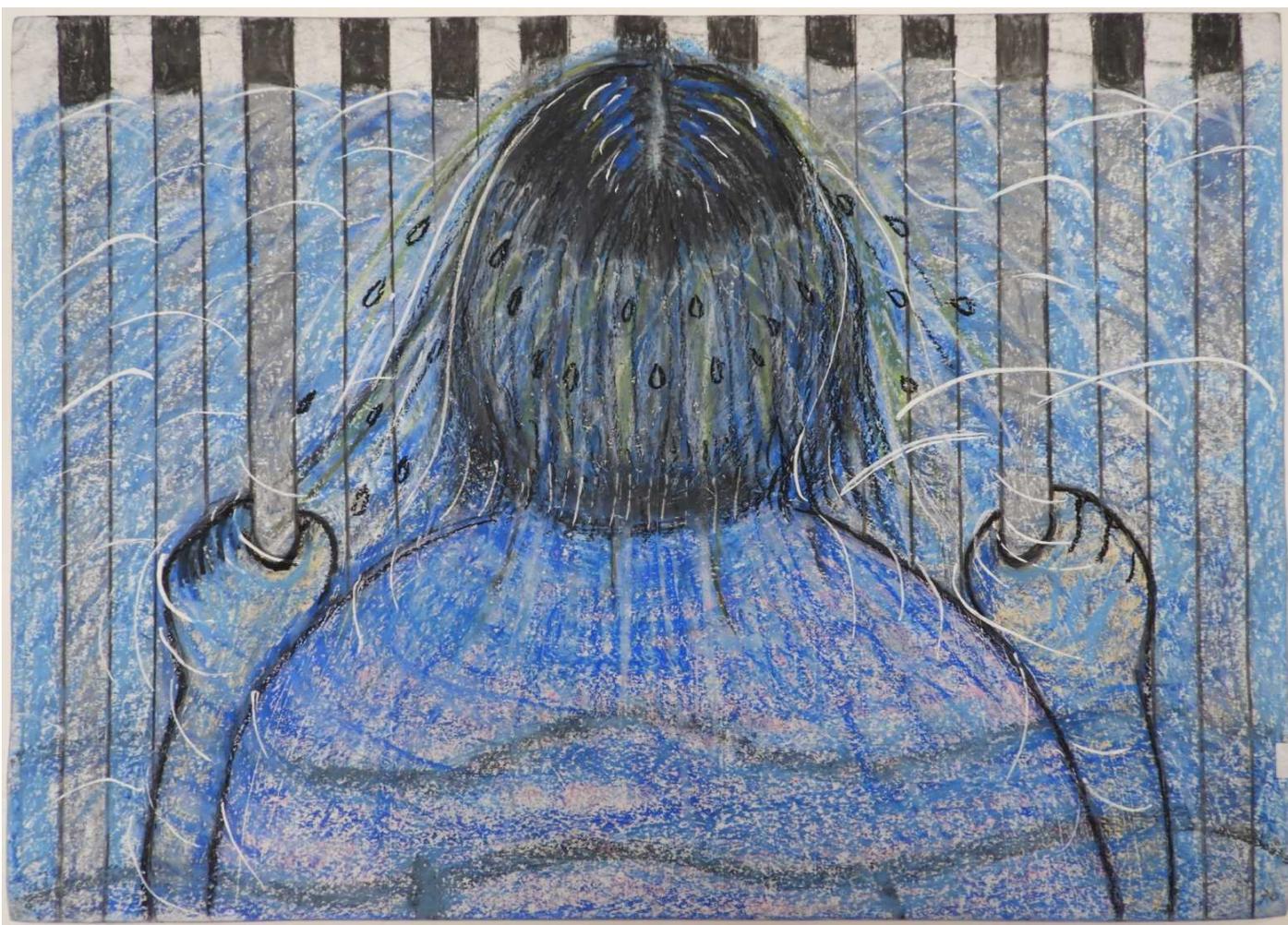


I kept trying to come up to the surface. Then, I felt my left hand touched something. I realized that it must be a fence of the sidewalk. I held to it.



What a relief!

I grabbed hold of the fence with both hands.



I rose up slowly and got my head above the water.

I found that I was carried a hundred meters by water. My hands were purple.



It was still raining heavily. Standing chest-deep in water, I was feeling terribly cold. I looked around and noticed that wooden objects and styroforms were caught in the fence. I stood on the wooden object and used the styroform as an umbrella.



As I looked around, I saw an unbelievable sight in the dusk. Farmlands, rice paddies and roads became like a huge river.

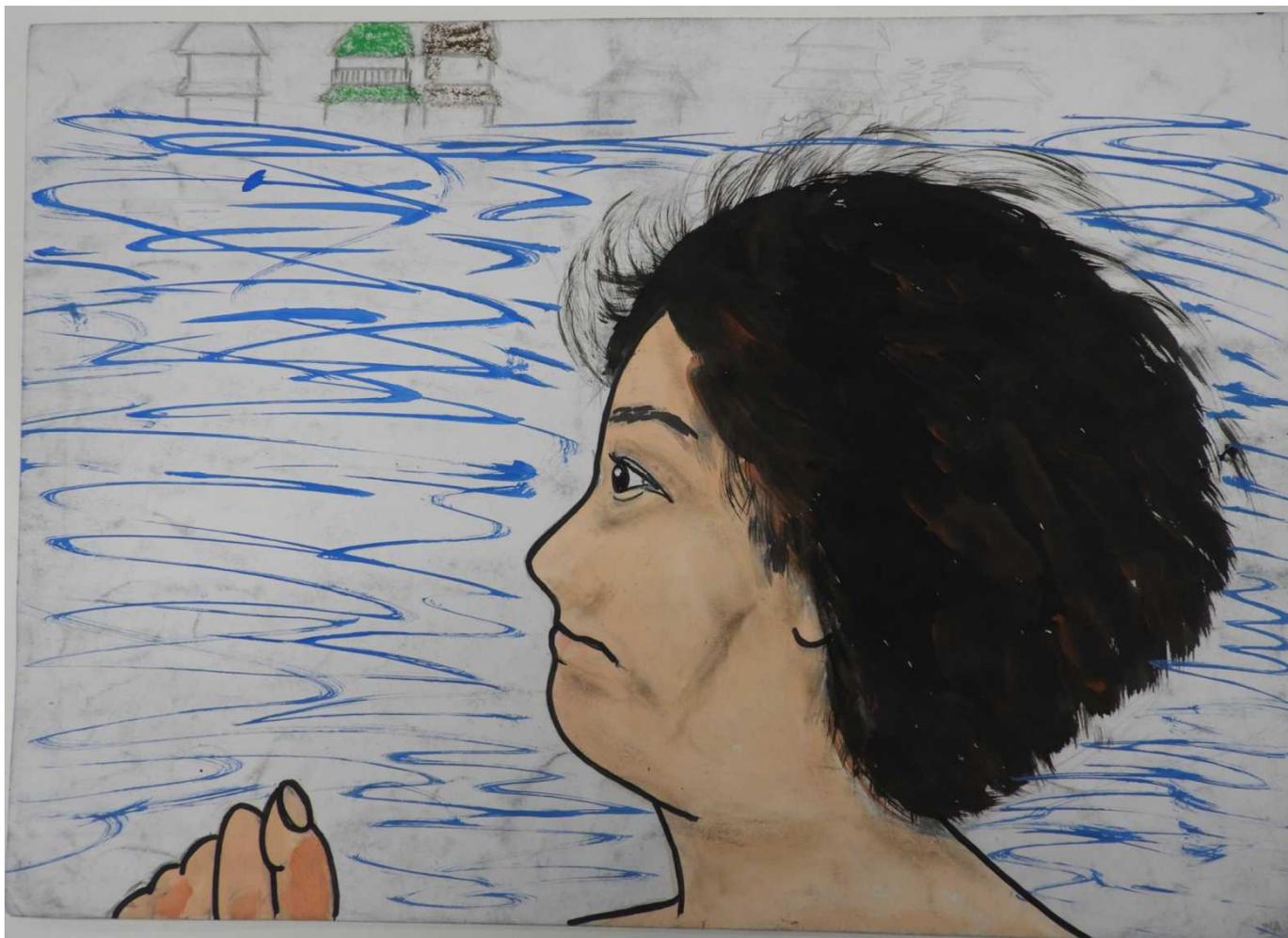
A lot of cars, including a police car, were drifting down the current at high speed with their lights on.

I heard someone shouting "Help me!"



Suddenly, I felt a pain in my side as a huge log hit me. I also saw a light truck drifting towards me. I couldn't move. The truck came close to me, but fortunately it changed its direction and I could avoid crushing with it.

Alone in the swollen river, I kept praying. "Please stop the rain and save lives of my daughter and husband."



Some time later, the rain finally stopped and dawn broke.
I rushed back home as I wanted to know whether my family was safe. Debris was scattered on the street and there was a drifted car.



Although the rain stopped, the water was still running at the knee level. I almost fell down as the water swept me off my feet. I desperately headed to my house.



Finally, I reached near my house. The water was still running fast, and I couldn't get inside my house. I held on to the garden tree not to be swept away. As I expected my daughter and husband to be on the roof, I called their names. However, there was no answer.



At that moment, a police officer shouted to me, "Don't come here!" from the second floor window of the police box. I made a circle with my arms to let him know I understood. I was disappointed to learn that my daughter and husband were not in the police box. If they had been there, they must have shown up from the window.



I managed to enter the building nearby, and sat on a desk. Filled with sorrow of losing my family, I collapsed into tears. I felt so sorry for my daughter, who was supposed to have a long life ahead.



The sun rose, and I heard the sound of a helicopter flying over. The relief crew came to rescue me, but I told them I would stay there to wait for my family.



After a while, the police officer came to me.

"Ms. Kubo, your daughter is safe!"

"Really? Where was she?"

"On the roof of your house."

It seems I didn't notice her when I saw the roof earlier.



I saw my daughter running to me with a smile on her face.



I was greatly pleased to see my daughter. However, she told me my husband couldn't survive.

[According to my daughter...]

After I was swept away, my daughter and husband also dove into the water trying to swim to the police box. However, they couldn't swim, and were trapped in debris. At that moment, a big wave struck them. Hit by waves repeatedly, they drifted from side to side. My daughter happened to catch hold of the roof and crawl up. However, my husband managed to get hold of the roof, but didn't have enough physical strength to go up. My daughter couldn't pull him up because she had drunk too much water. My husband was swept away again while my daughter looked away for a moment. She couldn't see him again since then. As both of the parents were gone, she made up her mind to live her life alone. She was then rescued. * My husband died without knowing I survived. However, I am sure that he was relieved to see my daughter going up the roof. That was my only saving grace.

If we had evacuated earlier, we wouldn't have needed to sacrifice a precious life. I hope you can learn a lesson from my story.