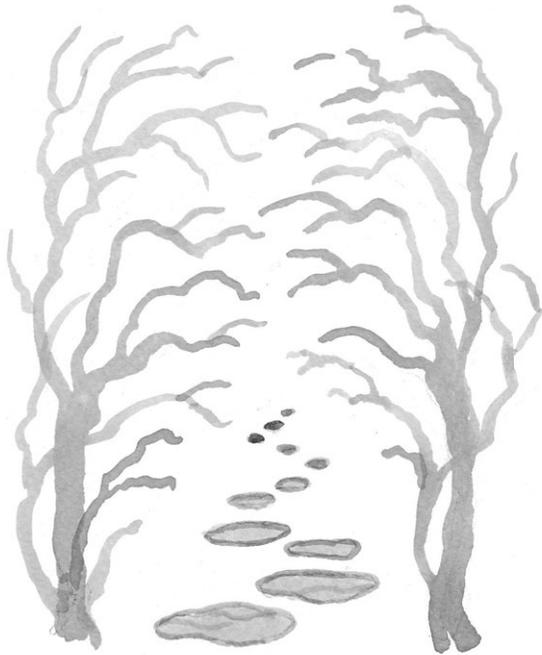


Note to Readers



ON THE AFTERNOON OF MARCH 11, 2011, massive, overwhelming, incomprehensible disaster struck the northeast coast of Japan. Life for those in the region would never be the same.

This book is about the awakening that follows disaster. About the minutes and hours and months and years that come after now. It is about what happens when we're smacked on the side of the head and open our eyes, startled out of the trance in which we have been living our days. It is about the opportunities always present, often invisible, to create the lives we want, now.

As the waters from the tsunami flower back into the ocean, as the last bricks fell from buildings almost destroyed, people began to turn to one another. They grieved, they laughed, they prayed. And they asked what do we do now?

This book is the story of my journey with the Japanese people over the last six years. I write about my own story of awakening after plunging into this disaster. I share stories from people who found where to take their first step, and the next. I offer the tools and processes and worldview I introduced as people came together to discover and create what comes after now.

This book built around two big ideas. The first is that after disaster, we find our way forward, together. We come awake, together. Disaster obliterates the past, plunges the present into chaos and cocoons the future. We need each other to build the new. The second big idea is that we don't have to wait for the overwhelming tragedy of disaster to build the communities and lives we want. We can engage each

other with respect, curiosity and generosity and begin to build what we want, now.

We live in a period of precipitous, unpredictable change. The book is for those who want to make this time of transformation more livable and less insane. It is for those engaging with others around questions that matter and who have something inside that keeps asking what else is possible. We are the hospice workers and midwives, honoring the old and letting that which is ready to die go, while welcoming in the new. I no longer think of us as “agents of change” -- that implies that we have control of the outcome. We need to let go of the pretense that we can know what will result from our actions. We need to embrace radical uncertainty, showing up as fully as we can from moment to moment.

In Japan and all over the world, we are living in the messy middle where many old forms are falling apart and new possibilities are in early stages of development. The ground is pulled out from under us on a regular basis. It is important to not get distracted and try to clean up the mess – trying to make everything perfect, removing the tensions, covering over important differences. Our work right now is to learn to coexist with the messiness. We need to keep trying things, to keep learning. We need to remain focused on our purpose and follow the braided strand of intention and surrender as we find our way forward – with each other.

Whether it is changing your life or changing something in your community, it is almost impossible to do it alone. None of us are equipped with all the knowledge, skills, intelligence and experience we need for the work of the long road of transformation. We need to pool our talents, our skills, our resources. We need to create new structures for learning, ones that make it possible for us to take the time to chew our own experiences, to learn from each other’s insights, and to interact with those from outside our immediate systems who have the knowledge and wisdom we need. That’s why we need community. Hopefully this book gives some clues about how to reach out, find and form that community, and get on with what needs to be done.

Through this book, I share what I have learned in Japan – before and after the Triple Disasters – and from working around the world with people building community and new futures. I tell stories of my experience and that of others who have worked hard and long in

Japan. I share the ideas, methods and processes that have been helpful to me in this work. I invite you to use these in your work, creating community, and finding the new future.

I hope this book is beneficial as you create your new story. I hope it helps you find the confidence to begin and to continue. Read it from cover-to-cover if you are so inclined. Pick it up from time to time and look at different sections. Treat it as a farmer’s almanac of ideas and possibilities to ponder and explore.

NewStories, the nonprofit I established in 2000, supports people everywhere who are discovering what is AfterNow. In our Learning Lab, we find ways to support those who offer their leadership in these uncertain times. In our Action Lab, we provide space for promising initiatives in different parts of the world. In our Stories Lab, we work to understand and reveal the role stories play in this time. We also provide strategic convening services, working with communities and organizations. Come visit us at www.NewStories.org and www.AfterNow.Today

And please, connect with me on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter where I am, not surprisingly, bobstilger.

Blessings on our many journeys.

Introduction

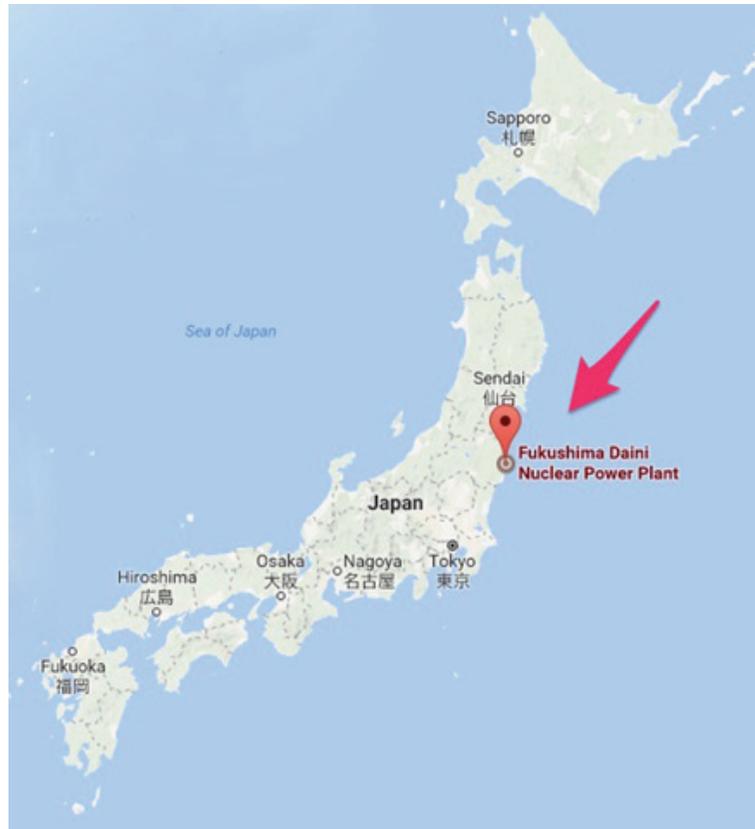


Figure I-1: This map shows the epicenter of the earthquake, near the end of the arrow as well as the location of the Fukushima reacto. The entire northeast coastline was hit by the tsunami with greatest impact closest to epicenter

IN THE PITCH-BLACK, early-morning hours of March 11, 2011, my phone rang. Startled, I answered and heard my daughter Annie’s frantic voice calling from New Zealand, “Are they okay? Have you heard from Obaachan and Ojiichan? Are they okay?”

I had no idea what she was talking about. The news had yet to travel to my home in Spokane, Washington. My heart sank and my fears rose as I listened to Annie tell me what little she knew.

Hours before, at 2:46 in the afternoon Japan Time, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake struck in the Pacific Ocean just off of the northeast coast of Japan. Forty-five minutes later, a 50-foot high tsunami wave traveling at more than 50 miles an hour hit the shoreline laying waste to all in its path. The next day the Fukushima nuclear reactors began to explode.

Annie was worried about the Nakatsugawas, our host family and dear friends, who live in Kyoto, near Osaka in the southwest and 500 miles away from the Tohoku region where the disasters struck. News was sketchy and for hours it was impossible to get through to the Nakatsugawas. They were safe, but for the people in Tohoku life would never be the same.

The morning before the disasters struck, most people in the area were leading full lives. Connected, interdependent and reasonably content, spending their days nestled in a familiar normalcy. That afternoon, everything changed. The Triple Disasters – earthquake, tsunami and nuclear explosions – would be the greatest environmental catastrophe to hit a country in living memory.

By the time, the waters receded nearly 20,000 people had lost their lives and another 500,000 lost their homes, jobs or both. Businesses, hospitals, schools and homes – destroyed. Gas lines ruptured, train tracks gone, roadways missing. Everywhere they looked, their world was in ruins.

In Fukushima, the disaster from the exploding reactors was largely imperceptible, yet likely more dangerous and even harder to comprehend. Strong, self-reliant people now found themselves sleeping on school floors with hundreds and sometimes thousands of strangers, depending on others to bring them rice-balls three times a day for meals. Days turned into weeks and months with almost all sense of purpose in life destroyed.

For those in the disaster area it was being in a nightmare that would not end.

Those outside the disaster zones, felt a sense of helplessness. They did not know how to support the people of Tohoku but knew everything had changed.

Beyond the personal loss, the physical devastation and the disturbing uncertainties about the nuclear explosions, the disasters struck at a deep psychological level. Such tragedies not only obliterate the present, they also destroy any pretense of a knowable future.

Japan faced a tremendous challenge to not only clean up from the Triple Disasters – but to find a new future.

What was possible?

Where to begin?

How to make a new path forward?

These were the questions facing Japan. Over the coming years, as I worked with the people of Japan, they became my own.

Approaching Japan

I first arrived in Japan as a student at Waseda University in 1970. Forty years later, in 2010, I was invited to Japan to introduce work on dialogue, leadership and building healthy and resilient communities. On March 11, 2011, the Triple Disasters struck and on April 5th I flew to Japan. I would devote much of the next six years of my life to service in Japan.

This book is about my journey in Japan before and after the disasters. The journey, of course, started long ago. This book is about what I have seen and experienced and wondered in a lifetime dedicated to building resilient communities. This is my personal story. It is also the story of the people I know and worked with in Japan. It is a story of what is arising in Tohoku and in the rest of Japan as well as in places throughout the world. It is a universal story of people everywhere who are gaining insight into their own lives in a world where the future is obscure. It is the story of people who are calling together others in their communities and organizations to find a new way forward – realizing that they first need to rediscover where forward may be. It is our story – yours and mine. The question, of course, is what story will we each tell? How will we stand up? What will help us find our way forward?

For 2011-2014, I spent 4-5 months a year in Japan. My time has decreased since then, but I still return regularly. During those first years, I worked with people up and down the coast, from Iwaki south of the reactors to Otsuchi, just south of Miyako. I wrote *Mirai ga mie naku nata toki, boku tachi wa nani o katare ba ii no darou* (*When We Cannot See the Future, Where Do We Begin*) to share my story with the people of Japan. It was published by Eiji Press in Tokyo in June of 2015 and has been well received in Japan, serving as a mirror and as a spotlight as people remember what we've been learning from the disasters.

In early 2015, my Japanese publisher told me the title they had chosen for my book – *When We Cannot See the Future Where Do We Begin?* The brilliance of the title is all theirs. In Japan, the publisher decides the title, not the author, and they do so by going into deep discernment about the essence of the book. At Eiji Press, they concluded that this book really wasn't about disaster, nor was it about building communities – it was about how we move forward when the future disappears. In Japanese, the title is subtle and brilliant and its question is the core of that book and this one as well.

From the moment I heard it, the title started to work on me. Through the writing and my work, I've lived into that question, and the response that has come to me is that we bring our attention to the present moment. Right here. Right now. We bring our attention to the people we are with and the resources we already have and to what's really important.



Figure I-2.

I knew when I wrote the first book that there would be an English edition someday and that it would be different than the Japanese version. Though many readers may have experienced disasters, I would be writing to people who had not experienced and may not know a lot about the Japanese Triple Disasters. It has taken some stepping back to see what story this book has to tell. After many discussions with my friends and colleagues, I turned to this English edition on the morning of March 11, 2016, sitting in my host family's home in Kyoto on the morning of the fifth anniversary of the Triple Disasters, known in Japan, simply, as 3.11.

On a plane ride to Japan in the fall of 2015 I was thinking about the title of the English edition. I knew it needed to incorporate this sense of NOW as a point of departure. AfterNOW popped into view and I got off the airplane in Tokyo and immediately did a domain search. AfterNOW.org, .net, and .com were all taken. But there was a new domain extension – “.today” – which I immediately grabbed. It was perfect. It said it all. What's important is what we do after now, after this present moment. And we need to begin TODAY.

Disasters Happen

Now as I finish writing this edition, in the early months of 2017, disasters in many forms are taking place around the world: cascading wars in the Middle East; millions of migrants desperately seeking safety; host countries being overwhelmed by the influx of people; economies collapsing in Greece, Zimbabwe and elsewhere around the world; random mass killings happening on our streets, schools and factories, and natural disasters destroying lives and property across the globe. Add to this list, the systemic consequences of climate change, income inequality, brittle infrastructures, hate mongering and numerous other issues. Some might object if I called the election of Donald Trump a disaster, so I'll settle for calling it a precursor of unpredictable disruptive change, which, of course, is what disaster is. And let's not forget the more immediate personal disasters that come when a loved one dies, when a partner says “I want a divorce” or we arrive at work and are told to clean out our desk and go home.

We live in a time that signals unimaginable shifts in our lives. Scientists say these are moments of “punctuated equilibrium”¹ when systems shift suddenly and unpredictably. Popular language sometimes refers to this as the transition from old to new paradigms. In his book, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, Joseph Tainter offers a compelling analysis of how the very complexity that societies generate as part of their growth contains the seeds of their collapse.

We have done enough damage to our global ecology that we can depend on more and more hurricanes, forest fires, floods, tsunamis, tornadoes, crippling snow and ice storms and the like. In addition, many of our structures and systems in areas ranging from health care to education, from transportation infrastructure to sanitation are overloaded, overwhelmed, brittle and collapsing. We will continue to have disasters: natural and man-made, structural and physical, systemic and psychological, smaller and larger.

Whatever the cause, disasters permeate our lives and world.

1 Connie Gersick's 1991 essay on punctuated equilibrium is a brilliant analysis of this phenomena examined from a number of perspectives. See Gersick, C. J. G. (1991). Revolutionary change theories: A multilevel exploration of the punctuated equilibrium paradigm. *Academy of Management Review*.

Disasters Shake Us Awake

Disasters end the lives of some and cause trauma and grief for many. They turn cities and countries upside down. They smack us on the side of the head, making us open our eyes and see the world and stories we are living in.

Disasters demolish our carefully constructed lives and dreams. They dissolve the ways in which we find meaning and make sense in our lives. They reveal how our lives are like a house of cards held together by stress and inertia. In disasters, the cards collapse, our present falls apart, and our future – the one we envisioned, the one we counted on – is gone.

Disasters wake us up. These are times of both trauma and possibility. Even after times of great tragedy and pain, we have a deep human capacity to create something new. Disasters are also a huge wake-up call that releases us from the trance of our old normal and the future that was laid out in front of us. Disasters can be the springboard to create the future we actually want. In these times, we are invited to look closely at how we want to live our lives. Important questions become visible:

- What happens after now, today? What do we do when we can't see the future anymore?
- How do we proceed when our normal vanishes overnight? How do we open our eyes, see our world as it is, find those we need to be with and ask what is possible now?
- How do we live well in this breath-taking moment, between the old and the new, surrounded by what's dying and what's being born? How do we keep from closing down, turning from chaos to fear and control?
- How can we respond to these disasters so that we can discover and unleash our creativity? How can we see take advantage of these times to turn to each other to build something new?

When the future is unknowable, we bring our attention to now, to the present moment. We bring our attention to ourselves and to each other as we welcome in the unseen and create together that which brings us joy. And we join together to creatively imagine a new future.

For me, this is the underlying lesson of the aftermath of the Triple Disasters. It is also what led me to first write Japanese version of this book, *When We Cannot See the Future Where Do We Begin?* – and now this English version.

In Japan, the Triple Disasters created a space and a necessity for change. In Japan, a deeply collective culture, this space is both individual and widespread. The birth of the new is taking place everywhere, and especially in Fukushima and in the coastal areas hit hardest by the disasters where the old normal is gone. There is no going back.

This book weaves together my experience of how disaster dissolves any knowledge of the future with the stories of how people in Japan found their way forward. The stories in this book offer insights about how they have begun to transform their lives.

On a personal level, I write about the journey I took as I fell into service in Japan. It also represents the chaotic, complex, confusing and uncertain journey each of us undertake when we follow life's calling and step into the unknown. I hope that reading about my journey will give you insights about your own.

I share stories from many people in Japan because I believe they are inspiring as well as informative. They give us a chance to take a step back and look in on the immensely rich journey of grief at the disappearance of the old combined with excitement about the emergence of the new.

I offer some of the approaches I used working in communities in Japan as they stepped together into new possibilities – tools, methodologies, approaches and views that sustained me as I worked with people across Japan to make sense out of what was happening. These were my starting points. I hope they will help you find yours.

There are many stories, voices and lessons in this book. You can read it from cover-to-cover or you can pick up the book at any point that speaks to you, read it and put it down. I suggest you follow the principle of start anywhere, follow it everywhere. I've included reflections and questions for you to consider at the end of chapters. You'll also find that I repeat certain core ideas throughout the book, sometimes using different phrasing to give a different access. Grab what works for you and build on it. Let go of the rest. There's a lot here. This book is not written around a single big idea. It is written around the

big question of how to live when our past is obliterated, present chaotic and future cocooned.

Here's what you'll find in each chapter.

Chapter 1 – Following the Thread is the story of my arriving in Japan in 2010, more than a year before the disasters, as a teacher and dialogue host. My entry into Japan was made possible because of a deeply personal 40-year relationship with Japan that has shaped who I am. In this chapter I share some of what I began to teach as I worked with people all over Japan. Beginning with Art of Hosting and its cousin, FutureCenters, I also started to offer my own research about *Enspirited Leadership* and about the values and principles of Life Affirming Leadership which guide us in our work to create healthy and resilient communities.

Chapter 2 – Befriending Confusion shares my arrival in Japan just weeks after the disasters. It offers both a glimpse of what it was like in Japan in the beginning days and, through my journals, what it was like for me to enter into this emotionally charged field. Those first few weeks set the stage for my work of the next five years. I hope my story helps you think about how you can step forward when everything falls apart and invites you to take a step back and look at our world today and the disasters we're living with.

Chapter 3 – Finding AfterNOW describes the work of creating spaces for dialogue, discovery, innovation and co-created action that have been a core part of my work in Japan. These spaces and methods have many names. In my work in Japan we call them FutureSessions, they were one key to helping people in the disaster area build new lives and people throughout the country to shape a new Japan. This chapter is a discussion of the steps, stages, and features of creating systems for transformative change.

Chapter 4 – Reflecting and Changing Together turns back to the first years after disasters and shares the reflections, thoughts and stories of some of my closest friends and colleagues. We dialogued with each other about what has been shifting in Japan. For many, inside and outside of the disaster region, the Triple Disasters were a wake-up call, calling people out of the trance of their lives and into questions about what's important.

Chapter 5 – New Futures Arising Everywhere broadens out and takes a look at the wider world. Everywhere people are in an

inquiry about what it means to be truly human and the purpose of their lives. The stories from different regions are distinct and have their own unique flavor textures, but they are the stories of a time of shifting paradigms and of new possibilities being born.

Chapter 6 – Walking the Long Road Together describes many of the ideas and models and frameworks I've been introducing in Japan. We need tools and stories and ideas that help us walk the long road into lives that matter more. As I did my work in Japan, these were the ideas that I introduced frequently – different ways of thinking about our lives and our world that help us explore those new possibilities being born.

Chapter 7 – Discovering Right Action is similar to Chapter 6 in that it introduces some additional tools and ideas. In this chapter, my emphasis is more on how we discover where to stand, on how we find ourselves and each other and look with fresh eyes at the systems in which we live. I turned regularly to Theory U, Active Hope and the Cynefin framework to help people understand their journey.

Chapter 8 – Creating a Future Together chronicles some of the archetypal stories that have been shared with me after the disasters. These stories are like stepping stones into an unknowable future. They illustrate how we, as human beings, have an extraordinary capacity to create the new, NOW. For some, disaster is a catalyst for these journeys into the hidden wholeness of our lives. These stories may give you some clues about your own journey forward.

Chapter 9 – WhatNow gives an overview of what's happening in Japan now, in all its messiness. Disaster changes everything and it changes nothing. It's a blip in time when the old is cracked open and new light begins to shine. But working in that light takes a lifetime, not just a couple of years. This is very much a story in progress, one with many endings and many beginnings.

Chapter 10 – Living in this Messy Middle offers some concluding reflections on how we live in this time with obliterated past, chaotic present and cocooned future.

It's my invitation to you, and to me, to continue to find the steps forward.