

Masami Ogata



<Profile>

Born December 28, 1957

Applied for compensation for medical expenses through the government settlement in 1996 but was denied.

Despite further rejections thereafter, continued to file objections and make administrative appeals; the court reversed its decision based on a second administrative appeal made in 2006.

Has been a storyteller at the Minamata Disease Municipal Museum since September 2007.

Became an Environment Meister of Minamata City in 2011.

Has been the president of the Storytellers Organization at the Minamata Disease Municipal Museum since April 2013.

Now runs a door fittings store. Is currently a resident of Tsukinoura, Minamata City.

<Essence of his story> *Content will be different from talk on October 9.

I was recognized as a Minamata disease sufferer by former Kumamoto prefectural governor Yoshiko Shiotani on March 15, 2007, becoming the 2,266th person recognized with the disease. My exposure to the mercury happened 55 years ago, in 1957.

I was born in a small fishing village Meshima in Ashikitamachi. My family worked in the fishing industry and was head of a fisherman's group. My grandfather suddenly grew ill in 1959 and died from acute fulminant Minamata disease. In the same year, my sister was born with fetal Minamata disease. Some 20 people throughout my immediate and extended family have been recognized as having Minamata disease. Hair mineral tests to measure mercury levels at the time showed everyone in my family to have high levels. We all lived together and ate the same things, but I used to lie and say that I didn't like fish and had never eaten it. Looking back now, I see that I myself discriminated against Minamata disease.

In order to find happiness in my life, I had always run away from the disease. But no one can run forever, no matter how much they want to hide the facts, and at age 38 I applied for compensation for the first time, only to be told I wasn't qualified. Because I had always taken whatever view of the disease that was convenient to me, life became very hard after those first 38 years. It was then that I decided to fight the disease head on. Regretting the way I have lived up to that point, I resolved to take action against my own condition out of a desire to help Kumamoto Prefecture and its inability to help sufferers. Despite being turned down 10 times, I believed all throughout my appeals that the world would allow me to be happy if I continued to plead my case with honesty and sincerity.

Through my battle with Minamata disease, I learned that nothing is impossible in this world. You never know until you try. I believe it's important to confront big problems with conviction. In the end, although I lost much because of Minamata disease, I also gained many things I wouldn't have known about otherwise.

Rimiko Yoshinaga



<Profile>

Born June 2, 1951

At the age of 3 (1954), father came down with acute fulminant Minamata disease. Father passed away two years later. Grandfather, a fisherman, also passed away in the same year after having been bed-ridden for nine years.

Became a storyteller at the Minamata Disease Municipal Museum in October, 1997.

Is the president of the re-glass studio "Bin-no-Kaze". Was certified as an Environment Meister of Minamata City in 2011. Narrates her experiences as a family member of Minamata disease patients and speaks on the importance of having courage.

Is the vice-president of the museum's Storytellers Organization.

Currently resides in Myojin-cho, Minamata City.

<Essence of her story> *Content will be different from talk on October 9.

I was born and raised in Myojin. My grandfather was a fisherman and head of a fisherman's group. When Minamata disease occurred, there were only four houses in my neighborhood. We all grew vegetables in fields, went out to catch fish to eat, and were essentially self-sufficient. It was a fulfilling life. There were eight in my family: four children, my parents, and my grandparents. My father, who was working at Chisso, came down with the disease in 1954 at age 36. He liked fish so much he would go catch some after work, make it into sashimi, and make it part of his box lunches. He was admitted to Chisso's factory hospital for about a year. Because he only ate hospital food while there, his symptoms did not progress. After he got out, he began eating fish again to take nourishment. His symptoms worsened, and he was having severe seizures when he was admitted the second time. 20 days later, he passed away at the age of 38. A month later, my grandfather started showing symptoms and began a period of being bedridden in our house that would last for nine years.

I did not invite friends over to my house much because I didn't want to have to talk about the situation with my family. Looking back, I was trying to run away from it all. For close to 40 years, I turned a deaf ear to anything related to Minamata disease.

Activities to repair social relationships damaged by the disease began about 15 years ago. Opening a book about Minamata disease one day, I realized all the wrong I had done in feigning disinterest in the topic. I learned about Chisso, who knew its effluents were the cause of the disease but did not stop it, and I learned about our government, which was unable to stop it. Through it all, I came to understand the great degree of sorrow my father endured in being ostracized with a rare disease. The damage done by Minamata disease has not been researched. The sooner research begins, the sooner we will learn of symptoms and ways to treat them; yet no efforts are being made all. We must accept the facts and take care of the situation. I believe this is the lesson to be learned from Minamata disease.

Hajime Sugimoto



<Profile>

Born January 18, 1961

Came from a family of Minamata disease sufferers. Mother was Eiko Sugimoto (she died in 2008).

Talks about when his family developed Minamata disease, his childhood life, his returning to Minamata City from the big city, and his health.

He is a fisherman and sells additive-free dried small sardines.

Has acted as a storyteller at the Minamata Disease Municipal Museum since May 2008.

Currently resides in Fukuro, Minamata City.

<Essence of his story> *Content will be different from talk on October 9.

My family has been heads of fishermen's groups for generations, and fishermen were always coming to my house. One day, my grandmother's hands suddenly began to shake. She was taken to the hospital, but they placed her in the isolation ward because they could not determine the cause of her symptoms. After she was discharged, people in the village began discriminating against her and treating her cruelly, thinking she had a rare, infectious disease. Nobody had come to my house since then. My grandfather later died from fulminant Minamata disease and both my parents developed symptoms, going in and out of the hospital many times. My life without adults around began at that point. I was the oldest of five kids. When my parents were taken away in an ambulance, there was no one I could talk to. Everyday I worried about how I would raise my brothers. I have a picture of myself with my four siblings. In it, I see children gaunt and full of unease. Even when they were home from the hospital, my parents stayed in bed and weren't able to do anything. But it made my siblings happy having them there, and they took delight in taking care of our mother. I thought at the time how precious a thing it is just to have your parents near.

When my parents' condition improved, they went back to fishing and I began helping them in 4th grade. I woke up at 4:30 in the morning to fish, after which I went to school. I never talked about how we had Minamata disease sufferers in our family out of fear of being bullied. With the families of both the victims and the perpetrators living in the same area, studying in the same classrooms, Minamata was an unmentionable disease. 10 years ago, my mother became a storyteller to help people understand Minamata disease. She referred to Minamata disease as a "nosari", something fate hands us, and talked about her experience, giving many courage.

The world is full of discrimination and stereotypes. As we live our lives, it is important to imagine how things are for both victim and perpetrator. Everyone has a role to play.

No matter how difficult life may become, it is never to be thrown away.