

# regional

## Help to heal the scars of war in Okinawa is at hand

A clinical psychologist has formed grief care groups for survivors across the prefecture

**Okinawa**  
THE OKINAWA TIMES

The mother and baby in front of him quickly became covered in blood. By the time he realized what he had done, they were both dead.

“I pulled the trigger,” a former Japanese soldier who had fought in the 1945 Battle of Okinawa said. “It appears in my dreams over and over. It’s unbearable.”

One day in the summer of 2010, the former soldier, then in his mid-90s, visited a cave on Okinawa’s main island with a group of war survivors.

“This smell — it’s unmistakable. It’s the place where that mother and child were,” said the man, who used the pseudonym Teruya.

Breaking down in tears, Teruya was barely able to speak. But he made repeated apologies in a trembling voice: “Forgive me, please forgive me.”

The visit was part of a session with a support group for Battle of Okinawa survivors. Maiko Yoshikawa, 49, a professor at Okinawa University and a clinical psychologist, began a series of such initiatives in 2005 by forming grief care groups for war survivors across Okinawa Prefecture to help try to heal their emotional scars.

Yoshikawa’s approach was to repeatedly ask survivors whether they wished to participate in group sessions.

Teruya, who underwent 21 preliminary interviews before joining group sessions, confided in Yoshikawa alone about his past.

“I won’t speak in front of everyone, but I’d like to attend sessions,” he told her.

“You don’t have to force yourself,”



The entrance to a cave on Okinawa's main island where a former Japanese soldier confessed to having killed a mother and child during World War II  
THE OKINAWA TIMES

Yoshikawa replied. “You can speak at your own pace.”

The group Teruya joined had eight other members. They gathered once a month, visiting sites related to their experiences of war or meeting in local community centers.

“I was a soldier,” Teruya reportedly said when he first introduced himself to the group. But he barely said anything else and sat quietly in the corner of the room, his face expressionless, according to Yoshikawa.

Even when members of the group discussed how they wanted to visit the battle sites of their memories, Teruya bluntly said, “There’s nowhere like that for me, so I’ll leave it to you all.”

Still, over time, Teruya’s expression began

to soften. During one session — about six years after he first met Yoshikawa — he told the group he had something to say. “I’m sorry it’s so late. But if everyone’s OK with it, I’d like to pray at that cave.”

Yoshikawa said she thought the time had finally come for Teruya to speak about his past.

The day Teruya and other members of the group visited the cave he had mentioned was shortly after Okinawa Prefecture observed its Memorial Day on June 23, which marks the end of the fierce ground battle.

Teruya approached the entrance of the cave, appearing to have made up his mind, then suddenly stopped. After a moment, he took another step — then stopped again. After several such pauses, one of the men in the group gently took Teruya’s hand and led him inside.

“No doubt it’s here,” Teruya murmured, kneeling on the jagged rocks, and he began to sob.

After a bout of crying, Teruya began to speak: He recounted how the cave his unit was using had been discovered by U.S. forces and that the Japanese military decided to take over another cave where civilians had taken shelter. It was packed with residents, and his superior officer said to them, “We’re taking this place. You all get out.”

A mother holding a frail, crying baby clung to Teruya’s leg and shouted, “Please, just let this child live.” And then Teruya shot them.

After his confession, everyone in the group lit incense and offered prayers. When one member said to him, “Thank you for sharing,” Teruya burst into tears, this time wailing.

As the group left the site, Teruya bowed and said, “I thought I could never go near that place again alone, but you all gave me the courage.” He added, “What I did during the war can never be undone, but if this serves as a form of atonement ...”

Teruya was born in 1915 in the central part of Okinawa’s main island. He was raised by a strict father and a kind mother, and he was good at running. At 25, he married a woman five years his junior. The couple had a daughter and named her Tomi, which means “rich,” hoping she would grow up with a heart full of goodness.

Teruya was deployed to Southeast Asia during the Pacific War and was determined to give his life to protect his family. In 1944, as the war intensified, he was assigned to Okinawa. By that time, the Japanese military and Okinawa Prefecture were urging residents to leave the prefecture. Teruya’s wife and daughter boarded an evacuation ship just as he arrived back in Okinawa.

On Aug. 15, 1945, Teruya was in a detention camp when he heard the emperor’s radio broadcast announcing Japan’s surrender. Though he felt the war was finally over, he couldn’t reach his wife and daughter as he had never learned where they had gone.

It was several years later that he discovered his wife and daughter had evacuated to Nagasaki and were killed in the U.S. atomic bombing.

With the feeling of guilt over the mother and child he had killed, and devastated by the loss of his own family — his emotional anchor — Teruya left Okinawa in despair. He felt he had no reason to live, but soon after, he returned to the islands for work.

Even so, he avoided his home village. He always carried with him the only photo he had of his wife and daughter and lived quietly, avoiding contact with others.

It took him 65 years to speak about his wartime experience, Yoshikawa said.

“I don’t think he wanted to erase his guilt, or justify what he did by confessing,” she said.

“He needed that long to be able to feel this group was a safe enough place to speak,” Yoshikawa said. “I just waited — and gave him breathing space until he felt the time was ripe — so I could quietly support him from behind.”

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*This section features topics and issues from Okinawa covered by The Okinawa Times, a major newspaper in the prefecture. The original article was published April 17.*

## Profitable Fukushima companies closing due to lack of successors

**Tohoku**  
FUKUSHIMA MINPO

Many companies are shutting down in Fukushima Prefecture even though they are making a profit, due to the aging of managers who run the businesses and their failure to find successors.

Data from Teikoku Databank’s Fukushima branch shows that out of the 871 firms in the prefecture which discontinued, suspended or dissolved their business last year, 34.9% were in the black.

They had to close down because they could not find a way to proceed with business succession smoothly.

Experts warn that such business closures are likely to increase in the future amid labor shortage caused by the aging of society and a declining birth rate.

They call for more effective measures to tackle the situation, as it could lead to a

decline of the regional economy.

Reflecting companies’ struggles to find successors, the number of inquiries made to a business succession support center, set up in the prefecture by the central government, has been rising every year, reaching 1,156 in fiscal 2023, the latest available data.

However, it has not always been easy for people looking for successors and those wishing to take over their businesses to reach agreement, because of mismatches in conditions or career interests.

Meanwhile, there have been cases across the country in which companies in metropolitan areas purchase firms in regional areas, then abandon the management at the regional firm and become unreachable, indicating uncertainties in business successions involving wider areas.

“It is important for proprietors themselves to look for potential successors from their immediate surroundings, including their clients,” said an official from Teikoku Databank.

The aging of business owners in Fukushima Prefecture is also becoming a bigger problem.

According to a 2023 Teikoku Databank survey, the average age of company presidents in the prefecture was 61.3 years old, hitting a record high and topping the nationwide average of 60.7 years old.

More than 80% of business owners in Fukushima Prefecture were 50 years old or older, and 4.8% were 80 or older.

A nationwide survey conducted last year found that 316 firms in Japan went bankrupt because their owners fell ill or died.

A Teikoku Databank official pointed to the need to take prompt action to prepare for unforeseen circumstances.

Kimihiko Matsuzaki, 79, the owner of Yanagi, a Japanese restaurant located in front of Iwaki Station in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, is one such person looking for someone to take over their business.

The restaurant has been in the black,

attracting a lot of customers, but Matsuzaki decided to retire this summer due to his advanced age.

He is looking for a person who will take over the business, which he has run for half a century since 1974.

“I desperately want someone to continue what I have achieved,” he said.

His specialty dishes using fish caught off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture, including bonito sashimi and anglerfish hot pot, are listed on the restaurant’s menu.

“My happiest moment is when I see my customers leave with smiles,” Matsuzaki said.

He looks serious when he cooks food, but seeing people cheerfully enjoying his dishes makes him smile at times.

Matsuzaki opened his restaurant in Iwaki at the age of 29 after five years of training as a chef. His eatery and his friendliness have been appreciated by many people.

“There were tough days, especially at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake,

Kimihiko Matsuzaki prepares dishes at his half-century-old restaurant, Yanagi, in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture.  
FUKUSHIMA MINPO



tsunami and the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant accident, but I didn’t want to quit as customers continued to come,” he said.

As he is nearly 80, however, he feels that his physical strength is nearing its limit.

If he can find a successor, he is willing to sell his restaurant at an affordable price.

He hopes the successor will also inherit the name of the restaurant, meaning “willow” in Japanese, as he took the name after willow branches that can weather storms, being able to bend instead of break.

“People visit Iwaki and enjoy the food. I don’t want such places to disappear.”

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*This section features topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the prefecture’s largest newspaper. The original article was published May 9.*

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