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## Orphaned by tsunami, survivors tell stories of loss

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Ayaka Ogawa, who goes to school in Japan, presented her experience during the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami yesterday to a tearful crowd of about 35 students in Salomon 001. The natural disaster left her without her parents, a sister, grandparents and the house she had lived in for 17 years. "I was left all alone on this planet," she said.

The lecture, entitled "BEYOND Tomorrow: Orphaned by the Wave," was organized by the Japanese Cultural Association and presented by BEYOND Tomorrow, an organization founded in Japan after the earthquake. The event featured five speakers, including three students orphaned by the earthquake and tsunami. The students spoke in Japanese, and their words were translated by

Executive Director of BEYOND Tomorrow Minami Tsubouchi, who also spoke about her organization.

Ogawa wondered why she was the only survivor in her family. "I felt like my heart and soul were gone," she said. But after the disaster, she said she met others who dealt with similar tragedies. "I learned the beauty of people being connected with each other."

Two fellow orphans presented their stories with Ogawa.

The earthquake and tsunami hit on the day of Sayaka Sugawara's middle school graduation.

"This is it. I'm going to die. I wish I had the chance to wear my high school uniform," she thought as she was swallowed by the black water, she said.

In the midst of the chaos, Sugawara said she found her mother bur-

ied under rubble, pierced by nails and tree limbs. She tried her best to clear the debris but was unsuccessful.

"I wanted to save my mother but I knew that staying there, I would be swept away by the tsunami," Sugawara said. "I chose my own life."

"It was a decision that makes me cry to this day," she added.

Masahide Chiba also lost his mother on the tragic day. The earthquake hit while he was playing club sports at school with friends. "Secretly, we were excited that something out of the ordinary was happening," he said. "Little did we know then how much grief was awaiting us."

When he arrived back at his home, Chiba found his mother dead. Chiba now said he feels it is his life's mission to join the relief efforts and to contribute something to his hometown.

"With my mother's memory beat-

ing strongly in my heart, I want to create a world where no child has to experience the grief I have," he said.

BEYOND Tomorrow was launched last June so that students like Chiba, Sugawara and Ogawa could take on leadership roles with compassion, Tsubouchi said.

The organization allows students to overcome the aftermath of the 2011 tragedies and become global leaders. Tsubouchi wanted to set up "a platform for dialogue and exchange" across cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, religions and values, she said.

Students in BEYOND Tomorrow will work to be ambassadors of Tohoku, the region of Japan hit hardest by the earthquake. They will lead the reconstruction efforts in Tohoku and gain exposure to different cultures and values.

"Society needs young people like

these three students here to take active leadership in addressing global issues," Tsubouchi said.

Research Associate in Human Development Yoko Yamamoto presented on the earthquake's effects on education in Japan. Seven months after the earthquake, 15 schools were still closed and about 160 schools were using a temporary facilities to continue instruction, she said. More than 20,000 students were forced to move to different schools.

"Imagine all of a sudden your education is disrupted, and your classmates and you are suffering from a tragic memory," Yamamoto said.

"The effort made by BEYOND Tomorrow assures us that even though the 2011 Tohoku earthquake took many things from children, their educational opportunities and futures should not be taken away," she added.