

## VareseNews

### What happened to our Japanese friends?

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**“Some years ago our village of Besano was twinned with a Japanese village, ‘Utatsu’, which, today, is part of the town of Minamisanriku.”**

“On three occasions, families in Besano gave hospitality to a number of young Japanese people, and in 1999, a group of us went to Utatsu; a number of friendships arose out of these visits. **Unfortunately, up to now, we haven’t been able to get any news about the survivors**”. This is the beginning of **the letter the Bianchini family sent to VareseNews** some days ago, calling for help.

From its tone, their request seems almost hopeless. One of the reasons is that the only answer the Bianchini family have received is from the Italian embassy in Tokyo, which said **“Dear Bianchini family, from an initial check, we have discovered that the village of Utatsu is in the area hardest hit by the tsunami and that it has suffered considerable damage. On the website <http://www.kahoku.co.jp/news/2011/03/20110316t13049.htm>, you can see a picture of the village. The searches for missing people are going on.”**

**Memories, friendships and relationships which arose out of that trip and of the twinning, may now also be victims of the earthquake.** But the Bianchinis **are not giving up**. “We can’t even get in touch by phone, because the line is always busy.”

**And this is where VareseNews got involved.** Like thousands of other readers, the Bianchinis have read the reports that Erica Borile, who, as a “chance” witness, not part of the news channels, has sent periodically from Japan, recounting the earthquake from early on.

**“We were wondering if Erica had a more direct channel, possibly to find out who we can turn to,** to discover something about a number of people from Utatsu, the Koki Yamauchi family, the Hisayuki Abe family, and the Hiroshi Onodera family.”

**Of course, we passed the request on to Erica,** who is still in Japan because of work. Here is her answer. “What I can do is check the websites that give information about refugees and survivors, and look for their names. Then, I’ll contact the association OGA, an international school in the town of Aomori, which has organised a rescue service and food distribution in the Minamisanriku area. I have no idea what might come of it, but **I’ll try.**”

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