

Interview with Ken & Margy Love

Americans Familiar with the Asia-Pacific Region Share Their Experience in Reflecting on Future Japanese Disaster Management

By C. A. Pomeroy

Hawaiian couple Ken and Margy Love were interviewed by freelance journalist C. A. Pomeroy on being prepared for disasters.

Profiles of Ken & Margy

Ken Love and his wife of 50 years, Margy, are both originally from Chicago, in America's Heartland. Along with some family members, they moved from the mainland United States to the Big Island of Hawaii in 1996. Ken works with the State of Hawaii's agriculture department plus the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), in addition to the University of Hawaii. He is a food preservation expert and provides local farmers among other persons concerned with professional agrobio advice, particularly with tropical fruit trees.

He has worked as a cameraman for Associated Press Photos / Wideworld out of New York and Chicago, and was sent out on special assignments. He spent much time at the AP Tokyo Bureau in particular, as it was headed by his friend, the legendary Tom Dygard. He has also worked for other news services in Asia. Thus he and Margy have traveled widely, coming face-to-face with most disasters to be encountered around Asia and the Pacific Rim of Fire.

Climatic disasters have loomed large in Ken's mind, ever since as a youth he saw the aftermath of tornadoes in his grandmother's Chicago neighborhood, not to mention observing them at a distance with their daughter. Margy experienced a large tornado during an outing to the suburbs with their children, and shares her husband's foremost fear of them, instilled especially during a visit to an Illinois amusement park with six kids when a tornado touched down. Fortunately all were unharmed.

Almost as bad for her, though, is having big earthquakes strike without notice, like a Level 6 one that struck in May with its epicenter only a mile away and traumatized their cats. This quake caused greater damage to the house of their younger son, a professional chef living next door to them – a chunk of the external concrete fell away, exposing some wiring, and the chimney was dislodged a few inches as well. The Federal Emergency Management Agency was



Photo: Mr. & Mrs. Love

Ken & Margy Love

helpful, but only really checked the structural integrity upon assessing the walls' interiors. They found wide cracks in the ceiling and broken stairs, with the rebar having been forced out of the concrete in their 1970s' home.

Interview Objective: General View of Non-Japanese on Disaster Management

In November of this year, Japan will establish its Disaster Management

Agency (*Bosai-cho* – *bosai* being a term that is being pushed for universal use by Japan, as with tsunami). In the wake of major tremors in Hawaii, Kyushu and elsewhere, the new national government unit is seen playing a crucial role in terms of international cooperation along with this field's digital transformation, enhanced resilience and speedy recovery.

There were several models considered upon drafting the 2025 law to establish the new agency, among them the US national agency, which aims to provide assistance before (storm alerts and hazard mapping), during (effective evacuation from volcanic eruptions and floods) and after (distribution of emergency food stockpiles like surplus cheese products found in USDA warehouses).

Japan SPOTLIGHT took the opportunity during their visit to Tokyo in July to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary with friends here to interview them about disasters, the roles to be played by both public and private entities, risk management in business as well as everyday life, and in reflection of global climate changes, the outlook for our future.

What to Expect from the New Japanese Agency for Disaster Management

Pomeroy: We understand you have been globetrotters. What do you see the new Japanese Disaster

Photo: Mr. & Mrs. Love



Margy & Ken Love at their 50th wedding anniversary

Management Agency doing globally with counterpart entities abroad?

Ken: The agency can, in addition to helping less prepared countries, focus on Pacific Rim and small island nations. Here, in the Pacific basin, China is already very involved, although offering “less-planned” assistance. Taiwan is trying as well but is facing an uphill battle perhaps. Palau, Fiji and even Papua New Guinea, as well as Latin American countries, are among places that need to be focused upon due to past links to Japan, including immigrants.

I see the situation presenting an opportunity to link with other agencies in the region, in order to benefit small island nations like Palau that already have strong connections to Japan. Still, the new agency will have to make itself available at a moment’s notice when disaster strikes, anywhere in the world, to assist. It should not matter what country or where in the world it is, even if such help proffered is refused by some countries. Being prepared is the important thing.

Margy: Ken often says, primarily in agriculture, Palau is very close to Japan and in international meetings often thanks Japan for building its first roads and schools during the Taisho Era, early in the 20th century. Knowing that help is required should mean Japan and others coordinating with the Japanese government need to be on standby from the early stages of disaster mitigation.

Ken: I think Japan could have an initial actions team head to a

disaster site anywhere around Asia and the Pacific. Such a team must comprise experts who can assess the need for dogs and have other search and rescue capabilities that befit the situation. It should be in the air at the latest an hour after the disaster is confirmed. It should take even less time if the disaster is on the homefront.

Then again, I sometimes travel to southern Europe but see China becoming more influential these days as a result of the heatwave hitting France, Spain and Greece. There are so many small air-conditioning systems and refrigerators to be spotted, not “Made-in-Japan” but Chinese products. Both the Japanese public and private sectors must do better in Europe, the Mideast and Africa for disaster management in the bigger sense of the word. JICA and Japanese NGOs have excellent networks in Africa. Coordinating with these before disaster strikes will enhance the new agency’s effectiveness.

Margy: Enhanced communication and mutual understanding of cultural differences should be furthered. Our oldest son served in the military. I’m sure such people are well aware of how to handle emergencies. Japanese Self-Defense Forces are likely trained to do the same, the same way those who cook gain knowhow concerning mishaps involving fire and electrical appliances.

We all know that transborder fires, explosions whether volcanic, bombs or even gas, and superstorms will hurt you regardless of power or money. Especially children and the disabled elderly should be taught how to face disasters, the same way schools and hospitals use drills in the US to respond to terrorist and criminal threats on campuses and similar locations.

Type of Disaster Management Necessary for Farming & Agribusiness

Pomeroy: As you are in the main business of farming – though Ken, you’re also into hunting new fruit varieties while Margy finds new cultural assets to pass on to children – isn’t risk assessment vitally important in agriculture as well as in the food sector?

Ken: Indeed, being able to look out for the future, keeping in mind seasonal diversity, adopting crop distancing/rotation regimens with an eye to plant variety and using “street smarts” in facing adversities such as abnormal weather, flooding or drought, will make or break a business. Not just assessment but risk management, both are essential. I don’t think the two are quite the same. I can assess a situation and know what to do once it happens. Indeed, in my field of

expertise, mitigation is that doing “something” – being proactive – before it happens. It is the need to ensure business continuity and resilience, not just finances and insurance.

As regards the food sector in which I was involved as a production expert not to mention as a chef, various precautions required upon preparing the final output equal the need to scrutinize safety and sustainability from the onset. Food safety is the first chapter in any textbook or class.

Assessing a situation and mitigating it can be applied to climactic conditions as well – something I would like to see part of this new agency address. When I comment about Japan’s new agency, it comes from growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, running home from school to see Astro Boy on TV or listening to baseball on my new Sony transistor radio (I still have it from 1964 and it still works). Many Americans thought of Japanese products as cheap and high quality. People here in Hawaii still drive Datsun!

Margy: I share Ken’s stance, and we both fear tornadoes in particular because this weather phenomena is “like Loki playing with humans using his fingertips”, as my husband puts it. Tornadoes have a particularly nasty habit of showing up out of nowhere, providing almost no forewarning. However, being near an earthquake epicenter and an active volcano is not a fun experience. We can usually react in time thanks to such modern technology like earthquake warning systems, yet being suddenly met with a tornado touchdown is a truly life-threatening event.

Overall Views on Japanese Preparedness for Natural Disasters

Pomeroy: Do you think the Japanese at this time are prepared enough to deal with major disasters?

Ken: I think they are prepared at household levels in places like Kobe, Koriyama and Kumamoto now, but maybe people should become even more seriously well-prepared. There is still a need to interact with people at the community level. It is crucial to have a community-wide channel for providing mutual aid.

There is still a general impetus in Japan to interact with people worldwide. We have seen much debris from Japanese shores reach Hawaii many months later, underscoring the wide-ranging need to be prepared always at all levels of society. Hopefully, the Japan side will maintain its open stance. I think Japan has fostered much international goodwill by being on the scene early after an

international disaster – earthquakes in Turkey or Colombia. Maybe it’s due to NHK and good PR, but on the day of a disaster I see the Japanese helping pull people out of collapsed buildings. I don’t see the Americans doing it, although I know they are there.

Margy: It seems most Japanese have been touched by a disaster or a would-be one, like taking shelter because of an oncoming typhoon. I heard evacuations in Okinawa, Kagoshima and other islands like Amami-Oshima take place often. The new agency should spearhead these types of operations in preparation for the inevitable day when a real nationwide disaster strikes.

In reflection of events like the great Lahaina fire and Fukushima, people should not be complacent about damage from concomitant fires, gas explosions, landslides or whatever. As with working in the kitchen, one should be prepared always. I often tell my students, keep at it, practice makes perfect.

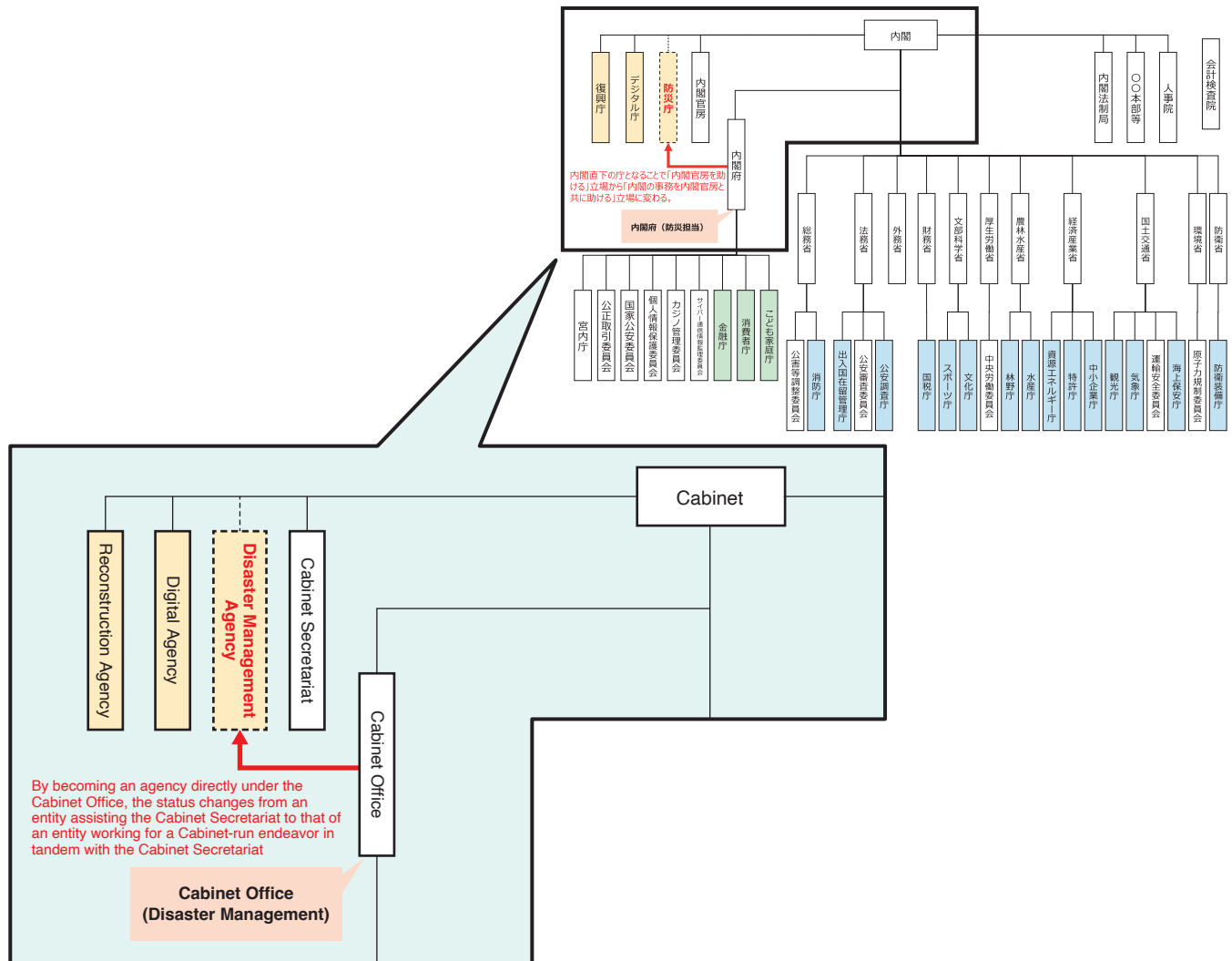
Ken: Just as preparations are required in terms of foodstuff and clothing, securing essential paperwork and cash using fire/ waterproof safes or other containers is a must. Risking life and limb to get some scraps of paper is foolish. That’s a conclusion we all agree on. More education is still needed, like the earthquake practice vehicles in Japan.

Photo: Mr. & Mrs. Love



They found “only” 42 irretrievably-damaged macadamia trees on their Big Island farm in Hawaii.

The organization of Japanese government ministries/agencies



Source: Disaster Management Agency Establishment Office, Cabinet Secretariat

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C. A. Pomeroy is a Texan who has been working in Tokyo for the vernacular press since 1989. He has also contributed to the Japanese-language *Global Keizai* magazine and the *Oriental Economist's Bio Business Explained* book. He is seismological technology/disaster mitigation education and business continuity planning specialist.