



Up From the Sea

Leza Lowitz

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A novel-in-verse about how one teen boy survives the March 2011 tsunami that devastates his coastal Japanese village.

On that fateful day, Kai loses nearly everyone and everything he cares about in the storm. When he's offered a trip to New York to meet kids whose lives were changed by 9/11, Kai realizes he also has a chance to look for his estranged American father. Visiting Ground Zero on its tenth anniversary, Kai learns that the only way to make something good come out of the disaster back home is to return there and help rebuild his town.

*Running through my ruined town,
pack flapping like wings
against my back.
Plowing through blocks
strewn with heaps of
refrigeratorsblackboardsbicyclestaxis
bustedpianosshelvesdesksstairs
allmixedtogether
in a marshland
grave.*

Up From the Sea Details

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Author : Leza Lowitz

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From Reader Review Up From the Sea for online ebook

Liane Wakabayashi says

Inspired by a boy Leza Lowitz met in the Tohoku disaster zone following the March 11th Great Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami, "Up from the Sea" is about a teenage boy, Kai, who loses all of his immediate family except for his father, an American whom he hasn't seen in many years owing to his parent's divorce. Written in verse, "Up from the Sea" is a spacious novel, with literally lots of white on every page that help young adult readers and adults too to better absorb and process the intensity of the emotions that Kai experiences. On virtually every page he tries to reconcile himself to the growing possibility that he may never see his mother again and that his father in America has left him for dead as he wanders through scene after scene of devastation. But as weeks turn into months, Kai is able to focus less on the dead and more on the survivors, especially soccer playing teen boys like himself. "Up from the Sea" becomes a story of hope and catharsis, when Kai is invited to take a vacation from his devastated hometown in one of the most isolated and insular regions of Japan to head for New York, where a meeting with grown up children who lost parents in the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks, raises hope that he will find his lost father. And even though his father doesn't surface in New York, other caring people do. And for families like mine in Japan who bore witness to 3/11 from the relatively safe distance of Tokyo, "Up from the Sea" offers us a powerful starting point for initiating conversation with our children about how this catastrophe may have actually changed the world for the better. Leza Lowitz leaves us with a powerful message: wherever there are people who care, there is hope and there is a future.

Stephanie (Reading is Better With Cupcakes) says

Up From the Sea is about two very difficult topics from the world's history. The first and the main one being the tsunami that hit Japan after a 9.0 earthquake struck. The second being 9/11 as it pertained to the Americans.

Neither of these two topics is something easy to discuss, but Leza Lowitz does it beautifully.

Up From the Sea is not written in the traditional sense. It is actually written in the form of poetry. If you are new to this idea, you may be a bit hesitant and find yourself wondering if a story could really be told this way. The answer is quite simply and very strongly a yes! The world is drawn very vividly and the characters are easy to relate to. It is very well done.

Up From the Sea follows along our main character, Kai. It starts the day of the tsunami, and ended approx a year or so after that fateful day. You feel his emotions, the emotions of those around him, and and you learn a lot of about what it was like in coastal Japan at that time. You also get to learn a little bit about Japanese culture and some Japanese language - which was a nice touch.

If you are looking for a fantastic read that deals with some real life issues, Up From the Sea will not disappoint you. I will warn you though. Once you start reading, you won't be able to put it down. You will be finished within a day of starting it!

My Rating

4.5 Stars

This review is based on a copy provided by the publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review.

Find more of my reviews here:

<http://readingwithcupcakes.blogspot.com/>

Holly (Holly Hearts Books) says

"At 2:46 on Friday, March 11, 2016, a 9.0-magnitude earthquake struck the Tohoku region of Honshu, Japan. It was the strongest temblor ever to hit that quake-prone country, and the fourth largest in the world. It lasted six minutes. After the quake struck, a massive tsunami followed. Waves reaching up to 133 feet."

11,106 aftershocks

Approximately 15,889 deaths

6,152 injured

2,601 still missing

127,290 buildings destroyed

This is Up From the Sea. We follow a young boy by the name of Kai living in a coastal village in Japan. We relive his whole devastating experience while he loses everyone he loves.

"At 2:46 p.m., when I'm sitting in Math, waiting for the bell to ring, and the earth starts to shake."

Throughout the story we do get glimpses of Kai's normal life before the tragic event which adds a blend of light and dark, happiness and not-happiness, and it's incredibly effective.

I wasn't planning on reading this book for another few days. I simply grabbed it from my shelf just to read the first sentence. A normal routine I do with every new book I receive. I read that one sentence. Sit down and found myself completely immersed and changing it from TBR to Currently Reading almost immediately. Which lead to me finishing the entire thing in one sitting.

The entirety of this book is written in verse and I thought "is that going to take the emotion away from this tragic eventful story?" NO. In all honesty, I wouldn't want this book written any other way.

It's heartbreaking, terrifying, disturbing, and oh so very important.

Cwalsh1 says

i'm not one to read much Historical Fiction but in reading up from the sea i found that it spoke to me a lot. Kai being roughly the same age i could relate to many of the emotions and thoughts he was going through, of wanting to run away from everything, of not caring about what happened to anything anymore. but i think the most important thing to take from the story is that life goes on, we rebuild, we change, we fight

desperately for what we believe hoping only that by the time we lie dying that we can say our live was worth living. we change because the universe is ever changing around us, it is the nature of existence, the very core of life for life cannot be without change, we must realize that we all change and that the ultimate gift of death is what we give future generations, we die so that change can happen and the new people can live out the bittersweet peaks and valleys, the highs and lows, the most beautiful, saddest, and happiest, thing in creation... life. The fact that all will change, all will be forgotten, and all will die is a bitter drink to swallow and yet i would have no other drink.

Mike says

Disclaimer: I received this book as part of an ARC giveaway at a local indie bookstore, although I didn't get around to reading it until after the book was officially released. This in no way affected my opinion of the book or the contents of this review.

I really thought I would like this book. And I know that I start a lot of reviews by saying that, but I think I have adequate reason in this case. The book is written in verse, it features a biracial protagonist, it's mostly set in Japan, and it's about a disaster I know almost nothing about. It shouldn't have been hard to make this book good, or at least interesting - certainly, I've never read anything like it. But - and it feels bizarre to say this - the book was just too cliched to do that. Turns out, even authors that genuinely want to do something new can fall into pitfalls that trap less ambitious writers. I do admire that Lowitz wrote a novel in verse with a POC protagonist - YA doesn't have nearly enough of either. But this book was a failure in almost every other respect.

So, let's talk about novels written in verse. I know next to nothing about them. The only other one I've ever read was *After the Kiss*. So I don't have a great understanding of why one might write a novel in verse, and what good poetry looks like. But I do feel like if you're going to use an unusual format, such as verse, there should be some sort of reason for it. *After the Kiss* had that - the poetry characterized its narrators in a way that I don't think prose could have. This novel just doesn't have any good reason to be written in verse. The poetry adds nothing to the story - Lowitz doesn't use it to paint a better picture of the tsunami, or to characterize Kai, or to add any observations that prose couldn't have easily communicated. Maybe this wouldn't be such a problem if the poetry was interesting in any way. But the style of the poetry essentially boiled down to narrative summary with line breaks. A better author could've used poetry to bring us closer to Kai, by using it to reflect his thought process. In Lowitz's hands, the verse keeps us at an arm's length from him and from the story. According to the Afterword, the primary inspiration for this story was a group of kids who started their own soccer league after the tsunami. But without the Afterword, there's no way I could've guessed that's what this book was supposed to be about. Yes, that happens in the book, but most of the details are skimmed over, and until the very end, it doesn't get very much screentime. Lowitz doesn't really show us the difficulties they must've had organizing this, or any sort of real passion for soccer. It's just lifeless plot-decorating. Most of the book was told this way - a lot of potentially interesting action was told to us in summary, which strikes me as a huge wasted opportunity. Lowitz has a very interesting story to tell, if only we could see any of it.

The other big problem is how cliched the novel is. The poetry doesn't do much to characterize Kai, and that might just be because there's not much to say about him. He doesn't have too much of a personality, and his family life is pretty much the only thing we know about him. He never felt like a real person to me - he always felt like your typical disaster novel protagonist. And that's indicative of a much bigger problem with this novel. It just feels too typical of a disaster novel, and even the elements that should've made it unique -

its verse, the fact that it's set in Japan - don't do much to distinguish it. You have your typical arc: the protagonist loses a lot in the first act, is depressed in the second act, and manages to start rebuilding in the third act. You get your typical themes about gaining strength from adversity - in the final sequence, you can almost hear the uplifting music a Lifetime movie would've played. These clichés are prevalent in individual scenes as well. The climatic sequence at the end comes complete with Kai reuniting with a long-lost family member, without much explanation. When Kai is depressed, he finds solace in exactly the people you'd expect him to find solace with: an alcoholic who lost more than Kai did, and a wise old man. It's like Lowitz wasn't even trying to avoid clichés. This, more than anything else, is what severely softens the impact of the novel. There's just very little here that you couldn't find elsewhere.

The obvious comparison for this book - to me at least - is to *Love is the Higher Law*. That was another book about a big disaster, in this case 9/11. Both books were written by people who lived through the disasters they're writing about, and both books focus on fairly average teenagers as they move on from the disaster. But *Love is the Higher Law* works so much better than this book, and the reason for that is pretty simple: David Levithan has something to say. Say what you want about Levithan, but he isn't short on profound observations, and he never writes without feeling huge passion for whatever it is he's writing about. *Love is the Higher Law* is one of his more subtle novels, but it's still clear to me that he wrote it because he had a lot to say about how people move on from disasters and how society in general responds to them. He explores what happens to the collective psyche of New York after 9/11. He shows how disaster doesn't always bring people together, how prejudice existed even after the tragedy. And instead of a typical message about strength from adversity, Levithan's message is more about moving on and how a tragedy can change you without dominating you. That's what makes *Love is the Higher Law* work, and *Up From the Sea* just doesn't have any of that. Lowitz doesn't have anything to say. She didn't go in because she wanted to give the reader a particular message - she wanted purely to inspire and uplift. But trying to evoke a particular emotion without a message invariably results in clichés. Because Lowitz didn't have anything to say, this book was doomed from the start, and no amount of unusual formats or diversity could've saved it.

This book isn't all bad. The poetry wasn't very interesting, but there was some interesting imagery here and there. And I guess I gave it two stars because I support what this book could've been, and I appreciate that Lowitz genuinely wants to contribute something that YA hasn't seen before. But Lowitz doesn't have anything to say - this has all the literary value of a TV guide. I wanted this book to be good, and I'm genuinely disappointed that it let me down.

This review can also be found on my blog.

Aditi says

"In this dangerous world that we live in, where hatred and violence and natural disasters sometimes collide to almost overwhelm us, we each can help in some way. "

----Marsha Blackburn

Leza Lowitz, an American author residing in Tokyo, pens her new YA verse novel, *Up From the Sea* that narrates the story of a young football-aspiring-dreams Japanese teenage boy whose happy life washes away by the roaring tsunami on March 2011, devastating not only his dreams but uprooting his life from his village, thereby losing his whole family. But this is not a story about grief, this is a story which tells the

readers how to survive the overwhelming pain, and stand strong against all odds. Moreover, this book also highlights the benefits and value of unity and kindness during a natural disaster.

Synopsis:

*Running through my ruined town,
pack flapping
winglike
against my back.*

*Plowing through blocks
strewn with heaps of
refrigeratorsblackboardsbicyclestaxis
bustedpianosshelvedeskstairs
allmixedtogether
in a marshland
grave.*

In March 2011, a massive tsunami devastates Japan. Kai, a biracial teen from a coastal village, loses nearly everyone and everything in the storm.

When he's offered a trip to New York to meet kids whose lives were changed by 9/11, Kai decides to look for his estranged father. Visiting Ground Zero on its tenth anniversary, Kai realizes the only way to make something good come out of the disaster back home is to return there and help rebuild his town.

Kai is a half Japanese teenage boy, living with his single Japanese mother and his grandparents . Like every other day on March 11, 2011, Kai went to school and his mother went to the market. Little did they knew, that on this very particular day, a tsunami would destroy their lives completely, which destroys Kai's whole village. But how Kai emerges from the loss of his mother and grandparents as well as his village is something really remarkable and enlightening for anyone. Kai has a dream - he wants to be a footballer, but his dream comes true when Kai and his friends form a football team from the Tsunami-affected village and despite when all their property and loved ones were lost to the raging waves, yet they did not lose their spirit and aspired for a better future by highlighting their lost, forgotten and devastated village in front of the world with the help of their football team.

The story is told in verse and is beautifully portrayed with diverse and heart-felt emotions that will only make the readers' heart yearn for Kai's journey. In other words, the story is sad and fascinating to read. The verse is smooth and simple and reflects realism and emotions. The pacing of the book is fast and can be read within a few hours as the story is so absorbing. The author's writing style is eloquent with carefully chosen words both from local dialect as well as polished English words.

The setting is the backdrop of a fictional Japanese coastal town and through Kai's story, the author brings alive the culture as well as the local folklore of the country. Moreover, the author vividly captures the landscape, the food, the language, the people , the streets and the sea with arresting details. Yes, the author not only makes the readers feel deeply but also transports them right in front of the Tsunami-raging sea and makes them also face the after-effects. And yes the scenes do come alive right in front of the eyes of the readers.

The characters feel very real and they all have an air of sympathy and hope in their hearts. The story is centered around Kai's life after the Tsunami. Kai is a teenager and he is going through a lot of changes in his life, firstly, he has a problem with him being a half Japanese, as he constantly gets bullied and mocked by other kids in the school, hence he is not happy about it. Next he at times disrespects his mother, then after the Tsunami, he is desperate and angry about everything when he tries to find his family. In short, he is a typical teenager with bigger dreams, but that gets destroyed when hit by a Tsunami. His character evolves a lot after the Tsunami, he changes himself from being lonely and angry to someone who is sympathetic with a bit of hope and kind. In the end, I deeply feel for Kai and could not let him go.

The supporting cast, comprises largely of residents of that coastal town, who are extremely kind and their loss unites them together which gives them strength to look after one another, help, love and support through difficult times. Moreover, they arise from the rubles and try to start a new life. Their spirit towards having a new start is something really inspiring. Even though help did not reach them right after the Tsunami, yet they tried to help one another on their own.

The story also highlights the idea of orphan teenagers sharing their grief and pain with that of 9/11 hit orphan teenagers by visiting their homeland. It is more like connecting with another person's loss be it in a natural disaster or a man-made one. The idea is really motivating.

In a nutshell, this is a must-read YA novel that highlights pain, grief and ultimately hope through the after-effects of a Tsunami in Japan. And the story is filled with so much deep evocative emotion, that it is bound to bring a tear as well as smile to the face of the reader.

Verdict: *A must read book with strong message of unity and hope during a natural disaster!!*

Courtesy: *Thanks to the author, Leza Lowitz, for giving me an opportunity to read and review this book.*

Nat says

I'm grateful to have completed my reading goal of the year (100 books) with this heartrending novel-in-verse. **Up From the Sea** follows the life of how one teen boy survives the March 2011 tsunami that devastates his coastal Japanese village.

*"What could possibly hurt me
more than this quake
already has?"*

On that fateful day, Kai loses nearly everyone and everything he cares about in the storm. When he's offered a trip to New York to meet kids whose lives were changed by 9/11, Kai realizes he also has a chance to look for his estranged American father. Visiting Ground Zero on its tenth anniversary, Kai learns that the only way to make something good come out of the disaster back home is to return there and help rebuild his town.

I went into this read expecting it to grow in intensity with each passing page since it's tackling such a heavy subject matter. However, I felt like there was little to no emotion inserted in the writing where it counted the most. In the end, it came off quite distant and disconnected from what I was anticipating with the discussions of 3/11 and the tenth anniversary of 9/11.

*“We all remember
exactly where we were
and what we were doing
when our lives
changed forever.*

*9/11 and 3/11 are so different,
two separate disasters—
but maybe they’re also
the same, Tomo says.*

How so? Kenji asks.

*Each one changed
our country forever.”*

The afterword where the author discussed the inspiration behind some of the scenes in **Up From the Sea** was the one place where I felt everything I should've encountered during my reading experience.

“Inspired by a young boy I met in the disaster zone, I began a novel about a boy who loves soccer and creates a team to rally his town after the tsunami. Months later, I discovered that exactly this had been done in coastal Onagawa. The team is the Cobaltore Onagawa Football Club. Supporters from all over the world helped in the difficult days following the disaster.

Later, I learned that a soccer ball that had belonged to a teenager in Rikuzentakata washed up in Alaska. Amazingly, the ball was found by a man with a Japanese wife who could read the messages written on it. The couple traced the owner and traveled to Japan to return the ball.”

I really wish I'd read this before starting the book.

But as with any read there are still a few pieces that made me experience something deeper within myself. Here's a handful of them:

“THERE’S A SAYING IN COASTAL TOWNS—

*inochi tendenko—
save your own life first.*

*A long time ago,
if you wanted to
marry someone from the coast,
the elders asked:*

*“If a tsunami came,
who would you save first?
Your wife and child,*

or yourself?"

*"If you can't save yourself first,"
they said,
"you can't marry anyone here."
They'd lived through a tsunami,
knew its full power.*

*It's true.
If you can't save your own life,
the town will disappear.*

*And if that happens,
the future, too,
will disappear.*

*So don't you dare
feel guilty for being alive,
Old Man Sato says,
looking from me to Taro
and back again.*

*We've got the future
to build."*

Ultimately, this survival story based on real life emotional events is vividly capturing and ends on a hopeful note.

I also listened on repeat to my favorite song of Lorde's new album while reading.

*Note: I'm an Amazon Affiliate. If you're interested in buying **Up From the Sea**, just click on the image below to go through my link. I'll make a small commission!*

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Romuald Dzemo says

What Happens when Everything Is Lost?

I became a fan of Leza Lowitz when I first read her brilliant and gripping memoir, *Here Comes the Sun* a book that described her journey towards meaning and purpose. This time, she offers her readers an enjoyable literary treat in *Up from the Sea*, a lyrical tale about loss and resurrection, the story of a people ripped apart by the cruel blow of a powerful earthquake and an unforgiving tsunami, a story laced with timeless lessons on survival, resilience, and the courage to rise after a devastating fall.

Up from the Sea is a riveting and heartbreaking tale inspired by the powerful tsunami that hit the coastal regions of Japan in March 2011, leaving untold havoc on its wake. Young Kai was enjoying an ordinary day when the Earthquake that lasted only for few minutes took everything from him. His grandmother and mother perished in the tsunami and his father has been away in the US. At 17, he has to face life alone, but the answer he chooses to give to the devastating loss is what gives beauty to this story. Instead of drowning in his sorrows and grief, young Kai decides to do something about the future of his people. A trip to the US will inspire him to connect with others and get support in giving back hope to his people. Listed as one of the top 100 Must-Read YA Books in Verse by Bookriot.com, *Up from the Sea* is a story of hope not only for those who lost everything to the tsunami but for the whole of suffering humanity. It is a work of great depth, the fruit of long research, and a masterpiece from a writer who feels the cry of humanity very deeply.

The Poetic, Symbolic Style of the Work

The writing is rhythmic and lyrical like the stampede of feet on solid earth; the only problem is that the earth creaks, dissolves, opens up and swallows once stood on it. It reads like the gasping sounds of someone caught up with time and racing to deliver a life-or-death message. The short poems are beautiful, portraying the psychological state of the young narrator, capturing powerful emotions. Lowitz begins her narrative with the musings of the young boy with a dream, a dream to follow up on Dad's path, perhaps to go find him, to leave this place of indifference. The young man has lived with indifference until that fateful ordinary day when disaster struck. Listen to the piercing words: "Didn't love it, / didn't hate it—/ it was just/ where I lived. / In the back of my mind, / there was always New York, / where Dad lived a life/ I could only imagine— / far from this sleepy town/ with its ponds and pines, / temples and tea, / wooden houses/ falling into each other/ like sailors wobbly/ from too much sake, / days as predictable/ as the tides." (p.3)

Leza's verses read like reggae, like a dance with the elements. The recollections of the young Kai are vividly poignant and the entire writing captures the fears and hopes of a people devastated by one of the worst catastrophes in history. But it is wonderful to see how this people make the passage from pain to healing and how they learn to weave a life through the rubble. The author of *Up from the Sea* underscores powerful lessons on the primacy of community in this new work. She so gently, and with an unwavering voice, conveys the indisputable message that after death there is a resurrection, that fledging leaves do sprout from decay. Yes, suffering lived as a community becomes a gift that unites and inspires creativity. A community that suffers together soon discovers the values of compassion, fraternity, and conviviality. Kai's story is a very inspirational one, a story that gives hope to readers and reminds them that perseverance pays, that the things we dream of do come true, and that the path toward personal growth could wind up through hell.

The tone is beautiful and it mimics the troubled mind of a young man faced with a difficult challenge ahead of him. The story starts with a serious issue: fear and loss, and uncertainty and the conflict soon progresses from the personal struggles of a young man dealing with loss to a quest for communal healing.

Kels says

Such a quick read, but also an emotionally gripping and powerfully inspiring one as well. Books like this lingers on the edges of my heart and makes me immensely grateful for this little life of mine. Gifting it to my nieces.

Lara says

Kai is a typical boy living in the Tohoku region on the coast of Japan. Everything changes on the morning of March 11, 2011, when the earth begins to shake while he is at school. The loudspeakers announce that a tsunami is coming, and everyone runs to higher ground. Kai and his friends reach the bridge that is five blocks away, but the water is too high, too fast, and too strong. Kai wakes up all alone in the mud. His principal finds him and leads him to the junior high school where survivors are congregating. Kai learns that his entire family has been swept away. His house and his village have been decimated. When Kai is given an opportunity to go to New York to participate in the 10th anniversary of September 11th with people who had been orphaned by the terrorist attacks, he balks at first, but then he agrees to go. Being able to speak with people who had been through a similar experience helps Kai begin to heal. “9/11 and 3/11 are so different, two separate disasters—but maybe they’re also the same, Tomo says....Each one changed our country forever.” When Kai returns to his village, he starts a soccer team to raise morale.

Written in verse, this novel portrays the events that took place on March 11th with honesty and compassion. The author had been living in Japan when it happened. Many of the events in the book are based on actual survivors and the stories that trickled out in the days and months following the tragedy. A group of Japanese children did travel to New York to raise awareness and money for the children of Tohoku that were orphaned after the tsunami and they were, in fact, joined by a couple of American children who had lost their parents in the terrorist attacks of 9/11. A young boy in Onagawa did start a soccer team to rally his town after the tsunami and supporters from all over the world supplied the necessary equipment. The resilience of the characters in this book is tremendous, and the fact that it is based on an actual event makes it all the more remarkable.

Grades: 7-12

Genre: Realistic, Multicultural

Characterization: Excellent

Literary Merit: Excellent

Recommendation: Highly recommended

Alice Lippart says

Good, but perhaps better for a slightly younger audience.

Carl R. says

Leza Lowitz's *Up From The Sea* is the first artistic response I've seen to the Fukushima Tsunami/Nuclear

disaster of 2013, and it's a powerful, unique work. Unique, first of all, in that novels in verse are virtually unheard of, let alone carried off successfully. But unique, mostly, in that Lowitz makes this tale of a teenager, Kai, whose world is torn to bits by the horrendous event, serve as a metaphor for the trials of an entire society subjected to such cataclysmic devastation.

Just an ordinary spring morning,

ordinary fight with Mom.

Maybe she spoke to me in English

and I answered in Japanese--

don't even remember now. . . .

Whatever it was seems so stupid

at 2:46 p.m., when I'm sitting in math

waiting for the bell to ring

and the earth starts to shake.

That moment launches the story, of course, and you'd expect to encounter lives and buildings rent asunder. Death and horror. There is all of that here, but it's not the center of the novel. More important even than the story people trying to recover and rebuild from such a catastrophe is a story that began long before the sea washed his village away--the search for his father.

Allow me a short personal detour. A couple of decades back, a fire swept our neighborhood. Flames took three thousand homes in twelve hours. Landmarks disappeared. People died. Families lost touch. Even with modern communication devices--not so modern, actually, cell phones were rare--it was difficult for a while for people to get back in touch. The devastation didn't approach Fukushima's, but there is a parallel. A mile or so away from our house (which the fire spared) there is a crossroads dominated by a huge eucalyptus tree. People took to posting notices. Found a dog. Lost a cat. Tell my parents I'm okay. Has anyone seen Jane?

Kai has already lost touch with his father, has yearned every day to somehow reestablish the connection. Now, with everything else seemingly destroyed, finding his lost father seems the only way to make his life whole again.

Talking too much, singing to himself

as he walked along the pier,

laughing loudly--

things a Japanese dad would never do.

He embarrassed me so bad,

sometimes I wished

he'd go away.

and then,

one day,

he did.

By making Kai's dilemma the core of this story, *Up From the Sea*, evokes an emotional response that the ugly pictures and statistics can't match. And we realize that it's the personal relationships that have priority even over the reconstruction of hearth and home. The book doesn't need Fukushima for Kai's search to draw us into Kai's heart and mind. However, the way that Lowitz has joined the two is a stunning literary achievement.

Suzanne says

On March 3, 2011, teen-aged Kai leaves for school after a fight with his single Japanese mother. He doesn't remember what he said to her. He doesn't even remember what language he was speaking -- Japanese, or English, the language spoken by his American father who now lives in New York. Whatever those words were, however, they were the last he'd ever speak to her. Later that day, an earthquake occurs. Within a matter of minutes, buildings are destroyed, and over 15,000 people are washed away in a tsunami triggered by the quake.

Leza Lowitz's debut as a solo novelist (she's the co-author with Shogo Oketani of *JET BLACK AND THE NINJA WIND*) chronicles the terror and sorrow of the disaster and subsequent days. An award-winning poet, she has chosen to tell this story in verse. The short lines do well to capture the urgency of the quake and its aftermath, while the white space on the page gives the reader a measure of relief. For the record, Lowitz is a long-time resident of Japan, and, as she notes in her Afterword, she experienced the earthquake firsthand. She later traveled to the disaster zone to volunteer, to bear witness, and to interview survivors. Her proximity to the event and her familiarity with Japanese culture lend verisimilitude to this story.

The tragedy in northwestern Japan was unspeakably sad, but Lowitz manages to infuse this novel story with hope. Although Kai has lost just about everything, friends, soccer, and the chance of meeting his father in New York help him to begin to heal. We never find out what exactly happened to some of the characters, but this seems right. Even now, five years later, 2,601 people are still unaccounted for.

This is a powerful, beautifully wrought work of art.

Leza Lowitz says

#1 BUZZFEED pick YA NOVELS YOU NEED TO READ: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/farrahpenn/ya...>

Dear Reader: I was in Tokyo when the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami struck at 2:46 p.m. on

March 11, 2011. Long-term residents like myself were used to quakes, but this one was different. The massive sharp thrust followed by a violent back-and-forth shaking grew in intensity with each second. I ran out of the building and watched a skyscraper sway, hoping it would not come down. Strangers huddled together as the pavement rippled and buckled under us like a wave. This kept on for six minutes. That's a very long time! What registered as a 7.5 in Tokyo was a 9.0 along the Tohoku coast. We didn't know that yet. We didn't know that minutes after the quake hit, a massive tsunami slammed onto the shore and devastated those ancient seaside towns.

Then the nuclear leaks began. Though the decision was agonizing, my family and I chose to stay in Japan. Japan had given me so much. It was the least I could do to try to give something back. As I watched from the relatively close (but far enough to be "safe") distance of Tokyo, I wanted to write down everything I saw, heard, and experienced. Though I wasn't in the tsunami zone, the very real and constant shaking of the earth was enough to remind me of the magnitude of the experience. I recorded what I was hearing on the news from friends in Tohoku, seeing on the news, and experiencing myself in Tokyo.

In the coming days, many who stayed mobilized to help. The yoga studio I own organized relief efforts, and I traveled to Tohoku and volunteered at the temporary housing shelters. We helped open a library in Oshika, a town that was devastated by the tsunami. Now teens in the community can have books to read and a quiet, clean, homey place to enjoy them.

But I wanted to do more. Inspired by a young boy I met in the disaster zone, I began to write "Up from the Sea," a novel about a boy who loves soccer and creates a team to rally his town after the tsunami. Months later, I discovered that exactly this had been done, with help from all over the world.

In June 2011, four Japanese high school students who'd lost family members in the tsunami flew to New York to raise awareness for the children of Tohoku orphaned in the disaster. Two American students who had lost family in 9/11 and in Hurricane Katrina, met with them. I was deeply inspired by this story of survivors of tragedies in one country reaching out to survivors in another.

I based the novel on the events of March 11, 2011, and their aftermath, including the above tales, but this story is fiction. I wrote "Up from the Sea" in verse, because the form lent immediacy to the events. I live in Japan, where much of what transpires in life is left unsaid--but still deeply understood and shared.

It is my hope that it will keep a light shining on Tohoku, and that it will inspire kids to know that we can help each other, even across vast oceans.

Rashika (is tired) says

(I still don't know what to rate the book but here is my review for it)

Flipping through

the pages. My heart

racing, hoping Kai will survive.

Hoping I will survive.

Coping seems hard and I

hurt for Kai. Poor baby.

Can I shelter him?

Probably not.

Pretty words that

pop off the page. Pages that flip

by fast.

Emotions that hurt.

Characters that grow.

Overall, my mind might not

be blown but my heart sure does

hurt.
