

Just before sunrise, "ABC Nightline" reporter Bill Weir and his team pulled into the tsunami zone, too dark to reveal the scope of the devastation. But once the daylight illuminated the area, reality kicked in and jaws dropped.



WEIR

In the face of an "apocalyptic" zone, Weir began to take in the scene.

"Imagine a toy-strewn sandbox after a hard rain," Weir said. "Then imagine that the toys are actual cars and boats and trains, and the sandbox is the size of Santa Barbara."

Rewind a few days, and no one could have imagined that one of the largest earthquakes in history would take place, even though the region is no stranger to seismic activity. Japan, a nation at the forefront of innovation and technology, was ill-prepared for the magnitude of what was to come. On Friday at 12:46 p.m. local time, when disaster struck, citizens barely had time to think before the warning bells sounded.

Days following the tsunami, families were displaced, homes were destroyed and lives were lost. An image that lingered in Weir's mind was one of people waiting and hoping to locate their loved ones from lists of patients who had been treated and released from a hospital near Sendai.

"Waiting patiently outside, was this long, pathetic line of people desperate to find proof of life of loved ones lost for days," Weir recalled. "Standing in that tent and watching the stoic faces crumble as they read name after name was devastating."

The job of a reporter is one of many hats: observer, partaker, inquisitor. It seems that separating oneself from a distressing situation is nearly impossible. And many times it is, said Weir. But, when a job needs doing, and you have to maintain your composure, he explained that he gathers strength from the people he interviews.

"I try my best to be respect-

ful in these moments of utter vulnerability and pain, and I constantly fret that I'm intruding, but nine times out of 10, people are gracious and open," Weir said.

As an alumnus of Pepperdine, Weir is constantly reminded of the perfection of our bubble. Oftentimes, he finds himself reflecting on the comparison of his current location to his former, and, more times than not, the uncomplicated nature of his college life is the one he admires.

"Every time I come back from stories in the developing world, I have a new appreciation for the simple ability to sleep indoors or feed my kid," Weir said. "At Pepperdine, I never realized how good I had it. This gig is a constant reminder."

From Afghanistan to Katrina, Weir has traveled the globe to cover breaking news stories. Standing where he is now, he recalls his time in college as one of trial and error, switching majors from pre-med to marine biology, until he got "bitten by the Woodward-Bernstein bug."

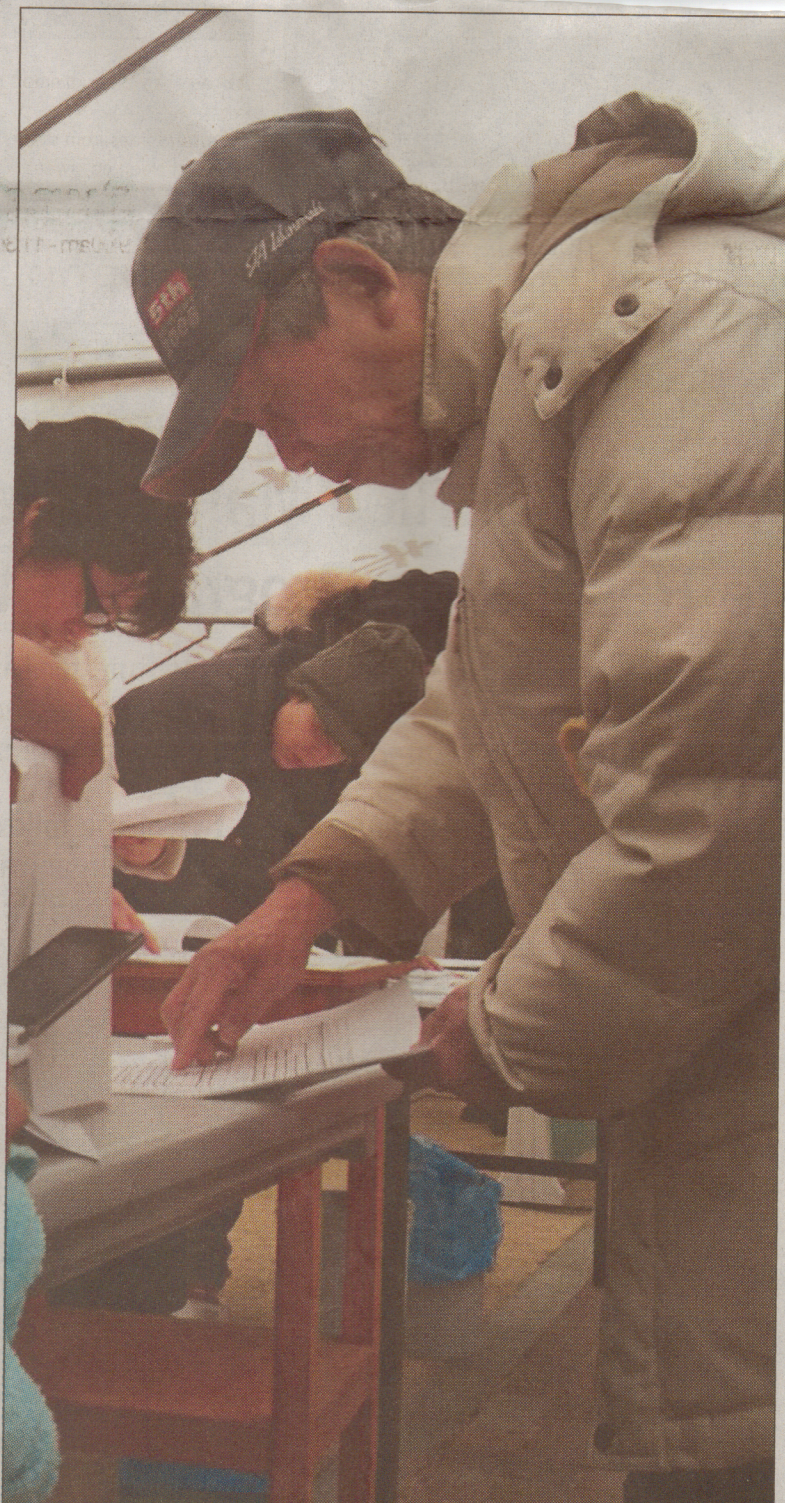
Looking back on his career, he credits his time with American troops in western Afghanistan as the highlight of his career, because it allowed him to see first-hand "the exhaustion and exhilaration of war."

Through the tragedy and ruin of each disaster, there is always hope. It may seem unimaginable to compartmentalize the images of crumbled buildings, flooded streets and cars stacked in tens. Now, even the threat of nuclear radiation looms in Japan, from the destruction of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Though, in spite of everything they have endured, the hope of rebuilding a people and country is always alive.

"Barring some new catastrophe, it won't be nearly as bad as Chernobyl," Weir said. "Thanks to those containment domes, it's unlikely we'll see an atomic cloud floating around the globe. But that section of northeast Japan, and the debate over nuclear energy, will never be the same."

After a disaster of this magnitude, what can one expect to do to rebuild the life that once was?

"It will be the most daunt-



COURTESY OF BILL WEIR

Disheartened: Survivors of the 9.0 magnitude earthquake scan hospital patient lists hoping to find the names of loved ones gone missing after the earthquake and tsunami.

ing project since World War II, taking decades and costing billions. But if anyone can do it, the Japanese can," Weir supposed.

"Their ability to innovate and preserve is an awesome thing to see. But first, they deserve to mourn."

THE FACTS:

- > Almost 22,000 are dead or missing; there are 8,649 confirmed deaths, and 13,262 are missing.
- > 600,000 people remain without electricity.
- > 2.4 million people remain without water.
- > The World Bank estimates that rebuilding will cost \$232 billion and that reconstruction efforts will take at least five years.

Source: the United Nations