



The Unspeakable Tragedy of that Day

by Miyoko Watanabe

August 6, 1945. That morning was bright and clear. The mid-summer sun was shining strongly. A yellow air-raid warning was lifted, and we all breathed a little easier. My house was near Miyuki Bridge, 2.3 kilometers southeast of the hypocenter.

I had been mobilized, but I had the day off because the factory to which I was assigned shut down on the first Monday of each month to avoid using electricity. I left home for the post office at Miyuki Bridge. On the way, I decided the sun was so intense I should go home and get a parasol. I was leaving the house again and had just opened the parasol when I was bathed in a powerful flash.

It was like the magnesium flash of a camera, but with some yellow or orange mixed in and hundreds of times brighter. I thought a bomb had fallen on the gas tank across the river, causing it to explode. I ran instantly into my house and lay face down in the posture we had been taught to take in air raids. I heard some extremely odd shaking and crashing noises. Filled with fear, I opened my eyes and saw that the west wall of my house had fallen down. I could see right into our factory in back of the house. Even as I was thinking, "I survived," I was filled with a terrible dread. When I went out side, the sky that had been so blue moments before was dark as evening. An odd smell was in the air that I could not describe.

When I came fully to myself, I looked toward the house wondering what had happened to my mother. I found her with her hair a mess and standing on end. Her lips were split and her

face was covered with blood from her head. She was a terrible sight. My younger brother's white *kimono* was stained bright red, and he was staggering around. I said, "Are you alright?" to my brother, and my mother answered. "That's my blood. The boy's not injured." When I looked at my mother again I saw blood spurting from her right wrist. I rushed to get some medicine from our emergency kit that would stop the bleeding. I put it on her face and stopped the bleeding from her arm with a tourniquet. My older brother and two men from our factory put her on a stretcher and took her to the Hiroshima Army Mutual Aid Hospital. They got her dangling lip, jaw, and shoulder sewed up without any anesthetic. Because her wrist had already received some first aid, it wasn't treated. That might be why it took so long to heal. Even now her index and middle fingers don't move properly.

Her index finger began to rot above the first joint and grew a black fingernail. After a week, I removed the stitches from her wounds. Because the numbness in her lip and jaw continued, I looked inside her mouth and found some glass fragments. They were about the size of the nail on my little finger. We found five of them. My mother said she wasn't feeling well so we should just stop, but I took some tweezers and looked around for more. I found two more smaller pieces. This was a frightening reminder of the power of that blast.

The tragic conditions in our area right after the bombing are still etched in my mind. I saw a woman who had been nursing her baby lying dead on her house near the riverbank. It was obvious that she bled to death when a glass fragment carried by the blast slit her left carotid artery. In her blood-covered arms, the baby, not knowing his mother was dead, was still sucking innocently at her breast. That scene still comes back to me vividly.

After a while I became aware of blood flowing from my little finger, and I suddenly felt intense pain. I had no idea what to do, so I washed it in water from the pump and put medicine on

it. Then I ran into the air raid shelter with my younger brother. Even today, my little finger remains small and bent and hurts when I'm in bad condition. Inside the shelter, nothing was normal. There was so much groaning. A horrible odor struck my nose, making me instantly nauseated. Then I noticed a little boy about one-and-a-half with his internal organs bursting out of his body. He breathed his last as his mother held him gazing into his white face. A beautiful little girl about five with long hair lay there bleeding profusely. She died, too.

As I left the shelter, I saw a boy about junior high age burned and without hair except on the top of his head where he had been wearing a combat cap. He staggered along like a ghost with both hands held out in front of him. The skin on his cheeks had burst open and was dangling down. He was horribly burned and walking barefoot saying, "Water please! I'm so hot! I'm burning!" Japan's military education taught boys never to say anything weak or feminine. Even though he was mortally burned, he never said, "Help me!"

Many female students had their clothes burned to tatters. The skin was peeling off and hanging from the tips of their fingers. My father came home burned over his entire body. We were terribly shocked. I was still convinced that a bomb had fallen on our factory behind our house, so I couldn't believe that my father was so burned. He had been doing building demolition work near the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital, which was 1.5 kilometers from the hypocenter. I just couldn't understand why he, too, was so burned. I went into our broken house and found some cooking oil to put on his burns. Father was worried about mother, so he walked with steady steps to the Hiroshima Army Mutual Aid Hospital. So many people with burns approached me that I was out of oil in no time.

Father came home with mother. He had a little mercurochrome on him, but there were so many burn victims even the hospital had run out of medicine. The *futon* in the stretcher my mother was carried in were soaked and sticky with dried

blood. Mother's fingers were still covered with congealing blood. We washed them with water from the pump and at last they started to move a little. Her toes were the same, and the *monpe* (work pants) she was wearing were also dried hard. Later, when we soaked them overnight in water, the water quickly turned bright red. We washed them over and over, but every time the water turned red with blood.

A soldier said, "There's a first-aid station near Miyuki Bridge. Injured people should go there." Father went, and was taken directly on to Ninoshima Island. Why did we let our badly burned father go there by himself? I ached with regret.

On August 8, we brought our father home from Ninoshima. Flies were drawn by his white medicine and the pus from his burns, and it was hard to keep them away. Father kept saying, "Give me water." But we had heard that if a burn victim drank water he would die, so we gave him only about a small cup a few times a day. We kept water from him because we wanted him to live. Looking back, my heart still fills with regret.

On the day Japan surrendered, he commented weakly, "So Japan lost...." The following evening he said, "I'm cold," and died, all too quickly. Fifty-three years later, the sorrow I feel about his death has just increased. At the time, we saw such a tremendous amount of death our nerves were numbed.

The center of the city was burning, covered with black smoke. A man I knew who worked at Dentetsu (Hiroshima Electric Railway Co., Ltd., 1.9 kilometers from the hypocenter) came to our house. He told me in tears how he had failed to save his younger sister and was forced to leave her behind. "The bomb fell right on Dentetsu. The back of my head was injured. I wanted to go to the Red Cross Hospital (1.5 kilometers from the hypocenter), but it was burning, so I tried to go home. I got to my house in Takanobashi (1.1 kilometer from the hypocenter) by dodging through the fire. My house was flattened. I called my sister's name. She said, 'Help me! Call the Civilian Guard!' Black smoke around us was already turning to flame. Soon it



Drawing by an A-bomb survivor:
Person Calling for Help from Collapsed, Burning Houses

(by Kanichi Itō)

was bearing down on us. Not knowing what to do, I struggled to remove the rubble. It got hotter and hotter. Finally, I just couldn't stand the heat. 'I'm sorry. Please forgive me,' I said and I left. I could hardly tear myself away. I kept hearing her say, 'You watched me die and didn't do anything. You're a demon.' I did a cruel thing." He was sobbing as he finished his story. All of those who left burning homes and survived have lived, to some extent, with the secret feeling of having done something terribly cruel.

We could not stay where we were. Putting my younger brother and my mother, who had come back from the Hiroshima Army Mutual Aid Hospital, onto a handcart, we fled to the house of an acquaintance in Tanna. I will never forget the horrible scenes I saw on the way.

The post office was completely collapsed, and an army horse was lying dead on its back. Crowds of people were squatting at the foot of Miyuki Bridge. They were weakly calling, "Water, water please." The bridge railing had been blown into the river by the blast. I saw soldiers cremating a mountain of corpses. For some reason, I looked at all those corpses without the feeling I have now about the sanctity of life. We were bombed with such suddenness. So many people had died. Maybe we had lost the ability to feel.

Beginning about the end of August, I had terrible diarrhea and blood in my stools. I lost some of my hair. We had no medicine, so I boiled some wild herbs and drank the tea. Somehow, I managed to survive, but the damage of the bomb lasted far beyond that August. Many who came into the area later to search for their children or brothers or sisters would suddenly develop a high fever, go a little crazy, get purple spots on their skin, and, one after the next, they would collapse and die. There were thousands of cases like that.

Ten years after the bombing, I developed anemia and a loss of liver function. I suffered terribly with that for four or five years. An unsightly stain peculiar to loss of liver function spread over my face. Every time I brushed my teeth, my gums would bleed. I lived in continual fear. Thankfully, I have hung on until today. Eighteen years after the bombing, my older brother got leukemia and died following a painful struggle. At the time, he had been working in the Hiroshima Prefectural District Lumber Control Corporation in what is now the A-bomb Dome. That day, his work day was delayed for one hour, so he was at home and his life was spared. But after the 9th, not knowing that the hypocenter was dangerously contaminated with radiation, he went to his office repeatedly to dig through the rubble and look for belongings of the dead. In 1947 he got a lung infection. The next year he got stomatitis. He was continually in and out of the Red Cross Hospital. It never occurred to us that his illnesses were caused by the bomb. My mother would say, "You're weak.

You're a disease warehouse." I'm sure he suffered a great deal from her criticism. He really had radiation right into the marrow of his bones. After he was cremated we found that his bones were unusually light and porous. They were empty like pumice, and reddish brown like bricks, with a touch of black. When we touched them, they just crumbled immediately. When I tried to hold them, they slipped right through my fingers like sand. They were so strange. In my brother's bones I saw vividly and clearly the true horror of nuclear weapons.

The word "Hiroshima" is known around the world. Those who somehow managed to survive in that city of death have lived ever since with aftereffects and anxiety about their health. They have battled continually with the demon of disease. Today's peace is built on the sacrifices of war victims the world over. Wars are the worst possible misfortune. I only hope that we will have the tenderness of heart to feel the pain of others as our own. The voice of Hiroshima is calling for lasting peace. I hope the tiny ripples we make now will grow someday into a giant wave. Nuclear weapons are inhumane. I will continue to tell the world from Hiroshima that human beings and nuclear weapons cannot coexist indefinitely, and I will continue to pray for the realization of permanent, genuine world peace.



Everyone in My Department Is Dead

by Rikio Yamane

I am profoundly aware of the sanctity of life and the joy of peace. When I see my friends and colleagues departing this world for the next, I feel, deep in my heart, that "all is transient, nothing is permanent." Some of those friends are atomic bomb survivors departing from lives of great suffering. The epitaph engraved on the Cenotaph for the A-bomb Victims in Peace Memorial Park reads, "Let All The Souls Here Rest In Peace; For We Shall Not Repeat The Evil." The Peace Memorial Ceremony on August sixth every year commemorates a day the citizens of Hiroshima will never forget. An old proverb says, "Get new lessons by studying the old." For this reason, I have determined to recall the atomic bombing and record the cruel tragedy of that time.

Though forty-five years have passed since the end of the war, I still shudder with horror when I recall the day the atomic bomb fell. Sometimes I wonder at how I have remained alive all this time. At the time, I was a physical education officer for the Hiroshima city government – all the other members of that department have since died. I lived two kilometers south of the hypocenter in Minamimachi, near the foot of Miyukibashi, Hiroshima's longest bridge. The air-raid warning for the previous night had been lifted, and I prepared for August sixth with a sense of relief. It was a midsummer day, and the sun was shining brilliantly. Seven or eight members of the neighborhood association had gathered, and we were discussing our rations. (Shortages of all kinds had forced rationing of food and other