

I will never forget that day

By Kiyomi Kohno

I will never forget that day 67 years ago when Hiroshima was completely destroyed by a single atomic bomb. This was the first ever atomic bomb used on humankind. The day after the atomic bombing, on August 7th, 1945, I entered Hiroshima city. I have never been able to forget the horrible experiences of that fateful day.

In 2002, when I was 70 years old, I received a notice seeking “Drawings by A-bomb Survivors.” I wondered at the time whether or not I should submit some drawings. One night, soon after, I had a profound dream. In my dream, many young boys, victims of the A-bomb, were shouting “Draw us!” I decided to draw for them and submitted three drawings. That inspired me to publish the book “I Will Never Forget That Day.” Today, I will tell my story by showing those drawings.

As the war intensified, all adult men were called up to fight. As a consequence there were too few people to work in the factories and farms. So from 1944 school children, referred to as “mobilized students,” were forced to do these jobs. I was fourteen years old and a second-year student of a girl’s school in Hiroshima.

Children Sewing Uniforms

In the face of the labor shortages, a lot of sewing machines were brought into our class rooms and we sewed shirts and trousers for our soldiers every day. There was no time for learning with books at school.

We Trained with Spears

We had daily training with bamboo spears, striking a hundred times as if there were enemies in front of us. Our teacher told us that we should kill enemy soldiers with the bamboo spears if they came ashore. I was a small militarist with a towel tied around my head.

A Sudden Heavy Sound

It was a quiet summer morning on August 6th 1945. I lived in the countryside about 35 kilometers away from Hiroshima city. My parents went to work early in the morning and I was left to take care of my three-year old nephew. He had been evacuated from Hiroshima city and came to our home to get away from the air raids. It was around 8 o’clock and we

were just about to eat breakfast.

We heard a large boom . . .the sound of a huge explosion. I immediately rushed outside, without my shoes. I thought that a bomb had been dropped on the house next door.

The Gigantic Masses of Clouds Rose Up in the Sky

I saw a huge mushroom cloud billowing up silently in the sky from the other side of the mountain. The cloud spread so rapidly in the sky. It was uncanny and eerie. I did not know what had happened, as there was no news service and I felt very uneasy.

The Railway Station at Twilight

Railway service was resumed from the early evening that day and a lot of wounded people came back to our village. The village was thrown into turmoil. All of the people were saying the same thing. "Hiroshima has been completely destroyed by a big bomb." My two elder sisters lived in Hiroshima city.

Looking for My Sisters

August 7th, my mother and I took the first train to look for them. It took twice as long as usual. We had to get off the train at Yaga station, one stop before Hiroshima. It was impossible to go farther because Hiroshima station had been burned down. When we walked out of the station, a smell, like burned flesh of animals, filled the air. There was an incredibly sickening stink of something rotten as well. The smell was so strong that I could not open my eyes for a while. We should have seen Hiroshima city, but it had disappeared. There was nothing but smoking burned-out ruins. Beyond the destroyed city, Ninoshima Island in the Seto-Inland -Sea stood out clearly against the sky.

People with Skin Drooping Down

We went toward the center of Hiroshima herded along with a lot of people looking for their families. I saw seriously wounded people walking in a very long line coming toward us from Hiroshima city. They were terribly burned, not only their clothes but also their skin, they were half-naked. Their hair was hanging in wild locks. Their burned clothes were tattered and torn off. Their skin was peeling off their shoulders. Some of them were covered with blood.

What I saw was such an appalling sight. The wounded people were wandering about the debris with burned skin, the tips of their fingers drooping down. They crept forward slowly, their hands out in front of them and I could not believe that they were human. They looked

like they had come from hell.

Streets with Burned Bodies Everywhere

Walking down a narrow street, I saw a lot of destroyed buildings and dead bodies everywhere. The bodies, probably burned by heat rays, made me imagine horrible red goblins from hell, because somehow they had become much larger and rounder than when they were alive. Some of the bodies were burned so badly that we could not even tell if they were men or women. Dark eyeballs covered with a jelly-like substance were dribbling to the ground out of bodies lying on their backs. Stomachs and bowels oozed from open wounds on the sides of bodies, and the color was yellow. Their arms and legs sticking out into the air, the dead seemed to be trying to grasp something. Other bodies were burned so badly that they looked something like charcoal sticks. I saw their long, burned tongues sticking out between their lips. The color was black and the shape was somehow triangular. I walked down the streets, holding my mother tightly for I feared that I might carelessly step on a dead body. I still remember each step feeling disgusting. It was like walking on a wet sponge.

Oh, Please Give Me Some Water!

My sister Midori worked at Hiroshima Red-Cross Hospital. We needed to use the bridge to go there. There were dead bodies lying side by side on the bridge with straw mats covering them. I remember hearing a feeble voice of a woman from one of the mats. "Help me. Water, water please. Give me some water." There were other people walking on the bridge like us, but all they did was pass by without replying. A rumor had spread that these wounded people would die if they were given water. They would have died either way, water or not. I still cannot forget her voice - her last wish! This experience cut me straight to the heart. I could not do anything. I can still hear her voice ringing in my ears.

Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital

The Red Cross hospital was a beautiful building before the bombing, but it was blackened by dust and the building lost all its windows in the bomb blast.

Arriving at the Red Cross Hospital

Stepping into the building, I saw a large number of wounded people filling the rooms and corridors. There was no place to move. Blood soaked people were rolling about in pain screaming, "Help me!" "Doctor quick!" "I want to die!" Their cries and groans echoed off the concrete walls and floors. At last we heard from a nurse that even though my sister had been wounded, she had been rescued and sent to Ninoshima Island. What a relief!

Dead Boys Piled Up Like Lumber

Outside the building, there was a big circular flowerbed at the entrance. Instead of flowers, I saw dead bodies of boys piled up like lumber. They had school caps on their heads and had their leggings on. They were students of Hiroshima prefectural junior high school. They were second-year students like me. They did not have any burns or wounds. I wonder if they were killed instantly. The innocent faces of the boys were deathly white, and it seemed like they were sleeping. On the day of the bombing, a lot of students were demolishing buildings to make fire breaks against air raids. The A-bomb killed more than 6000 of the Junior High School students in Hiroshima.

Dead Bodies Floating on the River

We hurried toward Ujina, where my other sister lived. When we were crossing the bridge, we saw a large crowd of people in front of the railings. Floating on the surface of the water at high tide, dead bodies as white as white pottery drifted on the waves, turned on their backs or face down.

Sister Sumiko Was Found Alive

Most of the houses in Ujina had been destroyed by the bomb blast. However there were no fires at all. It was probably because Ujina was about 4 kilometers away from the hypocenter. Arriving at my sister's house, we found that the windows were broken, the ceiling boards torn, and the house was leaning to one side. However, my sister was alive. She told us that last night she had slept outdoors with her family at the foot of the mountain for fear of air raids. My mother ran up to her daughter, saying, "Sumiko, how wonderful you are safe and alive! How wonderful!" She repeated these words over again and again and shed tears.

Soldiers Burning Dead Bodies

Eventually, we had to part from my sister and her family. We made our way home along a railway track. Every so often I saw soldiers collecting limp dead bodies and carrying them on a board. I thought it must be terrible for them especially because they did not have any food or water in this hot weather. They piled up about twenty to thirty bodies like they were logs, poured oil on them, and burned them to ashes. There were a number of places where dead bodies were piled up.

Burned Arms Hung in the Train

On the way home, I saw a black and burned streetcar off the track. It seemed as if nothing was inside the burned streetcar. It looked empty. However, when I looked inside closely, I

saw some black things hanging side by side on the straps. They were the arms of people on the train. They had been torn off their bodies by the bomb blast and burned into coal sticks. They were all in a row. My heart raced at the terror.

Soldiers Crouching on the Street

Walking farther, I saw a department store with only its outside walls remaining. There were a lot of wounded people laid side by side in rows on the streets around the building. I happened to meet a young soldier's gaze. He was lying on the street as well. His face was deathly pale and he could not stand. His dark and helpless eyes made me think that perhaps he wanted to say something to me, but he said nothing after all. A large number of soldiers laid there, but they were more dead than alive. Perhaps they all wanted to say something. My mother and I walked across the ruin of Hiroshima city all day long. Eventually we got home late at night.

My Friend Fumiko Was Dead

On August 11th, my friend Fumiko died. She lived next door and was one year older than I. She was a hygienist student. Two days previously, she had been carried home on a wooden board back from the city. Hundreds of pieces of glass were stuck in her body. Even though she had a high fever and was in terrible pain, in her last moments she gave these parting words to her mother. "Mom, please do not cry. You're the best mother. I will soon die. Please decorate my grave with many flowers." She gave me parting words, too. She said, "Kiyomi, when you go to school, please tell my friends that I have a lot of good memories." And finally to her grandmother she said, "Do not rush wearing wooden clogs. You will fall over." Everybody just nodded with tears.

Return of my Sister Sumiko

My sister Sumiko came back to my village with her baby. Before long Sumiko's hair began to fall out and her gums started bleeding. I also suffered from a skin rash for a very long time. Looking back I was very lucky because I only had to have my hair cut close and applied zinc ointment, but at that time I was highly embarrassed. It was caused by the radiation that we had been exposed to in Hiroshima. We did not realize that these were the effects of being exposed to the unrelenting radiation. I think my sister wanted to lie down, but she held her baby in her arms because the baby suffered from labored breathing. There were no doctors. There was no medicine. After a while, the baby died on my sister's knee. She was a lovely fair skinned baby.

Talking of that Day Today

67 years have passed since the atomic bombing. Sometimes I tell people about my

experiences of that day, for I would like to pass on the spirit of the young victims to the younger generations through these words. Their voices are always heard and still echo in my ears. saying things like:

“I want to eat a big meal.”

“I want to study and to play sports.”

“I want to play with my friends.”

And simply, “I want my Mummy.”

Junior High School Students Photo

Many young people died on this terrible day without realizing their dreams or hopes. If an atomic bomb had not been dropped on Hiroshima, could they have had wonderful lives? Please do not forget these young boys who lost their lives at only 14 years old.

Photo of Unveiling Ceremony

The monument of the picture I drew is now in the same location of the Hospital flower bed where I saw boys piled up like lumber. On August 6th, 2005, I attended the monument unveiling ceremony, with my granddaughters so that we could send our Peace message to coming generations.

Last Speech

As you know, the Great East Japan Earthquake was on March 11th last year. When I watched the cities being destroyed by the Tsunami on television, the unbelievable scenes and the scale of the disaster took me back 67 years to the terrible day of the Hiroshima A bomb.

Then, adding fuel to the fire, after the huge earthquake and the enormous Tsunami, there were explosions from the Fukushima nuclear reactors and radioactive waste was leaking into the atmosphere.

I had believed that Japan had established a peaceful society and we lived in safe times. But now, we are terribly shocked and frightened. I’m really anxious about the future for our children.

Natural disasters are impossible to prevent. However, the nuclear power plant situation must not be forgotten. We must say “No more Fukushimas.”

For us to demand change, we must continue to appeal for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Man developed nuclear weapons. So, surely man can abolish them. While the road to a

world with no nuclear weapons is not a smooth one, I believe that if we work together, we can solve it. Each and every one of us must have the desire for peace and the strength of will to make a nuclear arms-free society a reality. We must unite with other people throughout the world and stir up international opinions and talk about this issue. Please make an effort to eliminate nuclear weapons for the future of humanity.

A writer, Tamiki Hara was exposed to the A bombing in Hiroshima. He wrote about the terrifying circumstances that he faced in Hiroshima. He thought it was his mission given by God to write his experience in the novel, “Summer Flowers” It has been translated into English. While he was in despair, he continued to have hope and wrote this poem.

ETERNAL GREEN

In the delta of Hiroshima
Whirl round, green leaves
In memory of fire and death
May these, our prayers, live long!
Eternal green!
Eternal green!
Flourish ever fresh and green
In the delta of Hiroshima

Now, he has a monument beside the A-bomb Dome and it is abundant with young green leaves. After the bombing, it was said that nothing would grow in Hiroshima for 75 years. But from the rubble, the city has prospered. As well as that, Hiroshima has become an international symbol.

The city overcame tragedy and campaigns for peace. We must all persevere and work together

I'm absolutely sure that the east side of Japan will rebuild in the future. We're deeply grateful that so many countries helped and supported Japan. We will not lose hope.

I hope my story will strengthen your feelings against nuclear weapons and help create an everlasting world peace. When you get back home, please tell your friends and family about what you saw and felt here, today.

I put forth “No more Hiroshimas” “No more Nagasakis” and now “No more Fukushimas”

Thank you very much for listening to my story.