

Moving Toward a World of Children Living with Smiles

Emiko Okada



Hiroshima is located on a delta with seven rivers. It is surrounded by three hills and facing the Seto Inland Sea. The A-bomb, for the first time in history, was dropped at 8:15 am on August 6, 1945. Aioi Bridge, which was T-shaped, was the target of the bomber. All of Hiroshima, within 2 km from the hypocenter, was razed to the ground within 10 seconds. It is said that the population at the time of the explosion was about 350,000, including the students from Asia, American POWs and many Korean people. It is estimated that 70,000 people were killed instantly and that another 70,000 people died by the end of December, in the same year. The A-bomb has three basic powers: blast, heat rays and radiation. Radiation spread throughout a radius of 4 km from the hypocenter in Hiroshima city.

My house was located 2.8 km from the hypocenter. My family included my parents, a 12-year-old sister, plus my 5 and 3-year-old brothers. I was 8 years old, a third year student at the National elementary school. By the time I understood what was happening, I would watch soldiers going to the front almost every day. I respected and admired those soldiers as a small girl. Hiroshima was a military city and a strong army, called Fifth Division was stationed here. Many soldiers were sent to Hiroshima from all over Japan and dispatched to the battle fields in Asia from the Hiroshima Port. We knew through the radio that most of the big cities were air raided like Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and so on. Under such conditions, civilians were required to practice fighting with bamboo spear drill and fighting fires with bucket relays to protect Japan at the home front. Whenever air raid warnings were sounded, we took refuge in the air raid shelter wearing our working pants and air raid hood. We didn't have enough basic food, so on the playground of the national elementary school we grew pumpkins, sweet potatoes and Japanese radish. I often watched new soldiers at the Hiroshima Station who were just joining the army. They would shout "Banzai! Banzai! (Hurrah)" At that time, the children above the third grade at elementary school were evacuated to the countryside, including me. On August 5th, I went to the Hiroshima Station to see my cousin off, who was going to the front. I then went to my house instead of going back to the countryside. That was when the A bomb exploded. (That was why I encountered the A-bombing on the following day.)

On the evening of August 5, we had frequent air raid warnings. So we had sleepless nights taking refuge to the air raid shelter repeatedly. On the morning of August 6, my elder sister, then in her first year at middle school, left my home as usual with a cheerful voice, "See you later." She went to demolish buildings that were located near the hypocenter and never came home. To this day, we don't know where and how she died. Our family was eating breakfast together, when, we heard the sound of an airplane. After hearing the all clear signal, my brothers thought that it was a Japanese airplane that was flying over us. They rushed to the yard to wave to it, and I followed them. I looked up to the sky and saw the body of an airplane glittering in the blue sky. Immediately, I saw the flash and was knocked to the ground by the blast. I couldn't understand what had happened. My brothers' shirts and pants were burned and torn to shred. They both had blistering burns on their shoulders, arms and legs. They were crying loudly in pain. On our way to seek refuge; we saw many people whose hair was standing on end, and their skin was peeled off. Many people died, one after another, crying out for water and in agony, from the intense heat. Many people were so deformed that we couldn't make out whether they were male or female. Perhaps because I had been exposed to radiation and heat, I was vomiting frequently and couldn't move for some time.

Many people fled to the military drill ground in the north of the Hiroshima station. We lay near the bamboo bush. Around me I saw a child whose eyes were popped out from the eye socket and many dead horses whose internal organs had ruptured. It was a hot summer, so my brothers' burns were infested with maggots. They cried out in pain. My mother went to the burned city and brought back other's bones. She ground them into powder and then applied it on my brothers' burns. We looked over the entire burned city from the Hiroshima Station to the Seto Inland Sea. Hiroshima was engulfed in flames as if everything to the heavens had been scorched. Whenever I see a fiery sunset, I am reminded of that painful and hideous day. I was bleeding from my gums and had lost my hair. I often had to lie down saying, "I am tired! I am tired!" Many people said that I had pika-don disease and that the poison should be taken out from my body, since they didn't know that my illness was caused by the A-bomb.

From the next day, my mother started to look for my elder sister everywhere for almost three months, but we couldn't find out what became of her. When she heard about some makeshift first aid stations someplace in the city, even in Ninoshima Island, she visited every possible places crossing seven rivers. She said that every river, filled with corpses, looked red because of blood.

My grandmother lost five close relatives and saw her children and grandchildren struggling with serious illness. She put her hands together and prayed to her Buddhist altar saying, "It's so merciless! So merciless! If only there had been no atomic bombing." She said this repeatedly until the day she died.

On August 15, Japan surrendered. Those who became overjoyed over Japan's defeat were children, who had been evacuated to the countryside separated from their parents. They waited and waited for their parents to come and pick them up. However, only a few parents came to take them. After the A-bomb was dropped, it is estimated that about 2,000 to 6,500 children became orphaned. A-bomb orphans did whatever they could to survive, such as stealing, extortion, even murder. These children bravely made their own living shining shoes on the street, picking cigarette butt to sell and taking any job available. Many of them worked under the order of gangsters. The occupation forces came to Hiroshima City on a jeep and gave away chocolates and chewing gums to children. A-bomb orphans crowded around them and fought each other to get something. For about five years, those children and many people may have harbored hatred, resentment, grudge and despair. Some people killed themselves in despair. Gradually they overcame these ill feelings.

In 1957, twelve years after the A-bomb was dropped, the A-bomb Survivors Medical Care Law was finally enacted. Each A-bomb survivors was diagnosed. Many survivors were afflicted with keloid, leukemia, A-bomb cataract, microcephaly, thyroid cancer and other medical illnesses and complications. I was diagnosed as an aplastic anemia.

I visited India and Pakistan in 2005 as one of the delegations from Hiroshima World Peace Mission. Before visiting India, I had a stereo-typed idea about India and Indian people that they were very smart and India was a very developed IT country. However, as soon as I arrived in New Delhi airport, I was so shocked to see many people living on the streets with animals. The next day we saw a celebration parade in honor of the Republic of India. It was a colorful parade to boast India's military power: the nuclear missile "Agni 2", tanks, the armed forces and combat planes. It is said that one Agni missile costs three hundred million yen. There were a lot of children looking for food in the garbage outside the celebration site. In India 80% of people are afflicted with poverty and their children hardly ever go to school. I wish military spending would be distributed for children's education. We had a chance to visit a very elite school and they showed us a textbook. It says all the countries except India are enemies. They said that they approved India's nuclear armament for their defense. We also visited a Japanese temple, where young girls whose mothers were prostitute and HIV positive patients were sheltered.

We moved to Pakistan and visited the refugee camp for Afghans. Most of them were children whose parents were injured by landmines and killed by militants on their way to Pakistan. While we were there, North Korea conducted nuclear test using the technology developed by an eminent Pakistan scientist called Dr.Kan.

There are now at least 30.000 nuclear weapons on the earth. Please remember the tragedy that happened in Hiroshima 62 years ago and please make a personal appeal for all countries and nations to abolish all nuclear arms.

For additional Information about A-bomb survivors and their stories, please contact.



WORLD FRIENDSHIP CENTER

8-10 Higashi Kan-on, Nishi-ku Hiroshima 733-0032 Japan

Tel: +81-82-503-3191

Fax: +81-82-503-3179

E-mail: wfchirosima@nifty.com

Website: <http://www.wfchirosima.net/>