

My Story

Fumiko Sora

I was born in 1929 and raised in the country about 20km from Hiroshima.



In 1942, I left my home to move into the school dormitory when I entered a girls' middle school in Hiroshima. In the first year our school life was quite normal and comfortable as it should be. However, the next year, as the Pacific War intensified, everything changed from bad to worse. Even girls' middle school students were mobilized to work for assisting the war; polishing weapons, mending soldier's uniforms, packing cigarettes, canning beef and so on.

In 1944, when I was in the third year, I started working at the military aircraft factory as a mobilized student, instead of studying at school.

In the fourth year, even girl students had to work both dayshift and nightshift, from 7am to 3pm or from 3pm to 11pm.

On August 6, 1945, I was on the dayshift, so I went to the factory at 7am. Soon after I arrived at the factory, the air-raid warning was sounded. We entered an air-raid shelter outside the factory. About thirty minutes later, an all clear was issued, so I went back to the factory. In those days materials for airplanes were scarce and we were just waiting for them to arrive.

The atomic bomb has three basic powers; heat rays, blast pressure and radiation. I was a victim of the blast pressure. I was trapped by the collapsed building and lost one of my eyes. The military factory I was working for was located 2.7 kilometers from the hypocenter. Many including little children who were outside at the moment of the blast were killed by the blast pressure, and even some of those inside the building were killed instantly. I'd like to talk about that August 6th.

It was 8:15 when I saw a yellow flash at the window. I thought we had a short circuit in the power supply. It was followed by a roaring sound. I thought, "Bomb! I've got to run." The moment I turned around, pieces of slate showered onto my head. And what I saw there was a blue sky, not the ceilings.

I had been under the debris for some time, but managed to get out with the help of my friend. A lot of blood-covered people were running around, screaming loudly. I was surprised at the sight of people, who lay with their pink fleshed arms and legs stretched like Kewpie dolls. I too was injured. My head face and arms were bleeding. My friends took me to a first-aid station, but many injured people were already there. I had a triangle bandage on my head and face only. After that, we ran around in the scorching sun, being frightened by American B-29 military airplanes flying over our heads with a metallic sound. Finally we took a refuge in an air-raid shelter. When I got there, I felt a severe pain and lay down in the shelter. Soon I fell asleep.

I was awakened by a voice, "Fumiko? Are you there Fumiko?" I didn't know how much time had passed. It was my father. I was glad and relieved to see him. My father was to take me home, to my hometown. He put me on his bicycle, and he walked along supporting me, because my left eye hurt so much I couldn't open my eyes.

When we went forward for a while, father said, "Can't you walk, Fumi? I can't push the bicycle." So I got off. When I opened my eye that was not injured, I realized that the whole city had been in an air strike, not just our factory.

I could not keep my eye open long, so I got on the bicycle again, but it started to rattle. The bicycle had a flat tire due to the rubble. That gave my injured eye an unbearable pain. But we kept heading for home anyway, me on and off the bicycle. On the way Father told me how difficult it had been to find me. My hometown was 20 km away from Hiroshima, yet my father heard a tremendous roar in that distance and thought something must have happened in Hiroshima. Together with a neighbor my father immediately left home in order to look for his daughter and son, a middle school student working as a volunteer.

When Father came near Hiroshima City, he saw someone staggering forward whose head was like a gray balloon. It was a boy. Father went up close and found that it was his son. It was fortunate that my father even recognized him. My brother was burned in his face, hands and legs, so my father asked his neighbor to take his son back home, so that he could proceed into the city to look for me. But the fires hampered him as the whole city was an inferno. He almost gave up more than once. On the bridge near my school, he saw a lot of burned students who were barely alive, calling, "Mother, mother, water, water" in a feeble voice. At the sight of those girls he was determined more than ever and went on looking for me. In the evening he finally found me. This was what my father told me on our way home.

It was already late at night when we arrived in my hometown. Soon after that, I visited a doctor. He said to me, "This wound is not so serious. It won't affect your chance of marriage. As soon as the swollen eyelid healed, it will open and you will see again." All he did was stitch the eyelid. I had a terrible headache and severe pain, but the only thing I could do was to cool the injury with ice. The doctor didn't have any painkiller. I waited patiently for a week, expecting my swollen eye to get better and the eyelid to open again.

But no change was recognized after a week. So I tried to make my eyelid open, using my fingers, until I saw something black coming out of the pupil of my eyeball. I wondered what had happened to my eye, and immediately went to the doctor accompanied by my sister. Then, the doctor said to me, "Oh, the eye got injured, too. You cannot see with this eye." His words shocked me to death.

I had nothing but the icing treatment and lay in bed suffering the terrible pain for a whole month. Next to me was my horribly-burnt brother. He was covered with white ointment on his face, hands, and legs. He laid holding up his hands and groaning in high fever, "It hurts." Many maggots began to infest his wounds, and Mother removed them with chopsticks.

By the end of August, I was relieved from the pain in my eye and head. On September 16, I went to our middle school in Hiroshima. When I arrived at school, I was devastated to see that the school building had burned down, leaving only part of the walls and curved iron of the gym. There, we were told that about 400 students and teachers of our school were killed in the bombing.

Those four hundred killed in the bombing were mainly first and second year students. They had been at building demolition sites being mobilized to make fire lanes. In those days, most of the large cities were being air-raided and burned, so making fire lanes was important. Vacant space was also needed for emergency evacuations. Four of my dormitory roommates were among those killed in the bombing during the students' labor service.

On that day, about 8,000 students were mobilized across the City to demolish buildings or to work in military facilities. How merciless it was that about 6,000 students were killed by the atomic bomb!

I have more tragic things to tell about my family after August 6. Dysentery became rampant, spreading from Hiroshima to my hometown. My second and third younger brothers and a baby sister were hospitalized. My baby sister died at the beginning of September. And my father's white corpuscles began decreasing. He suffered from A-bomb disease for a while because he entered Hiroshima soon after the bombing to search for me and my brother. He also worked in the City for one week engaging in the rescue operation. In addition to those who were directly hit by the atomic bomb, people who entered into Hiroshima afterwards were also badly affected by the residual radiation.

In October I visited another eye doctor in the suburbs of Hiroshima, hoping for something that might cure my eye. But he said to me, "There is nothing that can be done. The eyeball cannot even be replaced with an artificial one." When the atomic bomb exploded pieces of slate fell on my face and they pierced my left eyeball. Because of that, the eyelid and eyeball were stuck together.

Fortunately, however, I could have my eye operated by an eminent doctor in December. After the surgical treatment was completed, my eye was covered with an artificial glass eye. The doctor said, "Now you have a beautiful eye. Look to the left side. Look to the right. Your eyeball moves accordingly." I looked much better now.

I thought I would pursue a career so that I could live independently. Upon graduating from middle school, I went on to college to become a teacher. Whenever I worked too hard, my bad eye became very painful and puss- mixed with blood would ooze out. Worse than that, the artificial eye cover broke accidentally and a replacement of the same kind was not available. The new one was thick and hardly fit my eye. When I moved my eyes, the artificial eye turned upside down. I was reluctant to appear in public.

But my problem was solved years later when improved plastic materials became available. Despite all this, I earned a teacher's license. I started my teaching career at a junior high school.

In 1969, the Hiroshima A-bomb Teachers Association was organized. We thought we should tell how disastrous the atomic bombing was and how foolish and horrible war was.

The A-bomb survivor teachers thus began to develop peace education, collaborating with other teachers at each school. The entire school was involved in this. Peace education that has been developed to this date stands on three major pillars.

1. What is war and what is the A-bomb like?
2. What are the causes of war?
3. What power can keep peace?

Now, I'd like to focus on the Number 2 pillar. The students, who already learned about the cruelty and inhumanity of war and the A-bombing on Hiroshima in the first material, would raise questions. "Why would such a cruel war break out?" We need to make them understand "the causes of war."

One of the factors is that advanced capitalist nations as well as newcomers dominated underdeveloped countries by force, either for natural resources, territory or markets, or for their own interests. Japan invaded the Chinese continent and made the Manchurian Incident occur, which led to the 15-year-Sino-Japan War, in which Japan dominated China. During this period many nonresistant Chinese were victimized.

The atomic bomb is different from conventional weapons, and it is an inhumane weapon. Mr. Akira Ishida was A-bombed in a tram that was running 800 meters from the hypocenter that day. He was the chairman of all Japan A-bomb Survivor Teachers Association. He suffered cataracts as a young man. He had an operation to treat the colon cancer and skin cancer. He died 2 years ago at the age of seventy-four. He was among those who were being monitored to his/her death about the after-effects of the A-bombing, radiation.

Today, younger teachers are deepening their understanding by visiting China, the Korean peninsula and other Asian countries. They are trying to teach their students the aggressive side of Japan's history with their original teaching materials, about Koreans forcibly-taken to Japan during its colonial rule, for example. They dramatized it or made a picture story.

It has been 62 years since the A-bomb was dropped and Japan was defeated. Yet, there are about thirty thousand nuclear weapons in our world. Furthermore, today's nuclear weapons are a thousand times more powerful than the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. Nuclear weapons and human beings cannot coexist indefinitely. The only way our species can advance is by preventing another Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

I'd like foreigners to work together with Japanese, sharing the wisdom to pursue the goal of nuclear abolition and no war.

In 1986, I retired from my teaching job, and have been working for peace, mainly at the World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, as a volunteer.

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



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