

## **ATOMIC BOMB EXPERIENCE AND THE SUFFERING OF VICTIMS**

There is all around a feeling of peace and quiet. In the city, life, business, and amusements are running along smoothly, as if they might continue on and on. However, in my mind I cannot help seeing, superimposed upon this peaceful scene, like a terrible double exposure, a summer scene 62 years ago, a day of infamy – a day of Hell! It began much like many days of August in Hiroshima, a beautiful summer morning. But all that was to change in an instant, into a day that was the very curse of Hell itself. Never, even in his wildest imaginings, could Dante have produced an Inferno as horrendous and appalling as that into which Hiroshima, at 8:15 AM on August 6, 1945, was reduced in an instant.



At that time I was in my second year of junior high school. My classmates and I had been mobilized by the city as student – laborers, and a few of us were assigned to the Truck Repair Program. That morning we were working on the second floor of a truck repair factory, about 2 kilometers (approximately one and a quarter miles) from the hypocenter of the bombing. That morning the weather was fair and hot. The sun just glared down. Before we began work, the head of the repair shop had given us our instructions. It was now time to start. Then, on the radio in the office was the announcement, “The Chugoku Area Military Command reports that an air raid alert is on in Hiroshima Prefecture. Just at that time, flying above our heads, was a single B-29. In that odd situation, we students whispered among ourselves and even laughed. In those days, other medium and small size cities had been attacked by hundreds of planes day after day. One or

two planes had no special meaning because our nerves had become accustomed to such bombings. Then the all-clear signal was given on the radio. We were taking it easy there on the second floor in the meeting room, waiting for our boss to come. We were chatting together.

All of a sudden, there was an extremely bright flash, which we call, PIKA! It was like burning magnesium, and everything was bathed in intense light and heat. A very bright flash! Terrific heat! My eyes were pained by the flash and what followed it. Someone, as if joking, yelled, “FOOL”, and without thinking I moved toward the door at the other side of the room. Just then, DON, which is what we call the great blast occurred and everything turned pitch black. Whether I slipped down the stairs, or was blown down, I don't recall. When I came to in the darkness, I found myself lying under a truck at the foot of those outside stairs. All kinds of sounds continued, and I thought I was surely going to die. I remember calling out, “Mother!” After a while it became lighter, and I could see people going by near me. When I stuck my head out from under the truck, I found all kinds of debris falling down from above. After a while, I gained enough courage to crawl out.

Everything around me completely changed. All the roof tiles had been blown off. Buildings had fallen down, and there was no glass in any windows. It was a terrifying sight. People with pieces of glass piercing into their bodies were seen. Everyone was hurt and crying and yelling and running about. Seeing all this, I could not help feeling all of their pain.

As I looked up at the sky, I saw a cloud like a massive volley ball. The moving cloud seemed evil or angry. It looked like it would fall back down on us, so many yelled and tried to run away. I watched fearfully, and ran as fast as I could toward the grounds of the Japan Monopoly Bureau, planning to escape along the Hijiyama streetcar line. When I reached

Miyuki Bridge, I found all the buildings destroyed as far as I could see. I was completely dazed at the sight.

In the area toward which I was going, there was raging fire, and the smoke came closer to me, so I decided I could not continue. I returned toward the place where I had been. I knew there was a river ferry at Niho, so I ran there. Along the way no one knew what the bomb was. Everyone was running in different directions. When I stopped someone, and told him that his neck was badly burned, he hadn't even realized it. I was very surprised, and wondered and worried about the fact that I had no injuries. I felt my body again and again. And looking at that never-disappearing cloud, I made my way to the ferry dock.

At the dock, among the people I saw were several men and women. I don't know how old they were, but they were burned all over their bodies, and their skin was hanging down like rags. They had their hands on their chest, as though they were holding themselves together. They didn't look like human beings. As I got off the ferry, I tried not to look at them. While I continued walking about 4 or 5 kilometers, I saw in the blue sky a cloud that looked like a huge pillar with a mushroom-shaped top. It was a horrible sight.

I arrived at home, in Funakoshi Town, a suburb of Hiroshima, at about ten-thirty A.M. My mother said, "You came home early." She didn't know anything about what had really happened. "A bomb dropped near the Toyo Kogyo factory, didn't it? She asked. A little after 11 AM, voices of people in the street began to be raised, saying "Something terrible happened in Hiroshima!" Many totally burned and almost naked people came in truck after truck. School gymnasiums and temples were filled with people.

“Many trucks must be sent to bring people out! What shall we do? Everything is in a terrible mess!” The voices kept on and on.

At one place where people were brought, there were some who had become crazed, some dying, some already dead. Some were calling out the names of children as they died. It was pitiful! The emergency camp looked like a graveyard with all those bodies. The bodies were rolled into straw mats and placed on the school playground. Afterwards, in an area by the riverside, the bodies were burned. People were wondering how all this had happened, especially after the all-clear signal had been given. Each person had a different story to tell about what might have exploded. I thought the city gas tank had exploded.

Along the street in front of my house, there were uncountable burned and injured people. All of them went silently by, from about 2 PM until the middle of the night. Only the sound of their footsteps could be heard. Many people went in the opposite direction, toward Hiroshima, to search for relatives. At dusk, the sky over Hiroshima was red. Fire burned all night. Many of our neighbors’ families and relatives failed to return from the city. Others were brought back dead. Since I had such a fearful, unsettling day, I was unable to sleep all night.

Neighbors’ names were mentioned one after another, but they were soon given up as lost. Not one of my school classmates had returned. I was amazed that I was still alive. From that time, the word “PIKADON!” became the word describing the bomb.

After 2 days we heard an announcement from the Army that said a special kind of bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. Even after 3 days there was no change in the sight of many people passing by along the street.

We junior high school students had been ordered to return to the factories to work after any bombing, and to notify our school at that war time. This was our duty. So I walked back to the city on the third day, as soon as I felt able. Military people, civilians, injured people—all of them completely silent – just struggled along the road. The fighting spirit of everyone was completely gone. I took a shortcut by going over Hijiyama hill. When I reached the top, I was shocked by the sight of the city below. Victims, who had fled to the hill from the burning city, were lying wherever there were open spaces. Weak voices called for water, Mizuokudasa! - - Give me water --Mizuokudasa! -- Give me water! They had been in the hot summer sun for 3 days. The scene was terrible enough, but the smell was worse. When I reached the bottom of the hill, I was feeling very sick. At last I got to the streetcar line street. Fallen telephone poles were still smoking. Burned, blackened people had fallen down along the street. There was a badly burned father holding a badly burned child to his breast. He asked me to help carry the child into the shade and put him on a mat. I did that. I shall never forget the mixture of feelings as I saw the father's love for his child, and the pitiful condition they were in. This scene is etched on my heart.

Those who experienced and survived the A-bomb are still, after 62 years, suffering from the effects, and live in constant fear for their lives. There have been many cases where death has come suddenly, from some form of cancer, leukemia, severe swelling, or other sickness, directly or indirectly related to the bombing. There was a seven year old boy, born of parents who were survivors, who said to his mother as he lay dying, "Why can't I live longer?" He expressed the wish and prayer of us all. I clearly

understand these miserable sufferings myself, since I have shared much the same experience.

Then, 17 years after the A-bomb, one day in March, I felt a sharp pain in my waist. When touching the area, I felt a hard mass in the waist muscles of my back. For 1 year and 4 months I went to various doctors and hospitals for treatment, but none of the doctors were able to determine the exact nature of my illness. The mass seemed to be growing gradually, and I felt afraid and wanted to find a cure quickly.

At last, in 1962, I went to the Atomic Bomb Hospital and had several tests relating to radiation from the bomb. I received notice to enter the A-bomb hospital. There I met another patient, whom I was surprised to find out, was a fellow student from my high school days. He was suffering from skin cancer. Another patient was a girl who needed plastic surgery on her face, as a result of the A-bomb. We all shared in common there the experience and suffering of the bombing.

A month later, on July 29<sup>th</sup> I had an operation to remove part of the growth for testing in the laboratory. On August 3<sup>rd</sup> the doctor came into my room and said, "We have received the results of your tests." On hearing these words I had an unsteady feeling. He continued, "The swelling in your muscles is very large, and is some kind of cancer. Unless it is removed, along with a large part of the surrounding muscle tissue, it will endanger your life." At that time I was 32 years old, married, and with a one-year-old baby boy. When my wife came into my room she did not know fully what I did. The doctor's words caused me to have very confused thoughts. I lost all self-confidence, and fear took over my mind. I became very depressed. This seems to be the fate of those who survived the A-bomb, to live with such agonizing and terrifying thoughts. It is very difficult to express the

depth of the torture of these feelings. That August day in 1945 began for me a long agony of such thoughts and questions. It defies description. When I heard the doctor's fateful words, my mind was weak and I felt lonely and helpless.

But thanks be to God, my best friend at that time was a person from the USA whom I had met in Tokyo several years before. His families wrote me twice a week by air mail, and were very concerned about my health and welfare. He remains, even now more clearly, my best friend and it is a true friendship, rooted in the one God. Deep thanks be to God!

After the operation to remove the cancer, I received radiation-therapy, and finally left the hospital. However, even now I tire easily, and there is pain in my waist with the expansion and contraction of breathing. With this pain, the memories of that fateful day constantly haunt me. After the war, there was a tendency among the survivors to keep silent about their experience, even by those who were disfigured by burns, and those in poor health. I too kept silent. But no longer can I do that.

In August 1968, just before the anniversary, quite by accident, I was able to attend a meeting of YMCA members from all parts of Japan. They watched a motion picture about the A-bomb and had a discussion following the film. That brought back to me the memories of 24 years before, of more than 200,000 people who had died, and of those who were still living and suffering. I began to realize that it was a sin for me to remain silent. I felt bitterness in my heart when I heard many of them saying that the voice of Hiroshima was slowly disappearing. I felt I must continue to pray and work hard for the cause of peace. Though I am only one humble man, I knew that I had to try to make some contribution, however small, to the cause of peace. I know that the path to peace is a rough one, but I also know, as a witness of

the A-bomb, that all humanity must never again ever experience such misery and suffering. We must keep telling the truth about that experience to people of good will. It is our responsibility to our God and to our fellow human beings. The horrible truth about war must be known, and Hiroshima is one of its hardest truths.

War is a sin for the human race. We must co-operate in good will, or perish. This is our duty before God and to our fellow humans. Listen to the groaning voice of Hiroshima, and understand its grave meaning. I see in my mind's eye that terrifying double image of this city, then and now. I pray deeply that never again in the future of mankind will we ever have to suffer in such a horrible way. This is my fervent, heart-felt prayer.

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