

## August 6, that fateful day

By Kiyoko Komeyoshi

My name is Kiyoko Komeyoshi. I am 84 years old. I was in my teens when I lived through a most unimaginably horrible time.

In order to encourage future generations to abolish nuclear weapons and bring peace to the world, I would like to share my personal story of the atomic bombing.

I was born in Tenma-cho in the city of Hiroshima on July 18, 1932. We lived downtown, not far from what is now called the A-bomb Dome which marks the hypocenter of the explosion. I used to play around the domed building and swim in the Honkawa River nearby.

My memory of the A-bombing is forever tied to my memories of studying hard during elementary school and entering girls' school. At 13-years-old I had graduated from Tenma Elementary School and passed my exams to enroll in the Second Hiroshima Prefectural School for Girls in April. This had been a happy and celebratory occasion for me.

But now, in the midst of the Asian Pacific War, we were mobilized to work even on Sundays and through the summer. During August, rather than studying at school, we were forced to help with house demolition in Zakoba-cho in order to create fire breaks.

On August 5, 1945, when we had finished work for the day, we were suddenly told that the next day we would be transferred to the East Military Drill Grounds to weed the potato fields. All 100 first year students and half of the second year students would make the transfer and then all students would return to Zakoba-cho to help with the demolitions on August 7. The second year class leaders used "janken" (rock, paper, scissors) to determine which second year classes would go to the military drill grounds and which classes would continue the demolitions in the center of town. The East class won. I was among the 150 students who would be working at the East Military Drill Grounds. As we dismissed, we confirmed that we would all be working together again at Zakoba-cho on August 7.

On August 6 I grabbed my lunch box, which my father had risen early to prepare, and headed for the tram. The healthiest children had to walk, but for a change, I got to ride on the tram that morning. We arrived at the East Drill Grounds and began working in the fields assigned to us.

Just as we were starting to work, friends around me began shouting, "Here comes a B29!" As I stood to look up, I saw an intense flash of light. Extreme heat struck the back side of my body. Immediately, I covered my eyes and ears and dropped to the ground between the rows of potatoes.

I don't know how long it was before I regained consciousness and became aware of the commotion around me, but when I opened my eyes, it was dark. I pinched my face and thought "I'm still alive! I must get away!" I ran through the darkness to where I had left my bag. As the sky gradually grew lighter again, I looked around and saw that nothing had escaped the destruction. Tree limbs were torn off. Telephone poles were broken and the electric lines were hanging low to the ground. Houses had collapsed. Roof tiles and debris were scattered all

around. There was hardly room to walk along the street. My bag had been blown away and was nowhere to be found.

My friends began to gather together but I could barely recognize them in their charred and tattered clothes, skin hanging off their bodies, eyes and mouths swollen. Becoming aware that one crouching figure was my good friend, I ran to help her, calling, "Take my hand and lean on my shoulder so we can go home together." But she could only reply, "I can't see and my legs won't move. If you come across my father searching for me, please tell him where I am." She was so severely burned, I could hardly recognize her.

Just then I heard the clear strong voice of our homeroom teacher calling, "Follow me! Follow me!" Along with many of my friends, I took courage in his voice and followed after him. With fires breaking out all around the Nigitsu Shrine area, we brushed off ashes and walked on toward the teacher's house in Ushita.

We arrived to find that our teacher's house had collapsed. We sat on the ground and put our feet in the stream in front of the house. This gave us a small sense of relief. There must have been about 20 of us students. Around then some people passed by yelling, "If you drink water you'll die! Don't drink water!" But our bodies felt like they were burning. We wanted so badly to drink and to immerse ourselves in water, but we bravely restrained ourselves.

Just then friends near me yelled, "Your back is burning!" and they peeled off my clothing. The middle of my jacket had burned up and the surrounding fabric was smoldering. I became aware for the first time that the back of my head, my back and my arms were burned and covered with blisters. Still worse than the pain was my intense desire for a drink of water and a desperate longing to pour water over my head. But remembering the warnings, I was determined to stay away from water.

The spreading fires were coming our way, so our teacher evacuated us all to the hill where there was shrine. Saying "you must stay here until I return to get you," he went back to his home. The hillside was filling up with escaping survivors moving about in confusion. People suffering severe burns and injuries were crying out for help, collapsing and dying. It was hell. Even though it was midday there was no sun or blue sky. I was sitting in a strange sort of dusk.

Several hours must have passed before our teacher finally returned. Saying "the flames in the city seem to be dying down," he led us to the gate of the Yasuda Girls' School and instructed us to head for our homes with others going in the same direction. "Just don't go through the center of the city," he said. I found two second year students heading toward Koi and decided to go home with them.

After crossing the Kohei Bridge, we came to the long railroad bridge crossing the Ota River. If we closed our eyes for the slightest moment we would lose our footing. Afraid to cross standing up, we crawled across to the other side. From Yokogawa Station to Tokaichi we leapt as fast as we could over the scorching street car tracks. Not being able to endure the heat any longer, we approached a burned-out street car, thinking we would climb in. But when we reached the door we could see that charred bodies were crowding the doors and windows as though trying to get in or out. We could not distinguish between the living and the dead. No one was moving.

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