

Michiko Yamaoka

Profile

March 24, 1930: Born in Takeya-cho Naka-ku Hiroshima

August 6, 1945: At age 15, exposed to the A-bomb on the way to her workplace, a telephone company, as a mobilized student of Shintoku Girls' High School. She was 800 meters from the hypocenter. She was buried in debris. Her mother came looking for her and rescued her.



1955: Sent to the U.S. with 24 other Hiroshima Girls (later referred to as Hiroshima Maidens). Received treatment for her keloid scars at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York. Home- stayed with a Quaker family.



1958: Became an instructor at the Doita Dressmaking School in Hiroshima. Later, she became a children's nurse at Nagarekawa Kindergarten.

1979: Started telling her A-bomb story, prompted by her mother Akino's death. Continued talking about her A-bomb experiences over the years in order to convey futility of war and importance of life to younger generations in Japan and in the world. She became involved with the World Friendship Center.

Spring, 1995: On the 50th anniversary of the A-bombing, invited as a peace witness to Sidwell Friends School in Washington D.C. to tell about her A-bomb experiences.

February, 1996: Invited to the A-bomb Exhibition in Paris, France to tell about her A-bomb experiences.

November, 2002: Invited to the A-bomb Exhibition in Ottawa, Canada to tell about her A-bomb experiences.

July 2003: Given the first "Man's Voice Award" in New York for sharing her personal account of overcoming hardships.

April, 2005: Awarded the Hiroshima Municipal Distinguished Service Award for her many years of service in sharing her A-bomb testimony.

August 2006: Hospitalized for a cerebral infarction. Restarted her activities briefly, but gave up to focus on recuperation.

February 2, 2013: Passed away due to pneumonia at the age of 82 at a nursing home in Hiroshima.

Michiko Yamaoka is one of the hibakusha who persisted in telling about her A-bomb experiences. At the age of 15, when she was a senior at Shintoku Girls' High School, she was exposed to the A-bomb on the way to her workplace, a telephone company, as a mobilized student. She was 800 meters from the hypocenter. Her mother came looking for her and helped her out. She was severely burned on her face and arms, lost all of her hair, and had blood in her stool. She barely survived. Though her life was saved, thanks to her mother's tireless care, her fifteen-year-old face was swollen with dark red keloid scars. Her fiancé, who had just returned from the front, was shocked and saddened, and he abandoned her. In May 1955, she took part in a program to travel to the U.S. to receive treatment. This was made possible by the efforts of Rev. Kiyoshi Tanimoto of the Nagarekawa Church, American Journalist Norman Cousins, and other Japanese and U.S. citizens. She was treated at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York, receiving 27 surgeries over the course of one and a half years. This group of girls who received treatment were called Hiroshima Girls, and their presence in the United States helped Americans realize the damage caused by the A-bomb. After returning home, she made her living as a dressmaker. In 1979, her mother died, and she started telling her story at the age of 49. She went to France, Canada and the U.S. in order to deliver the message that peace and life are precious.

Ms. Yamaoka stayed single all her life, but she loved children very much. She often said to the children listening to her testimony that they should grow up to be a people who can think and act for themselves. She collapsed after the Peace Memorial Ceremony on August 6, 2006 suffering from a cerebral infarction. She was in critical condition, worked hard at rehabilitation. She told her story to a young American in the following year. After that she lived in a nursing home. She passed away due to pneumonia at the age of 82 on February 2, 2013.