

A Flash Attacked Us Suddenly

— What separated life and death —
By Fumiaki Kajiya

Born in March, 1939

Age at the time of the A-bombing: 6 years old

The place of the exposure: Osuga-cho, Higashi ward (1.8km from the hypocenter)

Final workplace: Hiroshima Municipal Nagatsuka Elementary School

Introduction

I was exposed to the Atomic bomb at Kami-Osuga-cho, 1.8km from the hypocenter when I was in the first grade of National Elementary School. Even now I clearly remember what happened at that time.

Reminiscences of my A-bomb experiences

I remember that I was woken up out of bed many times soon after I had fallen asleep and had run into the air-raid shelter. I think that happened during the night of Aug.5th to Aug.6th. On the morning of Aug.6th, the last warning alert was issued and soon it was cleared.

In those days our family lived at the secluded part of a narrow road called Inari-koji in Osuga-cho (present time Kami-Osuga-cho) which was along the JR Sanyo Line. The town was located about a 7-minute walk from Hiroshima JR Station. The name of 'Inari' shrine, which means a god of harvest, is 'Hisen-Inari'. The origin of the name is handed down orally as follows: The Torii gate of Inari inside the Sentei (present time the Shukkeien Garden) was blown away by a big typhoon during the Edo period and settled down in this place. The Torii gate is still there.

Osuga-cho was located across the Enkogawa River from the Shukkeien Garden. In the book by Tamiki Hara Summer Flower, which is highly valued in A-bomb literature, he described the situation of Osuga-cho and the Shukkeien Garden. He took refuge in the Garden and wrote as follows; the fire on the other side of the river (in Osuga-cho) became furious. Heat came to this side (the Shukkeien Garden), so I soaked a floor cushion in the high water of the river and put it on my head.

My sister, a third grader, and I walked to school along the straight narrow road from our house. Every morning our mother came to the road and saw us off until we turned at the corner.

On the morning of Aug.6th, my mother saw my sister and me off as usual. It was in August and during summer vacation, so we did not go to National Elementary School in Kojin-cho. Children got together at a private house rented for the temporary small branch school and we studied there. 8:15 am was the cleaning time before studying.

After we cleaned the entrance hall, I had to change the dirty water in the bucket but I complained to my sister about carrying the bucket. So instead of me, she carried the bucket to the kitchen which was in the inner part of the house. While waiting for

her, I was somehow looking at the outside through the tatami mat room. I thought I heard the sound of the airplane and looked outside.

At that moment, a blinding white light blocked my view. The black roof tiles of the house across the street disappeared into the white light. The leaves of a fatsia tree in the yard remained black in my eyes like a shadow picture. Light has no sound but I think I heard something cutting through the air. After the flash, I have no memory of what happened for a short period of time.

I crouched in the darkness, sitting tight like a small animal in danger. Before long I knew that the house collapsed and I was buried under it. Walls must have fallen down. The strong smell of red soil, bamboo and straw stunk.

A cloud of dust became thinner and I could see through it vaguely. I felt I was in the narrow space under the pillars that had fallen down on top of one another. Maybe I screamed but nobody came to help me. I tried to escape upward toward the sky that I could see a little of through a narrow space. I made desperate efforts to get out of the space, pushing the wall up and biting something off using my teeth. I crawled up between the pillars, twisting my body and pushing the wall and pillars with my head and back. Finally I got out through the broken part of the roof.

The first thing I saw after getting out of the house, was the strange lines of the A-bomb victims walking in great numbers in front of me. Maybe there were men, women, children, and soldiers. However, how could I, a first grader, understand who and what the streams of people were? They were all just dragging themselves in the same direction like a stagnant stream. Soon I was aware that I was also among them, escaping from the place by walking between the people in front of and behind me.

Our temporary small branch school was on the outskirts of the east parade ground which is now the west side of the Shinkansen Platform. There was a bank for storage of ammunition for the military around there. Along the bank there was a ditch and the road which ran up to the Fourth Crossing of the Sanyo Main Line (present time Osuga Crossing). From the bottom of the slope I saw a long stream of escaping people. I could easily follow the people because their steps were very heavy and slow. When I came to the slope, I saw a dead war-horse lying on its back. Its belly was swollen.

The people escaping were bleeding, burned, had broken bones, and their clothes were torn. However I did not feel sick, nor was I scared. Such emotion is what we feel at normal times. I was also a victim, bleeding from my forehead. Under this terrible situation, as a child, I felt that it was a matter of life and death. I think I took action desperately with the idea that I did not want to die and I had to escape from there.

The people escaping walked up the slope and went down along the narrow road to the Tsuruhane Shrine and then they passed the Nigitsu Shrine to the road along the river. When I passed the Nigitsu Shrine, I saw a house along the road burst into flames. Suddenly the flame blew out of the house and went up to the eaves. Only at that time did the stream of escaping people become disordered. After they passed by they got back in line and once again they began dragging themselves forward.

I came to the end of where the houses lined the road. The river on my left took a big bend at the Futamata bank, and I saw a large bar of white sand in Hakushima-kuken-cho on the other side of the river. I saw the victims there rushing to the sandbar from the stone stairs like debris from an avalanche.

The white sandy area had already become full of people and some of them went into the water. The scene still remains clearly in my mind. Many bodies went floating down the river. Not just one or two bodies, but there were countless bodies floating from the upper stream like drift wood. The people in the water lay with their faces down and went floating down the river just in front of me.

When I recall this later, I wonder why I remember the scene so clearly. Maybe I stopped walking and saw them or I walked slowly enough to see them.

I have another strange thing I cannot understand. I had a narrow escape from being buried under the house so I must have worn no shoes. A lot of fragments of glass and dangerous things must have been scattered on the road. Not only me but also most people were escaping wearing no shoes. In addition, the road was scorching hot under the summer sun, so how could we walk on it with bare feet?

The stream of people were separated into the two ways around Nigitsu shrine: some people went to the mountain side and others went along the river toward Hesaka. I acted on instinct and desperately followed the adult just in front of me. I did not know when and where it was, but anyway I went to the right toward the mountain side.

I don't know how much time passed, but I found myself in a little opening in the middle of the rear side of Futabayama Hill leading to the mountain in Ushita.

There was a relatively large air-raid shelter dug into the slope where many people were gathered. I was brought in there for treatment. I hadn't realized I had a large cut above my left eye, near my eyebrow. Perhaps my face was covered with blood because I saw a lot of blood on the chest part of my shirt. My arms and legs were bloody too. I was treated with only a little bit of Mercurochrome.

There, I met someone I knew. She was Mrs. F, a woman living diagonally across the street from my house. She also escaped. People who were severely injured were inside the shelter. However, people who could move were outside, sitting in the small open space in front of the shelter and were gazing at the city of Hiroshima burning.

We were on the north side of Futabayama Hill. We couldn't see Hiroshima Station or Osuga Town because we were at the height of 40 or 50 meters. However we had the view of the area from Hakushima and Motomachi, all the way to Koi. Houses were burning endlessly and black smoke was rising up to the sky. The area turned into a sea of fire. Everyone was facing toward the burning town without understanding what was going on in front of their eyes. They may have worried about their families or thought of the past glory of Hiroshima City. It started burning in the morning, and kept burning all day. It was not until late afternoon that it finally began to weaken. People must have been watching the fire worrying about their houses, families, friends and acquaintances. I was only a child, so what the adults were thinking was beyond my imagination.

In the early evening, Mrs. F took me down the hill. I'm not sure it was because the fire had weakened so that we were able to walk on the streets or she just couldn't stand doing nothing. We went back the same way we came. We passed Nigitsu Shine, Tsuruhane Shrine and Tosyogu Shrine, then reached the East Drill Ground.

At that time, all the area from Futabayama Hill to Hiroshima Station was the East Drill Ground. Victims avoided the burning town, and swarmed all over the grass slope of the hill. Few were walking and most people were lying, groaning and wiggling, or crouching. I walked through those people following Mrs. F. It seemed that she was looking for my parents. She also must have been looking for her family and relatives. It was after sunset, and was getting dark. I remember that a dog was walking among people going this way and that way, and sometimes stopped. It must have been looking for its owner, too. Noticing us walking, people around us started to say "Please give me water." I listened to them intently. Then I realized that their voices and groans came from all around me like the earth rumbling, creeping low over the land and roaring.

Mrs. F must have gotten information from someone that my parents had evacuated, she took me by the hand and went to the crowd of victims at the foot of Gunkanyama (a small hill located in the southeast of Futabayama Hill). In that crowd, my mother was moaning. Her head and face were wrapped up in something like a stripped-cloth bandage, but it was bloody red and still her blood was dripping down from her neck. All her clothes were stained with blood and she was groaning.

I heard what happened to her later. After she saw us off, she went into the house and was doing some sewing by the window. Then suddenly an air blast from the atomic bomb smashed the window into pieces and those pieces struck her body like a shotgun. The damage to her body which had not been covered with clothes was terrible. She had a 10 cm cut in her cheek, and 50 or 60 small pieces of glass were embedded in her forehead, neck and chest. Some of them remained in her body throughout her life. The most tragic was a piece stuck into her left eyeball. My father found the piece when he finally rescued her from under the pillar. Her pain was fierce when he pulled it out with his fingers. She once said, "Nobody would ever understand how painful it was." Of course she lost her vision in her left eye on that day. She lay on the grass in blood and endured the terrible pain of wounds which might have killed her. So when she saw me, she couldn't say a word and just kept groaning.

My sister was lying on the grass in front of my mother. Her body had little damage and her hands were put together on her chest. She looked as though she was sleeping. I thought her death was strangely calm. Her face looked white and even looked like she was smiling in the dark. While sitting beside her, I almost didn't feel anything. Even though there were hundreds of deaths within my sight, that strange feeling I received from my sister's face still remains in my mind. What a tremendous number of deaths I saw in a day! People separated into the living side and the dying side. I felt that my sister had become one on the side of the dead.

On that night I just sat beside my mother and sister in the grass on the slightly high area at the foot of Futabayama Hill. We were at the entrance of Gunkanyama (current north side of Japan Railway Hospital) and this area was filled with victims. From there we could see Hiroshima Station directly in front of us and also the center of the city far away. We were watching the fire getting bigger and then smaller. I

remember we had rain while we were there. It was probably the so called Black Rain. People on the grass who escaped from life threatening danger had no shelter and were getting wet. I think they felt that the rain was comfortable for their heated bodies that hot night.

My father was slightly injured. After he carried my mother and sister to the Drill Ground, he was busy with saving other victims, helping the neighborhood association, and doing volunteer work as a member of the civil defense. It was already dark when he came back, but he was so happy to see me because he had thought I had already died. He held me tight and cried. We stayed the night of August 6 with many other victims. I woke up several times during the night, hearing the sound of the town burning, groans and dying screams, and then went to sleep again. That was my August 6.

The next night, or the following night, the gathered bodies were lined up like railroad ties, something like oil was put on them, and they were cremated. I remember the color of blackish flames, and black smoke spreading toward the sky.

My memory about relief activities

I remember people gathered at the back of a truck. It came into the Drill Ground and I took a big bite into a rice ball I was given. There was a case of another truck distributing bags of army hard biscuits. Instead of eating a biscuit, I found konpeito, small candy, in the bag and put it in my mouth first. I still remember the sweetness and happiness in my mouth.

My uncles came for us both, from Kumano, my father's hometown, and Oasa, my mother's hometown. There were a lot of relief activities from neighboring cities, towns and villages, and also by the army. We must remember victims themselves volunteered for relief and restoration activities despite the risk to their lives. In my father's case, he got an award from the mayor of Hiroshima on August 6, 1955 on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the atomic bomb. It says "...You devoted yourself to suffering citizens despite the risk to yourself in the devastation and confusion of deaths by the atomic bomb. These are beautiful highly valued acts that citizens of Hiroshima can never forget... Mayor of Hiroshima, Tadao Watanabe."

My father and others in the activities must have seen and experienced 10 or 100 times as many things as I did. Now I regret that I did not ask many uncles and aunts of mine who lived in the town about these things, and now they are all gone. Those acts by suffering citizens which were described as "acts which we can never forget" are going to be forgotten as time goes by without them being handed down. My philosophy is that we shouldn't let them fade away. I'm grateful that I am still alive and that I can share my experiences, as I think of the people who have passed away.