

The Appeal of a Girl Survivor

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At the time of the bombing I was 12 years old. I was working with a student labor squad just one mile from the target point, or ground zero. When an alert was followed by the all-clear signal, we went back to work. Then I sensed a sharp flash. When I regained consciousness, I began running for home. Coming to Tsurumi Bridge, I saw many people in the river crying for help. I jumped off the bridge into the water about 45 feet below. With only our faces above water we were all crying for our mothers to help us. Someone caught hold of me and said, "Aren't you Matsubara-san? I could not recognize who was speaking to me. I asked, "Who are you?" I am Hiroko," she replied. Then we all began to exchange names.



We realized that the fire would soon surround us and that we had to get out of the water and climb up on the bridge. Only 55 of our 320 students were able to get out of the water. Those who did not have enough strength to do so were drowned, and their bodies floated down the river.

On the bridge, I saw a person struggling to put out the fire consuming her body. Long strips of skin were hanging from her hands and arms. There were some who had stopped to get a drink from tanks of water, but the heat was so severe they were suffocated and died with their faces in water.



On the road to the forest there were many dead bodies and pools of blood were seen here and there. Helped by someone, I got to a first-aid station where the wounded were being treated. Someone placed a handkerchief over a girl's face because her wounds were so unsightly. The handkerchief stuck to her burned face and could not be removed even after she died. The mother of this girl looked for her daughter but could never recognize her child's face.

Between the air-raid warnings my father put me on a stretcher and took me for treatment. I was treated for burns for eight months, but was left with keloid scars on both legs, both arms and my face. I lost the use of my arms and legs for a while, but exercised them regularly so that they would not stiffen permanently. Every time I moved them they would bleed at the joints. I often thought it would be better to leave my arms and legs the way they were, for the exercises were so painful. Many times I would ask my mother for a mirror. I wanted to see how my face had healed. My mother would never give me a mirror. When I was able to get up I reached for the mirror myself. I was shocked when I looked at my face. So I live today, not knowing when the radiation sickness will return or whether I will recover from it next time. All victims of the Hiroshima bombing are in the same condition.

When I was unable to get a job because of the scars on my face, I used to cry. I used to cry when I knew I did not have the strength to go to school for more training. I used to cry whenever I thought that I would never marry. My mother would weep and say "I should have been burned instead of you, for I am older and it is easier for me to die." Sometimes she would say, "It would have been better if you had died when you were burned." Finally I came to the point where I could stop crying because my tears saddened my mother.

However, please do not worry about me. Although at one time I was threatened with the loss of my life, I hung on. In March of 1962 just before the US resumed nuclear testing, I was working at an institution for the blind for eight years. I was chosen as a representative of Hiroshima to present the heartfelt messages of the A-bomb survivors in person to former Secretary-General of the United Nations U Thant, and to the Soviet Russian Ambassador Zorin, at the 18th National Disarmament Conference in Geneva. On the way to New York and then Geneva, we visited 14 countries during five months, including the United States, England, France, West and East Germany and the Soviet Union. Everywhere we appealed for a stop to nuclear testing.

In the U.S.A., we attended 138 meetings at universities, schools, churches, peace groups and women's associations during forty days of traveling. I told my story with unabashed emotion, and soberly, almost prayerfully. I told of the patients still in the hospital in Hiroshima with injuries from the atomic attack and of the death rate of about 50 a year. Sometimes our meetings ended with a very good discussion, with people in the audience asking what they could do to help us make our message heard. The memories of the actual experience of the bombing were so painful for me, that I felt sick in the first country of this trip. Eventually I had to have an operation for appendicitis in Stockholm, Sweden.

In May, 1964 I joined another group, the World Peace Study Mission, which traveled to eight countries between April and July; the United States, Canada, England, France, Belgium, East and West Germany and the Soviet Union. Some of the group's participants appealed to their hearers' emotions and some spoke from a scientific point of view, which had the effect of emphasizing strongly, to the people of the world, their single-minded determination to make their vow of "No More Hiroshima" come true.

When I returned home, I was greatly shocked to find that my elder brother and his wife had died, leaving three children, ages 12, 8 and 6. They moved to our house to live with my aged parents who seemed to expect me to bring them up. Moreover, my father's health was very poor, due to cancer of the stomach, and the doctor said that he had only three months to live. Although he was a survivor himself, he took care of me and worked at the first-aid station, treating victims and helping to dispose of dead bodies. There were often no less than eighty and sometimes over one hundred dead bodies in a day till the 5th of October.

I decided to give up my job with the blind institution in order to live with my nieces and nephew and looked for a new job in which I could use my experience of traveling around the world for peace. It was very difficult, however, to find a job that paid enough for me to live on. Luckily, I have now been working as a non-regular staff member at the Hiroshima Peace Culture Center, which was established in 1967. The Center collects and preserves educational materials and makes them available to the public for exhibits. Relics and other materials, such as data for research, must be collected, organized and kept up-to-date and available. I collect materials about peace from seven different newspapers and magazines for our scrapbooks and help to keep track of the peace movement in Hiroshima.

My mother and I have been taking care of the three children since their parents died. Now they feel as if I am really their mother and they are learning to love people and peace. It is very pleasing to learn that one of my nieces has begun to study hard in order to become a child nurse, just as I did. She has really become fond of caring for people. In a way I feel as if my dream will never die.

We believe no father or mother who has dear sons and daughters would want to bomb or kill other children or make more orphans like my nieces and nephew. We survivors never want the millions of people in the whole world to suffer the same tragedy as we have. Please say, with a loud voice, "We don't want war any more!" and "NO MORE HIROSHIMAS."

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