

Narrowly Escaping Death

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● August 6

In those days, it took me more than one hour to commute to Mitsubishi Heavy Industries' Hiroshima Machinery Works in Minami-kanonmachi. I caught a train at Saijo and transferred to the tramway on my duty for student mobilization. I am the fourth child of five brothers and sisters: one brother, two elder sisters, me and one younger sister. My brother was in Kyushu for military service.

When I was a second-year student at Hiroshima Prefectural Hiroshima Second Middle School, all classes were canceled and I was mobilized to one factory after another. From the end of 1944, I started commuting to Mitsubishi's Kanon Factory.

On August 6, I experienced the A-bombing with several friends on our way to the factory. I believe the location was somewhere near a general sports ground in Minami-kanonmachi, which was about 4 kilometers from ground zero. If I had caught one train after the train I actually took, I would have died in the train due to direct exposure from the A-bombing. It was indeed a narrow escape from death.

At the moment of the A-bombing, I was exposed to the flash from behind. I still remember that my neck was hot. Then, after the fierce blast, I toppled to the ground and passed out. Five minutes later, I opened my eyes. Looking around, I realized that the factory had been reduced to mere steel frames with its roof blown off, despite being as far as 4 kilometers from ground zero.

What on earth happened? I thought maybe the factory where I had been mobilized might have been bombed by B-29s. But no, it would have been an explosion of a gas tank in Minami-machi more than it would a bombing by B-29s. My classmates also varied in their opinions. I was sure that the yellow alert was canceled. At 8:15 a.m., nobody was on alert. Before 8:00 a.m., a red alert was issued. It was later changed to a yellow alert and then was canceled around 8:05 a.m. I was positive I had also heard a siren cancelling the alert.

After that, an instruction was issued: "The entire city is on fire. Today, everyone here should go back home." So we headed east in a black rain that was pouring down. On my way home, I passed by Eba, Yoshijima and Senda, before crossing the Miyuki Bridge in the direction of Hijiyama. While crossing the bridge, many people yanked at my legs, demanding

water and saying, “Give me water, give me water.” But I simply assumed that they were injured since I had no idea what the real cause of their wounds and burns was. I was horrified by people who yanked at me demanding, “Hey you. Give me water, give me water. I’ve been injured and I’m thirsty....” Luckily, I didn’t suffer any injuries in the A-bombing. So I had no choice but go forward, totally baffled by the sight of so many injured people.

I saw a soldier whose body was covered in red when passing by the foot of Mt. Hijiyama. He is still vivid in my memory. His skin was all hanging down from his body. He was breathing but his appearance had been brutally transformed. Spotting me, he pointed at a corpse saying, “I have to carry this on a cart. Young man, will you hold the feet?” I was too scared to do that. In the area around the foot of Mt. Hijiyama, many people were not seriously injured thanks to the location far from ground zero, and many of them were helping the soldier carry corpses. The soldier must have died within several days.

I wasn’t sure what time it was but I finally arrived at a station in Kaita around midnight. Based on information that a train bound for Saijo would leave Kaita at midnight, I waited for the train for over an hour before managing to catch it. Arriving at Saijo in a train packed like sardines, I couldn’t identify the faces of those who had come to meet others at the station. Since it was a period when people weren’t permitted to turn on lights due to the blackout policy, and not knowing who was there for me, I just had to listen to the welcoming voices, “You must have had a tough time. I’ve heard how terrible it was.”

● **Situation on and after the 7th**

Based on information that my uncle had experienced the A-bombing while working on Mt. Hijiyama, my aunt and I went down to Hiroshima in search of my uncle. Although my memory on whether we drove a truck to the city and how we got to the city is blurred, we left at dawn on the 7th, trusting what we’d heard that my uncle was housed in a facility somewhere in Ujina. Thanks to three years of commuting to Hiroshima Second Middle School, a map of the city was in my head. That was why I decided to go out with my aunt to be her navigator.

We found my uncle in a shelter in Ujina. I remember that the shelter was

a warehouse near the harbor. I saw soldiers there lining up corpses at the connecting corridor, saying, "Oh, this guy just died. His body should be transferred to the corridor." One of the soldiers said to me, "This person is dead. Will you hold the head?" I was too scared to help him. People who had passed away were transferred to the corridor by teams of a few persons. Even a girl aged around 20 was being laid on the ground naked, for she had been burned black.

Although we were able to take my uncle back to Saijo from Ujina, he died on the 10th, three days after he returned home. He was cremated at a crematory near our house. I was there to provide help. My aunt died two years ago. She once told me that she and my uncle had been married for only 9 years.

● **Life after the A-bombing**

It was probably at the end of October or in November when classes of Hiroshima Second Middle School were resumed. I remember that we built a shack on the former site of Hiroshima Second Middle School in Kanon and took classes while trembling from the cold in a classroom without a heater, into which snow was blowing. It was a building without any window panes. Before the school finally returned to Kanon, they provided classes by borrowing a building from a girl's school in Kaita or a building from an elementary school that had not been broken.

Since I wanted to go on to a higher school, I had to attend classes to get the necessary credits. So I took classes while bearing the cold, thinking that I should be grateful for classes being provided even in a shack. It was a middle school under the old system. I graduated from the school in 1947 when I was a 5th-year student. After graduating from middle school, I went on to Hiroshima Industrial College in Senda-machi.

After graduating from industrial college, in the decade from 1955 to 1964, when automobiles were gradually becoming more commonplace around the world, I was hoping to establish a driving school. I started with acquaintances from building driving courses with shovels in our hands. Using credits earned at the industrial college, I was certified as an instructor for basic knowledge and practical skills. From 1960, I worked for a driving school in the city as chief instructor.

In 1966, I quit the driving school. Since my brother asked me to help him run a nursing home and other institutions, I started helping his business.

I'm proud of my brother, who also served as president of the medical association. The two of us closely cooperated to run the business, but my brother suddenly died due to a brain hemorrhage. I couldn't sleep for three days from the sorrow and disappointment. He would tour around facilities in Miyajima and Yuki. When traveling long distances, I would serve as his driver, since he was the hospital director. I supported him feeling that my mission was to drive for him. While my brother had devoted his life to learning, I was an athlete. We had cooperated with a singleness of purpose. Losing my brother has weighed on me as a great sorrow.

● **Employment, marriage and aftereffects**

My wife and I will be celebrating our golden wedding anniversary before long. When we were married, I tried not to tell her that I was an A-bomb victim. Since I was well aware that there was discrimination against A-bomb victims, I ventured to say to her, "I definitely experienced the A-bombing but from up to 5 kilometers from ground zero at the edge of Minami-kanon, where I was working for Mitsubishi. So it was nothing and I didn't suffer any injuries." My wife seemed not to worry about my being an A-bomb victim. My son, who's a knowledgeable pharmacist, has realized that he's a second-generation A-bomb victim. When our son and daughter were born, I worried a bit about this. I secretly made sure they had no abnormalities.

On my mind as an aftereffect was a swelling that developed on the back of my neck ten years after the A-bombing. It wasn't malignant but it was a big swelling like a benign new creature. It developed in an area exposed to the flash, which had come from behind me at the time of the A-bombing. I had surgery to remove the swelling but another one grew there ten years later. Since then, though, I haven't gotten any more swelling. Another condition that may be attributed to the A-bombing was that my teeth deteriorated quicker than other people's. Some A-bomb victims experience hair loss, too. Aftereffects vary from person to person. My hair didn't fall out. One thing in common to every A-bomb victim is that they easily get tired. When I was employed, my boss usually suspected I was lazy because I'd easily get tired compared with others in the same job. My boss reprimanded me, "Other people don't get worn out with this much of work. You feel tired because you're lazy." When working, it's very

disadvantageous for you to easily get tired.

● **Wish for Peace**

When conveying what the A-bombing and peace mean to younger generations, I think speakers need a little ingenuity. At the moment of the A-bombing, buildings collapsed in the blink of an eye, and people died in no time, so to convey this kind of thing, you have to be creative in how you do it. Just repeatedly saying, “It was terrible,” or explaining, “I regret that I didn’t give any water to people who really craved it. I just escaped from the flames approaching under the bridge” doesn’t convey anything. Just saying “We have a Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Please visit. There are peace trees” also doesn’t really convey the brutal aspects of the A-bombing. These kinds of expressions could give people the idea that the A-bombing was no big deal. A tornado that occurred in Hokkaido the other day claimed many people’s lives. In a video, the tornado’s aftermath struck a similar image to the A-bombing. It was a strong, realistic image. Even a little child would be able to understand the real aspects of the disaster. Also in the A-bombing, buildings instantly collapsed and burst into flames, and as many as 200,000 people died just like that. So videos of real disasters would have been able to represent the real aspects of the A-bombing.

Shortly after the A-bombing, professional photographers from the Mainichi Shimbun and Asahi Shimbun went to Hiroshima and took photos of the disastrous scenes. Even for these photographers, who had visited war zones many times, no war zone was as tragic as the disaster created by the A-bombing in Hiroshima. So what is the key to conveying the tragedy? I believe there has to be a little ingenuity in how to convey it.

Lastly, I was enrolled at Hiroshima Second Middle School and lost many lower-year students in the A-bombing. Some of my surviving classmates recently passed away. I have felt lonely with the death of my only brother. Currently, I am physically disabled and am taken care of by my wife. I hope I can live at least another two years. And I would be happiest if I can talk about what happened to me to younger generations, including small children and elementary school students once a week or every other week, if possible, until I have no regrets before going to my death bed.