

## A Diary of My Atomic Bombing Memories

By Hachio Noguchi

Yet another August ninth is coming around.

Five years have gone by, but I still find myself overwhelmed with emotions every time that day approaches. I first set about writing this document with the intention of making a factual document, but I found that my mind would always wander back my memories of my wife and children and the time before the atomic bomb took their lives. I then urged myself to write a tribute to their tragic deaths, but each time I tried to express the sorrow of their tragedy excruciating pains would pierce my heart, causing me to throw down my pen in lamentation. On numerous occasions I even found myself wandering around the mountainside in the middle of the night, my mind in a state of unrest. Eventually I managed to complete forty pages of writing, but I still don't feel that I did justice to their story, despite the fact that the memories were still fresh in my mind.

One day, as I was working upstairs at the office of the Nagasaki Coast Guard, I heard a roar that sounded like several airplane engines. Before I even had time to stick my head out the window to see what it was, a flash of light went off. I instinctively threw myself down to the floor so that the shattered window glass flew over my head and smashed into the opposite wall. I escaped with just a few cuts to my left cheek, something I can only attribute to providence.

At precisely the same moment, however, my wife and children were hovering on the brink of death. In the atomic bombing of that day I lost my wife Matsue (who was 43 years old), my eldest son Kenichi (14), my daughter, a graduate student doing nursing work at Nagasaki University Hospital, and my house itself. My wife suffered a most cruel death, while that of my son was sorrowful beyond belief.

My worries about the safety of my family had increased when I learned that this "new-type bomb" had been dropped over the Urakami district, but I couldn't rush straight home to check on them because of my duties as a public official. First I had to contact the central bomb shelter; contain the fires that were breaking out across the

district, transport all the wounded workers, rescue people from the sea, and deal with burning boats that were floating adrift. I think it was after 5:30 p.m. when we finished our work, by which time the only buildings that hadn't burned down were those around Nagasaki Station. After receiving permission to return home from Superintendent Yamaguchi, I hurried off on my bicycle for Shiroyama. Knowing that I wouldn't be able to ride the whole way, I raced to get as far as I could in the shortest possible time.

From Nagasaki Station on I walked my bicycle, detouring around collapsed bridges and blocked roads until I finally reached Shiroyama at around 7:30. Along the way I saw scenes of misery so horrific that my limited writing skills could never adequately describe them. I came across people with blackened faces whose bodies were contorted with pain, but all I could do was give them water from the canteen I carried on my shoulder and tell them to hang on until the emergency rescue crews arrived. All the way to Shiroyama I kept refilling the canteen with water flowing from broken hydro pipes, giving out four bottles worth in all. The most heartrending thing I saw was out in front of the patrolman dispatch center at Ibinokuchi, where rescue workers were pulling dead bodies out of a bomb shelter one after another and laying them out on the road. That was a truly harrowing sight.

Fires had razed the Shiroyama district to the ground by that time, making it almost impossible for me to find my way home. Eventually I managed to get my bearings, but I arrived at my house to find that not even a single part of it had been left standing. I stood numbly in front of the ruins, taking deep breaths as the flames shot into the air like those from a charcoal brazier. Everything was gone! I closed my eyes and silently prayed that through some miracle my wife and children had managed to survive, or at least had passed away somewhere close by so that I would be able to find their bodies. I went down the road, turning over every corpse I came to until I spotted the body of a young boy face down in a ditch and instinctively ran over to it. The body was badly scorched and devoid of all clothing except for a pair of gaiters. I stroked it gently with my hand, but then I noticed the remains of the waistband of the pants, which definitely didn't belong to my son. At that point I was overcome by dread, sensing that my wife and son must have been cremated alive at our house. I wasn't ready to give up just then, however, and went on searching the areas that hadn't yet been ravaged by fire. At the bomb shelter near Gokoku Shrine, I shouted out their names and searched relentlessly. I checked the corpses one by one, but it turned out that they weren't there either. When it became too dark to see anything, I screamed out at the top of my lungs, "Matsue!" and "Kenichi!" When no response came, a feeling of utter hopelessness pierced my heart and tears streamed down my cheeks. There was nothing else I could do then, so I set off

along the road from Takenokubo that led over the mountains and back to the coast guard station.

I didn't feel like I had it in me to go searching again the next day, but one of the young ladies who worked with me at the station wanted to go to Shiroyama to see if her mother and father were safe, and I ended up taking her because she lived next door to me and I knew the area better than anyone else in the office. We took a ferry over to the Asahi neighbourhood, from where I once again made the trek to Shiroyama.

We arrived at about 10:30, after which I went around checking the same bomb shelters I had looked in the night before. While I was walking through a field at the top of the hill, I heard someone call out "Father!" but I didn't pay any special attention because there were so many other children and adults calling out for family members as they lay wounded. When I heard the same call again, however, I glanced over in the direction it had come from and saw a boy sitting in the ditch beside the road below. He was looking at me and thrusting his right hand as high up in the air as he could.

Hoping it might actually be my son, I called out "Kenichi!" The boy responded with a call of "Yes!" To make sure it was really him I called out, "Are you Kenichi Noguchi?" "Yes!" he yelled back again. It was definitely my son after all!

I had given up all hope of finding him alive, but here he was! I forgot about everything else that was going on and literally jumped up and down with joy. The young woman and I ran down the hill to my smiling son, who was barefoot but still had on his shirt and shorts. When I checked over his body, I saw that he had a fist-sized hemorrhage on the left side of his stomach and a bump on his head as large as a hen's egg. He didn't seem to have any burn wounds, for which I was happy beyond belief. Never in my life had I been as overjoyed as I was at that moment. Forgetting all about the heat of that hot summer day, I immediately asked him to tell me everything that had happened to him.

All at once he blurted out that his mother had been inside the house as it burned down; that he had suffered a wound to his stomach from a piece of wood that fell when the roof caved in; that it had been terribly cold in the bomb shelter behind Yahata Shrine that night; that he hadn't eaten anything since the morning of the day before; that his feet hadn't hurt during his barefoot flight, but the next day the soles of his feet and the rest of his lower body had been so painful that it had taken him two hours just to make it to the next neighbourhood. Finally he told me that he had come down the hillside because he had heard that rations of rice were being given out there.

"All right," I said. "We'll go and find your mother tomorrow, but for now the most important thing is to get you home."

I took my helmet off my head and let it hang around my neck. Then I put my son up on my shoulders and set off. Each time we came to a new neighbourhood I would stop to let him down for a while because he kept complaining about the pain in his legs. All the while we talked about what had happened.

“Dad, at times like these people won’t do anything to help each other, will they?”

This was something that his father had taken over twenty years to learn, but he had become aware of it at the age of fourteen.

The suffering he told me about as I carried him on my back was enough to make my heart ache. My wife and son had left the bomb shelter after the air-raid alarm was lifted and gone back home to relax on the tatami mats. The explosion of the bomb brought the roof crashing down so suddenly that they didn’t even have time to shout before becoming buried under debris.

My son managed to crawl out from under the wreckage, his body covered in mud. He then started pulling off roof tiles until he located his mother, but he found her pinned down by ceiling boards and other pieces of wood. The only way to free her would be by cutting the wood or dragging off the ceiling boards, but there were no saws or knives to be found. My son’s heart must have ached as he looked vainly down at the spot under which his mother lay. In desperation he ran off and begged some of our neighbours to help, but none of them would. The man and woman next door had gotten themselves out from under the collapsed roof of their own house, but even they refused his pleas. With no one else to ask, he decided that he would just have to lift off the ceiling boards by himself. His mother kept trying to say something to him as he did that, but he couldn’t make out what it was because she was speaking too quickly and her face was covered by the heavy kimono that she had been wearing to ward off chills. Until then smoke had been blowing in from a house two doors down, but now the house erupted into flames, making it hard for him to breathe.

His mother, knowing that the fires would spread quickly, shouted, “There’s nothing you can do now! Don’t worry about me anymore- just get away from here as fast as you can and save yourself!”

Then she added, “Have my body buried at the cemetery in Saga.”

My son got the directions and, knowing he could do nothing else, decided to flee. They had one final exchange.

“Good-bye, Mom!”

“Good-bye, Ken!”

He was crying as he battled the smoke and ran off, following after others who were fleeing as well. A heart-wrenching anger comes over me every time I think about how

my wife had to send her son away like that while she herself waited to be burned alive, and how my son had been forced to leave his mother's side as the flames closed in on her.

I took my son to the coast guard station, from where I contacted a relative in the town of Kayaki in Seihi to ask about evacuating him. I arranged for him to go to Nunomaki, at the foot of Mt. Hachiro, a decision that would turn out to be the source of even more troubles for us.

On the morning of the eleventh I finally located my wife's decomposing corpse in the burnt-out remains of our house, which by then was covered in ash. It looked as though she had resigned herself to the fact that she was going to be cremated alive, and had faced her death in the most dignified fashion; lying with her arms folded across her chest, her legs straight and her Adam's apple relaxed. How enraged I became then! I spoke to her spirit, telling her that I understood how awful it had been for her, and commemorated her life with an offering of water from my bottle. I picked up every last one of her bones and placed them in the keg I had brought with me, which I then carried over to Koen Temple in Irabayashi, the temple she had attended for much of her life. After arranging to have her remains interred there for the time being, they chanted sutras and bestowed a posthumous name upon her.

At mid-day on August 30, a messenger from Nunomaki came and told me that I should go to see my son because his condition was growing worse. I excused myself from work and took off on my bicycle, but I arrived to find him smiling and in relatively good condition. His fever wasn't that high and the pain in his lower body didn't seem to be bothering him so much anymore. I could tell from his smile that he was happy to see someone from his own family, and that night I slept by his side. He was very thirsty and sobbed quietly as he clung to my body. It dawned on me that we hadn't spent any quiet time together since I had dashed off at the sound of the air-raid alarm at 9:00 on August 8, and during the interim he had been perilously close to death. Now all the emotions he felt at being reunited with someone from his family came pouring out. In silence, I hugged him back.

With his head pressed against my chest, my son said, "Dad, even though Mom passed away, I will still be loyal to her in everything I do."

What a pure-hearted boy he was! It still brings tears to my eyes to think about him saying that. When his mother had fallen ill, he had even done all the housework for her.

He then eagerly thrust a pear into my hand, saying, "Dad, a woman here gave this to me, but I want you to have it." That showed how happy he was to see his father! I was so moved that I couldn't even speak.

Over and over he expressed his regret at not having been able to save his mother's life. I waited until the break of dawn and then, after reassuring my son, reluctantly got on my bicycle and headed back over the hill. Thinking about how we were still at war made it was impossible to get any work done at all.

When the imperial proclamation to end the war was issued on August 15, the strained faces of those in the department showed a mix of uneasiness, loneliness, and relief. The war was over! For me, however, the hell was still to continue. Another message about my son's condition growing worse reached me on the morning of the thirtieth, after which I once again rushed down the road to Numomaki.

There were no differences in my son's outward appearance, but he told me that his hair was falling out and showed me by pulling out clump after clump. He also told me that spots were breaking out on his arms and legs, and that he was suffering from diarrhea. With the village doctor not knowing how to treat him, and there being no easy way to transport him to Nagasaki, he simply took the medicine the doctor brought him and sipped rice gruel. They watched over him as the evening approached, but in the middle of the night he started running a high fever and his diarrhea became severe. My son said that the diarrhea continued until the next night, but that he felt so bad for the others around him that he tried to hold it in as much as possible. When he couldn't, he would force himself to crawl his way over to the outdoor latrine.

His bouts of diarrhea became so frequent that I didn't even have time to catch a nap. Thinking about how hard it was on him to have to be carried outside so many times, I finally borrowed some diapers and cloths and put those on him so he could just go right on sleeping. My ill son had been relieved to have someone from his family with him, but his look grew forlorn due to the severity of his diarrhea, and he lay there staring into my eyes. After waiting impatiently for the arrival of daybreak, I hurried off to the shipping section of the marine patrol office in Nagasaki, where I managed to get 50 kin (about 70 pounds) of ice from the ice factory. I strapped this onto my bicycle and then went over to To-machi to tell Dr. Maeda about my son's condition and get medicine for him. After that I rode back under the blazing sun. At first my son was thrilled to see the ice, which was very rare in those days, and from midday on his condition seemed to stabilize. At around 6:00 in the evening, however, when he was trying to eat some rice porridge, he said, "Dad, I can't get it down my throat anymore."

He couldn't swallow thin rice gruel either, and when he was given water he complained that even that was impossible. Then he said, "It's getting hard to breathe or talk now."

Knowing that something was definitely wrong, I told him to hang on for a couple of

hours and asked one of the people at the house to look after him while I hurried off yet again on my bicycle. I told him that when I came back, I would have a doctor with me.

I can't express the lonely look that came across his face as I was about to leave the house. Uncharacteristically, he pestered me to stay at his side, but finally he gave in, saying, "Then come back as soon as you can." I had no idea that would be the last time I ever saw him alive.

Along the way the weather changed and I was forced to proceed through lightning and heavy rains, but eventually I arrived in Nagasaki. By then the city had descended into a state of confusion because an order had been issued for all women and children to evacuate before the occupation forces landed, something that was expected to happen either that day or the next. I went to see Dr. Maeda at Umegasaki Police Station, but I didn't have a chance to talk to him because he was in the middle of a meeting called by the head of the neighbourhood association. Back at the Coast Guard office, I found that any men with families had already been sent home, while those who remained seemed full of anxiety. I searched all around, but I couldn't find a doctor and there weren't any bicycles either. Finally, Captain Yoshida was able to get word through to Dr. Maeda, who came with me to Kayaki in a motor boat. We arrived at shortly after 11:00 p.m., only to find that my son had taken his last breaths just thirteen minutes before. He had reached the limits of his endurance while waiting vainly for my return.

My son had kept inquiring about me, asking over and over, "Hasn't Dad come back yet?" In the end, however, he folded his arms across his chest and said to the man looking after him, "It's no good. Just let me rest now because the pain is too much. Good-bye and thank you for all you have done for me." Then, at 11:33 on August 17, the son who was my last hope in the world passed away. Kenichi, the same boy who had counted on his fingers the days until his mother's funeral service and wanted ever so badly to go to Nagasaki with me on the 22<sup>nd</sup> for her two-week memorial ceremony, would never open his eyes again. Ah, I simply refused to believe it! I took the paper out of his nostrils and rocked his still-warm body back and forth, but when I called out his name there was no response. How could that be, when his arms still felt so full of life? How I longed to share one last moment with him!

Seeing as how he hadn't had any chance of recovery, it would have been better if I'd stayed by his side until his death. How terribly lonely he must have been, without anyone from the family there to look after him. I held my son's body tightly that night and grieved his loss.

On the nineteenth, I headed for Nagasaki with my son's cremated bones in a white cloth that hung from my neck. I followed a road that we had often walked along together

while he was still alive. All the way, I kept asking myself, "Where on earth am I?" My legs grew heavier and heavier as I pedaled on.

There are great numbers of people who lost members of their families in the atomic bombing. All of them have the same pain and sorrow weaved into the hearts.

I built graves for them. I did funeral marches. Despite that, I will carry with me for the rest of my life the sadness I feel about my son's awful death and my inability to spare my wife from a life of misfortune.

Next year will be the seventh anniversary of my wife's death. In accordance with her dying wishes, I will have her cremated remains interred at the graveyard in Saga.

Written in the years 1950, 1952, 1953.