

A Memoir of my Atomic Bombing Experience

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The following is a transcript of a lecture given to elementary students.

I was sixteen years old when I experienced the atomic bombing, the age when students enter high school these days. At that time I was a fourth year student at Imari Commercial School.

I came to Nagasaki City when students from my school were mobilized to join the national labor unit assembled during World War II. I went to work for Mitsubishi Arms at a factory in Ohashimachi, which was only one kilometer from the atomic bombing hypocenter.

The escalating war situation had created a labor shortage and we students above second-year junior-high-school age were being dispatched to dig tunnels or build roads for military vehicles to pass along. Before long we were only attending school two or three days each week. Then I spent the next half a year in Nagasaki, away from my father, my mother and my older brothers.

Meals were not like they are nowadays, as we almost never had white rice back then. With nothing but rice mixed with bean husks or radish, a lot of people went hungry or came down with diarrhea, growing thin for the sake of the country.

Our job was to make bombs to be used in warfare. (These were called aerial missiles and were loaded onto planes with their pilots who would then fly at battleships, hoping to do enough damage to sink it.) Work went on at this huge factory all day and night, with workers relieving each other in shifts. It was hard for me to learn the job, but I tried as hard as I could.

I was over at a (makeshift) factory set up in Yamai Tunnel. This was a single 200-meter-long tunnel with six air vents. All the important machinery was hidden so that it couldn't be spotted from outside, with the lathe machines crammed together in

the middle. I worked at those machines, making essential parts for the aerial missiles.

Back then it seemed as if the American planes were making air raids almost every day. At those times the mobilized school girls working over at the main factory would evacuate to our relatively safe tunnel and stay there until the enemy attack had ended.

Air-raid sirens also sounded in the morning on August 9, the day the atomic bomb was dropped. Large numbers of people had flocked to the tunnel factory to avoid an air raid but at a little after ten-thirty the alarm was downgraded to a warning. Just as I was wondering when the evacuees were going to go back to their own workplaces, that horrendous atomic bomb fell.

It was dropped at the fateful time of 11:02.

Suddenly the electricity in the tunnel went out, leaving us in darkness. At exactly the same time, a burst of light so bright that it seemed to pierce our eyes flashed at the tunnel entrance, 100 meters away. Then a tremendous blast wind came blowing in like a great typhoon. The people at the front of the tunnel shrieked as they were thrown through the air and against the machinery or the dirt floor, where they lay unmoving.

Somebody yelled out, "One of those new type bombs was dropped!"

I had heard the rumours that a huge bomb had ravaged Hiroshima three days earlier, and even though I didn't know anything about atomic bombs, I sat in the darkness shivering with fear at the thought that this had been some horrendous new type of weapon. My friend and I whispered nervously to each other, wondering what was going to happen from then on.

A little while later the girls who had evacuated to our tunnel earlier on came fleeing back. They were on their way back to work when the atomic bomb fell. The light was dim, but I managed to see that most of them had scorched and disheveled hair. They were frightening to look at. They looked just like ghouls, their cheeks puffed up with burn blisters and their skin seared. With no chance to get medicine or bandages, they had just wrapped their hand towels around their wounds and fled back to the tunnel. There were a lot of these girls, all of whom were fifteen or sixteen years old, just a little older than you. No one could do anything for them, except say things like, "Get yourself

together- Hang in there!” It was unbearable to see them in such a pitiful state. They looked so tired and hot, so hurt and afraid.

As this had all happened in a single instant, those of us in the tunnel had escaped uninjured. Sometime later our leader ordered us to head down the railroad tracks to the dormitories that were about twenty minutes away. We went, but our hearts were still with the wounded people we left behind.

All the buildings were completely destroyed and the roads had turned into seas of fire that were impossible to pass along. Four or five of my friends and I walked along the railroad tracks instead, stepping carefully to avoid the burning wooden ties that sent up smoke as they smoldered.

The weather was fine that day, without a single cloud in the sky. Not only was the sun beating down relentlessly, but the heat was compounded by the columns of fire and rising black smoke caused by the atomic bomb. In the afternoon the sky over Nagasaki grew dark, but beyond this darkness the yellow sun was visible. It made a very eerie sight as it slowly descended.

Even the lush green plants and trees had burned to the ground. Scattered along the roadsides were piles of scorched corpses so disfigured that it was impossible to tell the men from the women.

The burn wounds were particularly bad because it was mid-summer and everyone had been out in minimal clothing. A huge number of people had staggered down to the river in search of water, their hands held over their scorched and dirtied faces. There were so many that you couldn't possibly count them. Bodies floated in the water, piling up with the scorched corpses of cows and horses. People with burns and blisters clung to our legs and feet, crying out in unison, “Water, water!”

(I had been told that) there was no way to save someone who has had more than half of his or her body burned. I also heard that people grew desperately thirsty when they had severe burns, but would die if they suddenly drank a lot of it. Saying that they would drink anything at all, these people were gulping down the oily water from the river and then passing away. The sight was both fearful and sad, just like a picture of hell.

After what seemed like forever, we finally reached our dormitory. Nothing remained of the wooden buildings except smoldering debris. My friends who had worked the night shift were sleeping at the time, and they had been thrown out into the field outside wearing nothing but their underpants. Others had been caught under the debris of the collapsed houses, where they burned to death.

Under orders from the teacher in charge, those of us who had escaped injury then went over to the main factory to find our friends and take them back to our hometown of Imari. As far as the eye could see, the city was a sea of flames. The roof of the arms factory where the aerial missiles were built was crushed flat. The steel girders of the framework were twisted like strands of taffy and the giant gas tank was leaning over on its side. Up around the midpoint of the smokestack a dead man's body hung down like a circus performer.

The factory had been less than a kilometer from the atomic bomb hypocenter, at the place where Nagasaki University is located now. When we went there to search for our friends, we were showered in radioactive fallout, which became known as ashes of death.

As evening approached, a specially scheduled train came toward us, backing its way down the tracks. It proceeded slowly, as if it was being pushed, then came to a stop close to where we were waiting. It couldn't continue any further because the railroad bridge beyond was now demolished. That was still a fair way in front of the present-day site of Urakami Station. Some people rushed to jump on it, but they were turned back with calls of, "Let the wounded board first!" Those who couldn't move because of injuries or burn wounds were then carried on board, either on makeshift stretchers or on the backs of others, and taken right to their seats. That took a lot of effort. Those who couldn't get on were then packed into freighter cars.

We were packed in the train like sardines, without any place to step. If one person moved he would cause all the people around him to bump into each other and those with burns or open wounds would start screaming in agony. There were people who were covered in blood, their bodies pierced with fragments of glass. Others were so blackened from burns that no one would ever recognize them. Some repeatedly called out "Please kill me!" while others yelled at the top of their lungs, "Water... Give me water!" I saw

people coughing up blood as they took their last breaths. Even those without injuries were affected by the conditions inside the train, becoming nauseous and throwing up when the heat and the raw smell of blood became too much for them. It was like a train from hell.

Then there were those who had been left off the train. Having been exposed to radiation and heat rays, they eventually grew weak and collapsed on top of each other before passing away.

It was a long, grueling trip, with people dying and others being unloaded at stations with nearby hospitals where treatment could be given. We rode on all through the night, finally arriving at Arita Station the next morning.

One of my classmates, a boy I will call T, lay face-down at my feet, unconscious but suffering in agony. I tried to get his attention when we approached Haiki Station, but by then he was already dead.

The war came to an end just one week later, on August 15, 1945, brought about in part by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan had been defeated.

Just two atomic bombs left over 700,000 people dead or wounded. (There were more than 300,000 casualties.) Even now more than 6,000 bombing victims pass away each and every year. There are approximately 300,000 atomic bombing survivors across the country and their average age is over seventy. Many of them were exposed to radiation and suffer in agony, often entering the hospital because of illnesses caused by the after effects of radiation.

Of the ninety students and teachers in my graduating class who experienced the atomic bombing, twelve died immediately and thirty-five (about one-third of the total) passed away over time.

I have also suffered from deteriorating health on countless occasions, going through a period when I was admitted and discharged from the hospital repeatedly. Luckily, I seem to be doing better these days, and I do what I can to maintain my health.

A lot of people who escaped the bombings uninjured suffered from what could be

called mental aftereffects, as they became overcome with anxiety every time they came down with an illness, thinking that it must be something caused by the bomb. In this way, the atomic bomb proved fearful even for those who survived it.

At present there are some 30,000 nuclear warheads in existence around the world, with seven countries possessing arsenals. The majority of these weapons have anywhere from five to a hundred times the destructive power of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs.

The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki literally created hell on earth. At the instant of the explosion people were burned to death by the heat rays released by the bomb. The force of the blast destroyed buildings within two or three kilometers of the hypocenter and fires then consumed the debris. Those who hadn't been able to get away in time were trapped under collapsed houses and later burned to death when fires broke out. On top of this, the atomic bombs released huge amounts of radiation which was invisible to the eye. All those who escaped the flaming inferno were bathed in this radiation. About one week after the atomic bombing, people started losing hair, bleeding from their gums, developing purple blotches on their skin and running high fevers. In agony they died off one after another. This was acute radiation illness.

That is how dreadful these atomic bombs are. They are weapons of evil.

This is why we atomic bombing survivors continue to do what we can to promote efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons from the face of this earth at the earliest possible date. I hope all of you will learn what you can from talks about war and the atomic bombings so that fear of war and gratitude for peace become engraved in your hearts. Please pass this message on to as many people as you can. Also, enjoy your school life and do what you can to make your ideals and future dreams come true. Never resort to violence or bullying.

Today we are displaying in this gymnasium an exhibition of panels entitled *The Atomic Bombs and Humanity*. The pictures are a mixture of those from both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but in both cases the fear and cruelty of the atomic bombings are made clear. I think you will clearly understand how grateful we should be to be living in peace. Look closely at these pictures well and tell your families about them when you go home.

This concludes my talk. Thank you for listening attentively right until the end.