

My Atomic Bomb Experience

By Yoshitaka Yamaguchi

On August 9, 1945, I was a first-grade student of Zenza National Elementary School. Earlier that morning, I'd gone shopping with my mother and my brother, who was four years older than me. We went to a town in the countryside called Azekari, which was about 20 kilometers away from our house in Sakamoto-machi. As we were walking back my mother asked a man on a horse-drawn wagon to give us a ride because she knew how tired I was.

We were heading down a slope, right behind a charcoal-fired bus, when a white light flashed. I remember my body being lifted up in the air, but after that I lost consciousness. When I came to, I found that I'd been thrown onto the grass alongside the road. My sneakers were gone and my feet were bare. For some reason I was the only one whose hair had been burned. My, mother and brother escaped uninjured. The wagon had fallen over and the horse was gone. After a few hours, the three of us started walking toward Nagasaki. Later we learned that at that time we had been in Rokujizo (in present-day Akasako-machi), about 1.8 km north of the hypocenter of the bomb blast. To get to our house in Sakamoto-machi, we had walked right

through the hypocenter of Matsuyama-machi. My mother was worried about my three brothers and my sister, who had all stayed home. She took my brother and me by the hand and hurried us along home. But there was so much debris and so many people lying on the road that we couldn't make much progress. Then mother said, "Let's walk on the railroad tracks", and we climbed the slope and started walking on the railway ties. My mother tore her *obi* belt and used it to wrap my bare feet. We had only walked for a few minutes before we found our way blocked by the fires that spread across the Ohashi district. So, we went back to Akasako-machi and then crossed the mountain to Kawabira, where we searched in vain for a friend's house. We spent the night in an air-raid shelter near the mountain. The town was still smoldering the next day, but we were so worried about the rest of our family that we set off anyway, walking through the burnt ruins and fallen people until we finally got back to our neighbourhood of Sakamoto-machi. Our house, as well as the entire neighborhood, had completely burned down. Around the front door, we found the charred bodies of my sister and my two younger brothers. I didn't really understand what had happened because I was still just a first-grade elementary school student, but my mother cried for hours. My father survived because he'd been working at Kawanami Shipyard, which was outside the city. The next day, back at the burnt house, we placed the three dead bodies on wood boards and cremated them. While

we were collecting their ashes, our fifth brother came walking back home on crutches. He was 14 years old and had been mobilized to work for the National Railway. He died ten days later. Sakamoto-machi was devastated, with most houses demolished or burned. We had to live in an air-raid shelter for about a month, and then moved to the house of an acquaintance.

War is caused by humans. War is wrong. We should never have any wars.

There are no winners or justice in a war. I only pray for peace in the world, with people not hating and killing each other. I will continue to work for this.