

Sentiments for My Mother

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● Situation on and before August 6

At that time, we were a family of four—my mother, elder brother and sister, and me—living in a house in Kamitenma-cho. My father, Toshio Omoya, died in the war in China in 1938. Since I was a little child when my father died, I knew my father's face only from photographs. According to my family, during my childhood, whenever I saw photos of my father, I said, "My father can't come out of the photo because nobody brings his wooden clogs to him."

My mother Shizuko raised us all by herself. She was an education-minded mother, more than any other parents. Although it was during the war, she allowed me to study calligraphy and ballet. When my brother took the entrance examination for middle school, she visited one shrine 100 times every morning to pray for my brother's success in the exam. She seemed to think that after her husband's death the only thing she could give her children was education.

To that end, my mother worked hard every day from morning till night, holding several jobs concurrently. I remember when she was delivering morning papers, my elder brother and sister helped her. I was little but I walked to keep up with them.

In those days, since everyone treated their neighbors like their own relatives, while my mother was busy working day after day, we children were taken care of and helped by people around us, with my uncle's family living in our neighborhood and my grandfather's family living in Hirose-motomachi, a neighboring town.

At that time, many primary schools promoted group evacuation and evacuation to the homes of students' relatives in the countryside. I was a third-year student at Tenma Primary School, and joined a group evacuation to a temple in Yuki-cho with my elder sister Sumie, who was a sixth-year student at the same school. Despite my mother and elder brother Toshiyuki visiting us with some souvenirs such as potatoes, it was very hard for my sister and me who were still small to put up with lives without our parents. Since my mother told me that if we died we were going to die together, I asked my mother to take me home and returned to my house in Kamitenma-cho. In hindsight, all of us might have been able to survive if I had stayed at the evacuation site, because my mother and brother would

have been visiting us at the time of the A-bombing.

● **Situation on August 6**

On August 6, since our school was out, I went out to my neighborhood with my friends.

Seeing B-29s flying overhead leaving jet trails, I instantly covered my eyes and ears with both my hands. I probably did it unconsciously because we had been trained to do so. So I didn't see the flash because I was covering my eyes.

At the moment of the A-bombing, I was lucky enough to be under the eaves of a house and didn't suffer any injuries or feel any heat, shielded behind a wall. My friend suffered only minor injuries, and so we crept out of the house through a crack all by ourselves and returned home.

When I got home, my mother, who had been injured in the A-bombing, was waiting for me. That day, my mother had gone out to get some rationed rice and experienced the A-bombing on her way home. As soon as I got home, she grabbed a first-aid bag and escaped from the disaster, taking me with her.

Looking around, I saw houses that had collapsed and the railings of a bridge burning. We crossed the bridge and headed for Koi. On our way to escape, a person who had been burned black asked for help, pleading, "Give me some water, please give me some water." But we were then so desperate to escape that we couldn't do anything for her. I still regret that I didn't even ask her name.

When we finally arrived at Koi Primary School, I realized that I was barefoot. I wondered why I didn't get hurt even when I was running through the rubble.

Every place in the school was filled with the injured, including classrooms and corridors. I had my mother get treatment there. My mother had suffered serious burns on her hands, legs and back, and minor burns on her face, plus a severe depression of her skull. My mother's treatment was only of applying a bit of ointment. Looking back, I'm not sure now if my mother really get any ointment applied.

After that, my mother and I headed for a designated shelter in Ogawachi-machi, following the direction of our town. When we arrived at the shelter, black rain began falling from the sky. We sheltered ourselves

from the rain with a sheet of metal I had picked up nearby. A short while after the rain let up, my elder brother Toshiyuki came.

At the time of the A-bombing, my brother was a second-year student at Matsumoto Industrial School, and was mobilized to a factory on Kanawajima Island, off the coast of Ujina. According to him, although he himself experienced the A-bombing with his friends near the Miyuki Bridge on their way to their mobilization site, he turned around and went back home rather than heading for the site, worrying about us. Around the site of the headquarters of Hiroshima Electric Railway, since the road was impassable with both sides of the road burning, he headed for Shudo Middle School, crossed the Motoyasu and Ota Rivers by boat, crossed a bridge, and finally arrived in Kanon-machi. On his way home, although someone asked him to help another person who was crushed under the rubble of a kindergarten building, he couldn't do it. He was in a hurry in order to make sure his family was safe as soon as possible. He told me he was sorry for them.

When he arrived home, flames were approaching almost within reach of our home. He later told me that he immediately put out the flames using a water bucket. Then after making sure there was no one in the house, he headed for Ogawachi-machi to search for us. In Ogawachi-machi, we were finally able to reunite.

According to my mother, on the morning of the 6th, my elder sister told my mother that she didn't want to go to school. But my mother wouldn't allow her to be absent from school in the hope that she would go on to Yamanaka Women's High School. My mother got my sister off to school that morning as usual, but she didn't come back home.

● **Situation from the 7th**

The day after the A-bombing, my brother went to Tenma Primary School in search of my sister, who had not returned home yet. Learning that she had been cleaning the principal's office at the time of the A-bombing, my brother searched around for her, but found nothing in the ruins. The school building had been flattened and everything had been reduced to ashes in the fire.

My mother, brother and I were in the shelter in Ogawachi-machi for a few days. But my mother worried so much about my sister that we decided to return home.

My mother was bedridden ever since we returned home. The only treatment she received was the ointment applied to her injuries at Koi Primary School.

Since our house was fortunately left unburned, our neighbors helped themselves too all our bedding. Learning of the situation, my aunt Sueko Omoya got angry, asking us, “What’s the matter with you? You generously gave other people your bedding and put no covers on your own mother, huh?” Since my brother was only a second-year student in industrial school and I was only a third-year student in primary school, a combination of what today would be a junior high student and elementary school student, there was nothing we could really do to deal well with the situation. After my aunt came to our home, she took care of my mother and us. In my aunt’s home, her husband Shigeo, my father’s younger brother, who had been drafted to a military unit in Yamaguchi, returned home to Hiroshima only two days after the A-bombing, on the grounds that his wife and daughter Nobue were in Hiroshima. If it had not been for my uncle and aunt, our family would have had great difficulties with only children and a bedridden mother.

Although my mother was happy that the burns on her face quickly healed, the serious burns on her back wouldn’t heal. The skin on her back suddenly peeled off completely when I thought that it was getting better because the skin was drying up. Maggots were swarming under her skin. Before I knew it, the insects were swarming around and completely covering her back. It was impossible to completely remove all of them. When my brother and I began sleeping next to my mother, who was lying inside a mosquito net, I couldn’t ignore the penetrating smell of swarming maggots.

Despite her serious injuries, my mother said nothing like, “It’s painful” or “It’s itchy,” or craved for water. Since she just pleaded, “I’d like to eat a peach. I’d like to eat a peach,” my aunt went to buy some in Iguchi. In hindsight, she must have been really thirsty.

On the morning of September 4, my mother died. I realized her death only after my aunt told me, "Hiroko! Your mother is already dead." My brother and I really didn't realize it until then. Looking back, I wonder how she could have lived as long as even a month with her head so seriously injured being cracked open. When soldiers were putting the injured onto a truck in an effort to evacuate them, my mother wouldn't leave the house no matter what until she learned about my sister's whereabouts. One person had suffered serious injuries like my mother and recovered through treatment in the suburbs. Worrying about my missing sister, my mother continued living just clinging to the hope that she would see my sister again.

We cremated our mother's body at the former site of Koseikan on the day she passed away. But no emotion of sadness nor tears welled up inside me. My emotions must have already been paralyzed. That day, it rained and my mother's body wouldn't burn to ashes so quickly.

In the city, all the buildings had collapsed and a burned plain stretched over the whole area. We could see Hiroshima Station and Ninoshima from our house. Corpses were everywhere. Corpses in the river were pulled out and cremated by soldiers. Although some corpses were left lying out on the ground for more than a month, we didn't care much about these corpses when we passed by. Since we had no idea what the A-bomb was or had anything to eat in those days, without hesitation we ate food exposed to radiation, such as potatoes grown in other people's fields and rice buried under contaminated soil.

● **Life after the A-bombing**

Shortly after our mother died, we went to Midorii Village where we could rely on our relatives, and asked them to allow us to live in their barn. Our grandparents had already arrived there. At the time of the A-bombing, our grandfather Tomekichi Omoya and our grandmother Matsuno were safe in the living room of their own house. However, after they arrived at Midorii Village, our alive and kicking grandfather suddenly started feeling under the weather, and passed away five days after our mother's death. We hadn't heard from our uncle Shoso, who had lived with our grandparents in Hirose-motomachi, and, according to them, was at the entrance at the time of the A-bombing.

In Midorii Village, we were disoriented by many things that were quite different from what we had experienced thus far in our lives. After going to school in Midorii Village for about a year, we returned to Hirose. We all stuck together, leveled some land and built a shack to live in. Our aunt and uncle acted as foster parents and raised me and my brother as if we were their own children. I didn't have to feel emotionally lonely at all from my parents' death.

As I grew up, though, I came to miss my own parents. Seeing my cousin, with whom I was raised like a real sister, studying with a private tutor from when she was in elementary school, I envied her and felt lonely a little. I lived with my uncle's family until I got married. Since my uncle's house was a furniture manufacturer, I worked there keeping the books.

● **Marriage and illness**

In the old days, many people hid their identity as A-bomb victims. Many women especially did not even apply for the atomic bomb victim's handbooks, hiding the fact that they were A-bomb victims, in order to attain their goal of getting married. Although I am currently grateful for the handbook, it took me a while to actually apply for it. Regarding marriage, I believed that I would marry someone whom my aunt and uncle would find for me. I eventually got married through a marriage interview. Fortunately, my new husband didn't care about my being an A-bomb victim.

After getting married, I worried about my future children. I suffer from thyroid cancer. My elder brother and cousin also suffer from cancer. My daughter has an acoustic nerve tumor. I wonder if my daughter's illness can be attributed to the A-bombing.

● **Wish for peace**

I often tell my story of the A-bombing to my children. I have also taken them to the Peace Memorial Museum and told them about the situation at the time of the A-bombing.

Though in those days I was so pressed for time in my daily life that I had no time to even visit my family grave, now I frequently do that and talk with our old neighbors there for a little while before returning home. If my mother were alive, I would do things to please her and let her know how

much I cared. So, whenever I meet someone around my mother's age, I can't leave them alone from a desire to do something to please them as much as I could have done for my own mother.

With so many lives sacrificed in the A-bombing, I am truly grateful for my current health. Also, thinking about my deceased mother, I would like to live a long, vigorous life for my own children.