

My Atomic Bomb Experience

By Namio Sakamoto (formerly Arakawa)

The reason I keep appealing for world peace every year is that I am one of the people who directly experienced the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. Nagasaki and Hiroshima are the only two cities in the world to have suffered from this type of bombing. At that time, I was 15 years old and spending three days of each week at Nagasaki Commercial High School and three at the manufacturing plant of Mitsubishi Electric, which is where I was on the day of the bombing.

That morning ten of us students and one of the teachers took a train to the company's head office, where we ran errands for some workers who were going back and forth to one of the makeshift factory sites. Our task was to take their tools and things back to the dormitory. We loaded up a truck and then sat in the back of it while we waited for the teacher to come back. That was when it happened. The blast made an incredible noise and the sky was lit up by a blinding flash far brighter than the summer sun. At the same time a hot wind came tearing through. As I struggled to stay in the truck, I looked up at and saw a huge white cloud that blocked out the sun. Underneath the cloud fires were raging. Shocked at the extent of the catastrophe, I crawled under the truck and lay there on my stomach with my hands on my head. After a while, I am not sure exactly how long it was, maybe 5 or 10 minutes, maybe even less, an air-raid siren

broke the silence. Our teacher yelled at us to evacuate to the air-raid shelter inside the workshop, and we all managed to make it there safely. Inside, I heard the older workers saying that this must have been one of those new-type parachute bombs, like the one dropped on Hiroshima on August 6.

We stayed in the shelter for a few hours and then the teacher decided to take us back to the dormitory. The roads were often blocked, but we trudged through the Hiradogoya neighbourhood, along the foot of the mountain. We covered our eyes at some of the wretched sights we saw along the way, and some of my classmates grew weak in the knees and had to crouch down at the side of the road.

We finally arrived at the dormitory in Shiroyama, only to find that it had burned to the ground. The training facilities were also completely destroyed. We immediately went to work rescuing the survivors who were trapped under the collapsed roof. We didn't have any food or any place to sleep. We staved off our hunger that night by boiling a pumpkin we found in the field, and then laid summer cypress on the ground and slept under the open sky.

At dawn a rescue team came and led us in pulling the dead bodies of our classmates out from under the collapsed roof. We carried these to an open area by the training facility and laid them on the mats of summer cypress. We then made funeral pyres out

of scrap wood and placed the dead bodies on top of them. We stacked the wood in three layers and put wood boards and chips around them. Then, we set them alight and bowed down in prayer. We stood transfixed as the bodies of our friends and elders collapsed in the rising flames.

During the three days and nights we worked, we also helped collect the ashes of the dead from the burned dormitory. The ashes of about 150 victims from the dormitory and the training facility were put into plain wood cases that the company provided and stored in a meeting room until the end of the war.

Nine of the boys at the dormitory had come to Nagasaki with great ambitions for the future, five from Miyakonojo and four from Takasaki. Three were consumed by the flames of the funeral pyres and placed in plain wood cases that were carried off in the arms of their friends. Three of the injured survivors they took jam-packed passenger trains, cargo trains and locomotives until they finally got back to their homes.

More than 50 years have passed since the end of the war and my memories have become vague. But when I think about the friends of mine who died so young, I feel obliged to pass this experience down to my descendants, taking every opportunity to tell them how dreadful war is, what disastrous results nuclear weapons bring, and how important peace is.