

60 Years after the War

By Jungo Kawanami

*I lived through the atomic bombing*

*And now, having reached the age of 70,*

*I sing a requiem for my father*

I experienced the atomic bombing of Nagasaki on that hot August 9, just after my 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. Since 1944, my father had been working at Nagasaki Mitsubishi Shipyard, where the navy assigned him to duty as an engineer. My mother passed away from tuberculosis in 1943, when I was just a little girl about to enter third grade. My father quickly remarried because I was still young and things were growing more and more difficult due to the war. He married a woman that someone had introduced to him. I lived with my new mother's sister while I attended Kumamoto University Elementary School.

My father and mother-in-law moved to Nagasaki in 1944. I went with them because the war situation had grown intense in Kumamoto and I wanted to live with my father. So, I moved to the Inasa neighbourhood of Nagasaki in March, 1945 and started the fifth grade at Asahi National School. We

hardly had any classes at school. Food rations were limited and at best we were given grains and sweet potatoes. I spent most of my time in an air-raid shelter and was almost never in my own room. In late July, an ominous event occurred: a gravestone came crashing through the roof tiles of our house and landed upright in the middle of the tatami mats. It must have been thrown when a bomb exploded over at a nearby cemetery. My father started thinking about sending me to his parents' home in a rural part of Fukuoka called Hishino, but then, on August 9, 1945, the U.S. dropped the atomic bomb. That day had been very hot, with the sun beating down fiercely. Some of my friends had come to my house that morning to ask me to go swimming with them, but I told them I'd meet them a little later because I was hungry, as usual, and wanted to eat something first. While I was eating some roasted beans that we kept for emergencies, I heard a screaming siren and a tremendous blast. I also saw a brilliant flash. At the same moment, my body was lifted into the air and then thrown back to the ground. The shock left me so stunned that I couldn't figure out what had happened. I cried and cried, unaware of how much time was passing by. I only came back to my senses when I heard someone shouting, "Help! Help me!" I was in great pain, and I realized that I was trapped under debris. Beams and roof tiles from our demolished house pinned down my back and legs. I used all my strength to pull them off and managed to get myself out

of the house. Outside was an inferno. There were clouds of dust everywhere. Despite the injuries to my arms and legs, I managed to miraculously survive that sea of fire. I jumped into an air-raid shelter, where I saw people whose skin was scorched and tattered, exposing something that was either bone or tissue, I couldn't tell which. There were also beastly-looking people groaning in agony and others who had already died. People were dying in that shelter one after another, without receiving any treatment or being given any food. There was no light either, just the dark of night. I trembled with fear as I waited for my father.

Late at night, I don't know exactly what time it was, my father came crawling back to the shelter from Urakami, which was the bombing hypocenter. His burned body was covered with a wet cloak he had probably picked up on the way. As soon as he saw my face, he fell to the ground, without saying even a single word. He never woke up again, and a week later he died. He was 37 years old. I was so overwhelmed by sorrow that I couldn't even cry. I just collected scrap pieces of wood and used them to cremate my father's body. The body of a man does not burn easily. Around that time, I heard the rumors that the U.S. was going to drop more of those terrible bombs, and that they would kill any Japanese they saw. I put my father's ashes in a container and wandered among the demolished houses,

searching the kitchen areas for something to eat. It was almost the end of August when a woman in the yard of a farm house told me that the war had ended.

Astronauts who have gone into space tell us how beautiful the earth looks from up there. But people are still making nuclear weapons and starting wars. It pains me to see the attack on Iraq. The preciousness of human life, the importance of eternal peace for all humankind and the philosophy of Article 9 of the Constitution should be kept. We should never have a foolish war again.