

A Final Struggle as a Hibakusha

Miyoko Tando

I was exposed to the Atomic Bomb when I was thirteen, a first year student of Hiroshima Municipal Girls' High School. On the previous day, the fifth of August, I was mobilized to demolish the buildings in Kako-machi, 700 meters from the hypocenter. The next day, the sixth of August, I didn't go to work. I was supposed to help my father move our closet in the suburbs. When I opened the windows of the upper floor of our house and looked outside, a sharp bluish flash spread over everything, and I unconsciously covered my face with my hands.

Nothing was visible. I was trapped under the house. Only my right leg was not trapped in the debris, and I was seriously injured below my knee. My father managed to pull me out. But both my grandmother, who was on the ground floor, and my little brother, who was at play outside, were missing.

My father, my sister and I fled into Mitsubishi Shipyard Building in Minamikan-on. On the way I became so thirsty that I drank water, and soon afterward I vomitted some thing yellowish. Then I was drenched with 'black rain' and felt cold. I was covered with cloth that someone brought from nearby.

The three of us were just lying in the shelter (the shipyard building) without being treated with anything or by anybody on that day and the following day. On the morning of the third day, the eighth of August, my sister died, and in the evening of the same day my father's condition became very bad. All I could do was just watch him pass away without any treatment.

I could only eat things that were weak like rice porridge. On the fifth day, the tenth of August, my uncle found me and took me back on a two wheeled car to his house in Hatsukaichi, about 20 km west of Hiroshima City. I was seriously burned. My mother, who had been away from the city on the day that the bomb was dropped, took me to Hatsukaichi Elementary School, which had become one of the first-aid stations. But there she saw people dying one after another, so she moved me to another station in Hara. She took very intense care of me, but people around us thought it was hopeless to think that I would survive. I don't remember how sick I was, how the loss of toy fair or diarrhea or fever affected me. All I got for my burns were decocted 'dokudami kind of medicinal herb) and something with oil and 'sikkaroru' that was put on the burned parts, In December of the same year (1945) the burned parts of my body tegu to heal, but I felt I had lost my stamina or desire to live, I survived because I was absent from the demolishing work on that day while most of my classmates were killed at the demolishing site. I agonized over this fact for a long time.

Anyway, we lost our father, who was the family's bread winner, so I had to en school and got a job. For a hibakusha' it wasn't easy to get a job or even to married. After two years' work as a nurse, I was employed at a company store of the former National Railway, In 1975 I suddenly lost my health. I was diagnosed as having chronic hepatitis, However, I continued working at my job, but I had to quit it at the of 51.

On the ninth of July, 2002, a collective application for acknowledgement of the A bomb disease (radiation sickness) was started by many hibakushas all over the nation. I decided to risk participating in it.

Ten years ago (1995) I was diagnosed as having chronic C-type hepatitis, but I did get Health Maintenance Allowance. I receive only Health Care Allowance, which is given to anyone who was within two kilometers of the hypocenter. I had previously abandoned hope that my application for acknowledgement would be successful because I knew that the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Labor would reject my application only as is their usual policy.

This time in 2002 the Counsel Center tried very hard to get doctors to write certificates for me. The support of these people around me made me decide to submit an application again. I also came to see the importance of having a sincere communication with doctors.

All I wanted was to make them (the government officials) acknowledge that I had hepatitis because I had been exposed to the atomic bomb and that this had resulted in the decline of my immune system. When my application was accepted at the local Ministry office desk, I almost cried.

But in December of the same year (2002), the national office of the Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare rejected it. In response, we lodged an objection. The mass media then took up our case, giving it broad publicity. This encouraged other hibakusha who had almost given up on their application for acknowledgement. As a result, inquiries to Hidankyo and the Counsel Center began to increase.

We need a broader support system for this collective application. We are asking not only peace supporters but also doctors, lawyers, social movement groups, youth, women's groups, individuals, and many more to assist and support us.

We strongly believe that there should never be any future atomic bomb victims. On June 12, 2003, I filed a lawsuit in Hiroshima District Court with 27 other accusers. Little time is left for aged hibakushas. For me this will be the final struggle of my entire life, after 58 years of suffering.

(from vol. 37: 2003)