

Just the Right Survivors So I Insist Total Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

Miyako Yano(1989)

I was born in the year when the Fifteen-Year War started and entered the girls' school in 1944.

When the Atomic bomb was dropped, I was home absent from school with a stomachache. We were a family of five: Father, who was a priest, Mother, two elder sisters who were volunteer corps members, and myself.

On August 6, the military factory where my sisters worked was closed for planned outage. So unusually, all my family were in the living room. Suddenly a flash came like a lightening. Father almost automatically jumped out to the yard, shouting "We're attacked!" Our house was 4km away from the hypocenter, but my father had a minor burn on his right hand, which was exposed to the flash.

Mother ran to the kitchen, and my sisters rushed to the air-raid shelter, but I was still sitting there.

Then our whole house started to shake from side to side as if there had been an earthquake. In that moment, I was blown up by the blast with tatami mats up to the ceiling, and then knocked down to the floor. I went outside unconsciously. I was surprised to see our house completely destroyed, and the big pine tree that had stood in the yard fell down from the base. But I saw no trace of a bomb. I looked up in the sky on the north to see a gigantic thunderhead climbing higher and higher. A pillar of flame whose color was hard to tell if it was yellow, red or orange was rising.

It was all quiet out there and I had no idea what had happened. I heard someone shouting, asking for help to rescue those who were left under the broken house.

I didn't know how much time had passed. People with burns and injuries came one after another to evacuate in our shrine, and it soon was packed with these people. The shrine became a first-aid station.

In the afternoon, the army ordered us to move patients to Ninoshima Island because it was dangerous there. We put those who had just settled down on a large two-wheeled cart or boards to carry them to Ujina Port. Soon there was a line of the injured stretching in to the night and the shrine became crowded again.

We were told not to let people die before the altar, so we carried the seriously injured to the kindergarten next to the shrine. We let the lightly injured or uninjured stay in the shrine. My family stayed outside. In the center of the city, the fire kept burning all night turning the night sky red.

At dawn, the rescue activity started again. Our shrine was used as the first-aid station till the end of September.

We were surprised to find those who had looked well and stayed in the shrine the night before dead.

We dug a big hole in the kindergarten yard with wood scrap from the demolished buildings. The owner of the photo studio across the street led the neighbors to cremate the dead bodies.

He said to me, "Miya-chan, keep watch on fire," and he went back to the aid station.

The adults did not want children to see such a cruel sight, so I had to go and sit under the blazing sun watching the fire burning the bodies from day to day.

The photo studio owner couldn't eat anything because the rotten smell bothered him and he was laid up in bed several days later.

In retrospect, I think he was affected by radiation.

Early September, school reopened, so I went back to the classes. But there were only a few students in each class in the first and second grades. Our school had the biggest number of casualties, and all the students who had been to demolition work were dead.

I grew up with militarist education that taught us the highest honor that could be attained was to die for the Emperor. So I felt very ashamed of myself for having survived because I was absent from school and labor that day. I attended school with a sense of guilt.

Our school buildings were severely damaged, so on rainy days we had no classes and worked for reconstruction. When we searched for personal effects of the deceased or lost articles, the teacher would call me, "Hey, you, the survivor." regret to be alive. It made me feel more.

Meanwhile, the School Memorial Ceremony was held, where the mother of a friend of mine, who used to go to school from elementary through girls' together, said to me squarely, "I don't want to see your face. You remind me of my daughter. She told me that she was too tired and wanted to stay home. The diligent one died while the lazy one survived."

At that time I couldn't understand the grief of a mother who had lost her child. Every day I thought of dying. I started to hate people and tried to avoid them. Some students felt it was too hard to be told they had survived because they were lazy, and moved to another school.

After Japan was defeated in the war, the school education was drastically changed; girls' schools (12-16 years old) were abolished, and the education system was reformed many times. In 1950 I graduated from high school.

Around that time, I fell sick. In the morning I was too weary to get out of the bed, feeling like falling into the pits. When I had a bath, I felt dizzy, things went black and fell down. So I consulted a doctor, but he said, "Nothing is wrong with you except anemia."

Father was also unable to get up in the morning. Back then surviving was the biggest challenge. Father had no job and we hardly had cash income. Mother hoped that I found a job to help with family expenses. She scolded me for staying home without looking for a job.

My weariness and dizziness of unknown cause continued for a year and a half. Our neighbors worried that a young one like me would become useless and found me a job at a laboratory near my house.

In 1955, I got married and had a son two years later. He was born in a state of suspended animation, but to my relief, he grew up without any more trouble. But the about six months later, he started to suffer anemia, and it became worse and worse. He was injected with blood forming medicine, but there was a limit on frequency of injection, so the doctor had to stop it. The exam found no cause for his anemia and my husband was very worried, while I took it easy thinking that my son just inherited anemia from me.

I avoided people, turned my back to society, and never read anything related to the A-bomb. I blindly accepted what the government said in public and I was not conscious of myself being Hibakusha. I hadn't told my husband what I had experienced either.

Four years later, I gave birth to a baby girl. She was born premature, so I had to leave her in the hospital when I went home. I got mastitis, had it cut open, and the wound would not heal easily. The doctor looked puzzled, so I asked him if it was because of my exposure to the A-bomb. He said that it had nothing to do with the A-bomb. Then I started to have pains in chronic appendicitis. I was examined in the hospital, and was told that due to my abnormally low level of white blood cell counts they were not able to do surgery on me. At that point I believed my condition was related with the A-bomb.

My father had already passed away of stomach cancer three years before and the photo studio owner, who had burned the dead bodies together, also died of cancer.

All these remind me of possible effect of radiation on myself.

I have long kept being "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" about the A-bomb. When I participated with my husband in the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs for the first time, there were many right wing people coming in vehicles to intimidate the participants. I did not understand most of what people were discussing and reporting, but I came home feeling refreshed, overcoming all the biased views I had had.

I was encouraged to join the New Japan Women's Association, and I happened to read "Burnt Like Fallen Leaves." My way of life totally changed.

Ms. Misao Nagoya wrote that her younger sister who as a girls school student had left home cheerfully that morning to work in the building demolition just beneath the hypocenter. Her sister was still missing, burnt and gone leaving no trace of life on this earth. I thought I could have been one of those who disappeared like her sister. This was the first story of Hibakusha I had ever read, and I was deeply shocked.

Friends of mine who died had no choice but to live in the wartime. They were gone without experiencing a single day of peace.

To create a world where all the children, no matter what country they live in, will not be made victims of war, I will keep committed to the movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

This year, I left Hiroshima for my husband's work, and it is now difficult for me to get materials and information on the A-bombing. It reminds me once again that "Burnt Like Fallen Leaves" has such an important role in making Hibakusha's stories known.