

Big Scars

Mrs. Yoshiko Yamamoto

In 1945, I was newly married and was living in Nishikoshima. My husband was working for Mitsubishi and he had gone to Hiroshima on his business trip. Because my husband's parent's home was in Hiroshima and we didn't have any children yet, I thought I might live in Hiroshima if I liked it there, so I was staying at a Ryokan in Hiroshima for about a month, with plans to look around and see what it was like. One morning when I was thinking it may just be about time to go back to Nagasaki, the first bomb fell when I was on the way back from the train station after seeing my husband off to work. I was safe because the Ryokan was on the outskirts of the town, but my husband died at his factory.

The next morning, I went back to Nishikoshima in Nagasaki. I thought about going back to my parents' home in Ohashi, but because of the constant air raids, I couldn't do that and so I was bombed again in the meantime. I went to see my parents' house immediately but the house was burnt down and my father and 6 year old nephew [my sister's child] had been crushed dead under the house.

I heard from my neighbor that my sister and my other nephew were on their way to Isahaya, then I went back home at once. However, there was a rumor that it would be dangerous if the Occupation Army came and that women and children should get away, and I also had to look for my sister and others, so I left for Isahaya with the wife of one of my neighbors. The people strewn around the place had maggots coming out from their

ears and noses.

I didn't have to look far for my sister, and when we met she called out to me "Yoshiko! Thank you for coming!" She seemed really surprised and was pleased - I hadn't been in touch with my sisters since I went to Hiroshima, so they thought that I must have died from the atomic bombing there.

Although my nephew Shizuo had been injured by a nail that had stuck into his leg, he seemed fine. When I asked him "Is there anything you want to eat?" he said he'd like a watermelon and a fig, so I told him that I'd get them if I could find them, and left with Takamura san, my neighbor's wife, to see her off to her parents' home (she said it was in Amakusa). On our way, I saw someone walking with a watermelon, I asked if I could have some but I was denied because someone else had already asked for it.

I was going to go on a train from the station but couldn't get a ticket because there were so many people so there was no choice but to walk. When I was hurrying along on my way, I found a watermelon field. When I told the lady there about the situation, that it was for an injured person, she was happy to say that I could take as much as it was possible to carry and I was filled up with feelings of gratitude that when one door shuts, another opens. I was given 5 or 6 of them and I left a little money to show my appreciation but she ran after me and wouldn't accept it.

I asked a person nearby how long it would take to get to Kuchinotsu and I was told that it would take us a whole day on foot to get there. But still, we couldn't get any tickets and had to keep walking. On the way, because we both hadn't had anything to eat since morning, we couldn't restrain our hunger and had one watermelon each.

After walking for a couple more stations or so, at last there were less people. When I think about it now, I think it was around Fukae. After two trains had gone, we could finally get tickets. I wanted to see her to Amakusa but because the injured boy was waiting, I saw her to Kuchinotu and took the same train home.

Because it was already late, I thought I wouldn't be able to see them on that day, so I tried to stay at a Ryokan but I was told that they didn't need money, but instead wanted a watermelon. It seemed like there was a sick elderly person in the house, and I would have given anything but couldn't give up a watermelon. So I said I'd pay, but was then told that there was no longer a vacancy. There was nothing I could do, so I decided to go to the house of someone I know from the markets, and imposed upon their hospitality.

Early the next morning, when I went to the hospital with the watermelon, a white cloth was over my sister. My brother in law was next to her, and said "She was calling "Yoshiko! Yoshiko!" for a long time. You didn't have to worry about the watermelon, if you'd gotten here ten minutes earlier... " Although her body was still warm, injured people were being carried in one after another as people were dying constantly and all of them were being put onto a truck and taken to a crematorium. Although it was called a crematorium, it was actually just a big hole, dug in a field with something like an iron plate placed at the bottom, and they put the bodies on top of it then cremated them. My heart still gets hot now when I go near that place.

We picked up her bones and the three of us; my brother in law, Shizuo and I, went to the station, but it was full of people like before and we were held up. Then a young police officer came and asked "What's the matter?" I told him about our satiation,

that we wanted to go back to Nagasaki but couldn't get any tickets. Maybe because we were holding the remains, he must have felt pity for us, and he asked "For how many?" and as soon as I answered "Two adults and one child." he went off somewhere quickly and came back with the tickets.

There are no words to communicate the gratitude I feel for both the lady at the watermelon field and the young police officer. Because we were shaken up at the time, I couldn't even ask their names and addresses, but when I think of it now, I regret that I didn't at least send them a note of thanks.

After receiving those two acts of kindness, the two of us, Shizuo and I, went back towards Nishikoshima. My brother in law went back to his parents' home in Kibachi, and my sister and her younger child's remains were also taken there to be kept at their home.

My brother in law was coming and going between Nishikoshima and Kibachi, but soon Shizuo started to complain of a sore throat, then a fever, his hair started to fall off, and he died after a month. Before he died, he suffered so much from the burning pain in his throat that he begged to be stabbed with a knife. There was a crematorium above Tsukimachi, so we took him there and gathered firewood and cremated him. We picked up his remains the next day and took them back to my brother in law's parents' home. Because I was still young, I think Shizuo might have been thinking of a way to help me get remarried. Shizuo went into the grave in Kibachi next to his mother and younger brother.

When I think about back then, I think I was more stunned and occupied with getting through everything than sad.

On August 9th several years later, I saw my brother in law by

chance at Peace Park (the Atom Bomb Memorial in Nagasaki) and found that he had remarried and had a child. I am grateful to be able to spend the rest of my life at this home now, but my loneliness at losing my family members from the atomic bomb and being all alone and the big scar it has left on my heart will never diminish.

[Location at Bombing: Higashikoshimamachi]