

Night at Noon

It was a beautiful morning on August 9. I was on the early morning shift. Finishing my breakfast in a hurry, I gathered with the others in front of the imperial portrait. Then singing a song, "We the Young!" which Reverend Mother loved, we marched to the factory in two lines, encouraged along the way by the Sisters. As boarding students at the school, we had come to look upon these wonderful nuns as our second mothers.

There was a gas tank in front of the gate of the factory where we worked. Each day we would note how full or empty it was. Ever sensitive to such signs of how our resources stood, we keenly felt the situation of our country, daily bombed and now producing so little from her factories.

We were tense as we entered the factory and gathered for the formal morning greeting. We then went to work in our appointed sections. In those days we each had a junior along side us, one who was just mobilized and still wore a clean uniform. Working with us girls from Junshin High were some girls from Kagoshima. I am not certain of the time, but at one time an air raid alarm drove us all to the shelters. After a short while the all clear was sounded. As we were working I asked Yaeko Yamashita, who was working with me, what time it was. She told me it was 10:45. I asked if she would like some pickled plums which I had brought with me for lunch from our dormitory. She said "Yes," so I gave her some.

I had just finished a test run on my own machine and was about to run it at full speed when there was a blinding blue flash. The sound of it was very much like a day or two before, when the foundry next door had blown up. I tried to run to the back door. I might have gone a meter or so when the air was filled with flying objects. I fell flat on my face as we had been instructed to do. Lying there, I looked up but could see nothing except a bright light, and so I prostrated myself again.

I don't know how much time passed, but I could hear somebody crying, "Mama, mama..." I opened my eyes to see a fearful sight. The whole factory had collapsed. I was half buried under a heap of twisted steel. I could see many people crawling about and screaming. When I dragged myself out, Miss Urakawa told me I was bleeding from a wound on my head. I must have struck my head hard for I felt very dizzy. Some of my fingernails were missing! My

right arm would not move, but dangled limply from my shoulder.

I remained still for a while till some people came to help me. Miss Tabata, my junior, lay trapped under a large machine, her face twisted with pain. We could not do anything for her. The factory manager, himself afflicted with a head wound, was unable to help her. From other parts of the factory many were rushing about and screaming. The sky was darkened as if it was night. "It's an air raid! Hurry...to the shelter!" shouted one of the factory hands. I pleaded with him to help Miss Tabata. He hurried us out shouting, "Get out...out! I'll take care of the rest!" So we quickly left the factory, crossed the Urakami River, and made our way into a bamboo thicket where we met others seeking refuge, among whom were many of our classmates. Those who had any energy left kept moving to safer areas; but some of us were so exhausted that we could move no further. So we stayed in this place all night, talking to each other to prevent ourselves from falling asleep.

All around us people were running here and there in panic. Many were covered with blood or enveloped in flames. We sat huddled under some blankets which a passing stranger had given us. As I watched the flames spreading, I saw our school go up in flames and cried out; no one seemed to be listening. There were only silence and tears all about.

It was hot the next day; and so to escape from the heat and from enemy planes, we trudged to the foot of a little bridge. We made the sign of the cross over the stream and cupping our hands, we drank the dirty water. Kashi Kawahara, who could not walk and had to be left behind in the fields, asked for water. Spotting a cracked pumpkin nearby, I took it and hollowed it out, and putting some water into it, took it to Kawahara-san. She drank from it several times while we prayed, each holding a part of the rosary beads which I had with me.

After a short time a few teachers from Junshin High School arrived and escorted us to Ohashi-machi. Some of us were able to walk, but many had to be carried on stretchers. There at Ohashi-machi we were put on a train only to be pushed out of the train at Isahaya. Finally Minn Ken, a graduate of Junshin, and Tokunaga Sensei, a teacher, came and took us to the hospital where we met many more of our friends and Sister Christina Tagawa who was nursing the victims.

Later on talking to Miss Kashiyama she told of how Toshi Matsubara's parents

had come looking for their daughter only to be told that she was not among the survivors. She had then led them to the machine shop where Toshi had been working. There at her work place they found the charred body which they were able to identify from part of her apron which had not been burned.

After a while I was moved to Miss Matsumoto's who told me that Miss Kashiya had later died. Later Miss Matsumoto, too, passed away. And at this time I heard to my great sorrow and regret that Miss Tabata had also been burned to death. No one had been there to save her.

I shall never forget the kindness which we received from Tokunaga Sensei and Sister Christina Tagawa.

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