

The Sun Dropped Out of the Sky

Sixteen years have passed since that fateful, terror stricken day when the A-bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. And while it is true that this event is unforgettable, we must also admit that time has faded the memory of that terrible day. I feel obliged, as one who survived, to make this record before the memories fade forever.

I mourn no more for the dead, for they are now happy in their eternal rest. On the morning of August 11, 1945 Mutsuko Kamiyama, a third year student, who had been left lying on the roadside for some time before she came to Tokitsu aid station, said to me, "Sister Itonaga, I envy those who have not been hurt." I was very sorry for her; tears ran down my cheeks, for there I stood without a scratch or a wound. I should have been much kinder to the victims at that time. I hope they have forgiven my thoughtlessness, carelessness, and cowardice. I must beg the pardon of their parents who came to the school to ask after their daughters only for me to tell them, in a matter of fact way, "Yes, we understand; we are doing our best." It must have seemed to them that I didn't understand how they felt, that I did not share their concern.

From the beginning of June, 1945, our third year students had been mobilized. Some of them went to work at the iron-works at Tokitsu and Michino. Sister Uchino and I took charge of them by turns. On August 9, 1945, it was my turn to take care of the girls. It was a lovely summer morning and we all enjoyed the walk along the country lanes that morning. Quite a number of other mobilized students, including primary school children, were working there at the iron-works. There was little work to be done that day, though the atmosphere was tense, so we passed the time in building air raid shelters.

A little past ten o'clock I left the factory at Michino for Tokitsu. There, as I was standing in the office, my back suddenly felt very warm. Turning around I saw half-way up the mountain side a big ball of fire floating down as if the sun was falling out of the sky. I grabbed my belongings and ran for the students' quarters. The moment I entered and slammed the door shut everything began to rattle and shake. Some people were hurt by flying pieces of glass, but all our students were safe except for Miss Michida who was now bleeding from a wound in her forehead. I had been protected because I had been so near the door.

We moved into the shelters where we remained hidden for some time. But the rumor was going around that the Urakami section of Nagasaki had been bombed. Concern for the students at the Michino works drove me to leave the shelter, and so first escorting Michida-san to her home, I headed towards Urakami.

There at Michino I was relieved to find the students gathered at the factory manager's house where they had taken refuge, after crawling out from under the crushed roof of the factory. Masue Kimoto and some others whose houses were in the city were very worried and anxious to return home. We persuaded them to stay that night with the factory manager while I made my way back to the school with Setsu Arima who insisted on going back home to Sumiyoshi which was on the way.

On the way we met Mitsue Yamasaki who with a friend was heading home. Ignorant of the power of the new bomb I wondered why those I met were so badly burned. Group after group was trudging out toward the suburbs of the city. A little further on many people were lying piled on the bank of the railroad tracks. My sense of fear and anxiety for the school was such that I can not remember how I kept walking. After parting from Miss Arima I walked with a man who was going in the direction of Tateyama. He was walking rapidly but I kept pace with him for fear I might get lost. The road itself, strewn with damage and carnage, was difficult to move along: in the evening light the flicker of the flames of numerous fires only increased my fear. At Futago-bashi we parted and I ran on to Junshin High School which was close by.

Climbing over the fence at the back of the convent I saw a black nun-like figure standing on the bank of the river. Thinking it was Sister Mitsuno Nakashima I ran toward her, my spirits raised. It was a solitary fir tree. Suddenly I felt terribly alone. I made my way through the ruins of the kitchen to the shelter in the school grounds where I saw Sister Fujiko Fukahori coming towards me carrying a bottle of pickled plums. On seeing her I was lost for words: I was much assured and encouraged when she related briefly all that she knew.

By the time Sisters Urata, Hatanaka, and others came back from Koba, Sisters Yamaura and Kimura who had gone to the factories at Ohashi and Nishi-urakami to search for other students, had returned. They had found many people lying in ditches and on the banks of the river suffering from a variety of

injuries. Almost all the students, to say nothing of the principal, had been injured: some died. Every moment, every hour, every day, they had prayed and worked, dedicating themselves to our country, and here I was now without the slightest scratch. I vowed anew to do what I could, working harder for those who were still alive.

Going on to the next shelter I was filled with a sense both of relief and grief on meeting the principal. I also took care of Sister Osako who had been found lying in a potato field suffering from many wounds. She was praying to God, "Have mercy on us sinners. . . ." Had I been in her place, what prayer would I have said. I then returned to my own shelter where I met Shinobu Nakamura, her pale face covered with blood.

August 10. After a night of great suffering, the sun arose as if nothing had happened. Wherever I looked I saw nothing but misery. A bowl of rice was our breakfast. Along with Sister Kamata and others we went off to continue our search for students. First we met Kinuko Oda coming our way; her cheeks were so deeply gashed as to make her mouth look grotesquely enlarged. Seeing us she could just about say, "Sensei!" Later we saw another student walking along the bank of the river: it was Miss Yamada. At first she did not respond to our calls; she was too seriously wounded. Presently noticing us, she said, "My friends are in the shelter at the factory; they have all been injured. They asked me again and again to go for help, and this is as far as I managed to get." To have walked as far as she did must have caused her great pain, and now she walked back with us to the shelter where we met the other students. We wanted to stop and help them all, but all we could do was transfer them to the first aid station, and go on with our search for others. We found some in the fields near Mr. Kataoka's house. We again entrusted these victims to the first aid station. Some of the injured were able to walk, but many more had to be carried on stretchers. Finally behind the school we met Taeko Yamashita who was very badly wounded. Her only concern was for the school and the principal. She did not seem to be conscious of her own injuries, for she never complained about them to us.

At one point an air raid alarm forced us to hurry to a shelter. There a kind gentleman offered us some rice balls which we gratefully accepted. We then continued our search going as far as Nagasaki University where we found Miss Takeuchi, a fourth year student, lying in a ditch. It had been so hot on the main road that she had rolled into the ditch for shade. We helped her

back up on the road. "Kazue has my rosary, but . ." She could say no more. Her cousin, Kazue, had been staying with her at Ippongi; perhaps they had been using the same rosary. Later, in the aid station of the factory she asked me calmly, "Sister, will you pray for me?" She had always been ready for death, although she never talked with anyone about the subject. She had prepared for her death by herself. Blessed Mother Mary for whom she had a great devotion must have taught her what she should do. Every time I pray for the dead I remember how many times I have been asked to do so.

By the Iwaya bridge I heard someone calling. I went nearer and met a man who pointed to three bodies and explained, "I think these three girls are your students. Last night they asked me to go to the school and inform the teachers about them. I was so busy looking after my own who were injured that I couldn't get away. Before I could do anything for them they died." The girls were laid in a line all neatly dressed in summer kimonos. Their faces were too swollen to be recognized but from the names written on their white shoes, we found that one was Yoshino Masuda, and the other two were Shiozuka and Yokogawa. These three had been bombed while on their way to work in the school for the blind. Since their dresses had been so badly burned, the man had kindly laid them out in clean summer kimonos. If we had known we would have come for them sooner; they were second year students who had been mobilized only a few days before. Though their death for their country was inevitable, I cannot remember them without shedding tears when I think how they must have suffered through that night before they died.

As we headed toward the shelter at the Nishi-machi factory we passed numerous scenes of death and destruction. We wanted to stay a while but had to go on searching for our students. At the sound of the alarm we would take cover in ditches and then at the all clear continue on with our search. In the ditches we often found bloated corpses floating at our sides. By the stream in Nishi-machi we found Sumiko Kobayashi crouched in pain. In the shelter of the factory Tomura-san and others were found. Sister Nagatani carried Tomura-san on her back to a first aid station. I was too exhausted to carry anyone anywhere.

We moved on to Shoen Temple near the railroad station where many victims were waiting for the train to come. No train came on the afternoon of August 10. It was now becoming dark. Sister Nagatani and Sister Hatanaka went to Sister Osako who was lying a little way off. I remained with Sister Kikuchi

who was also with us searching for students. There at the temple were many more students from Junshin. We took care of them as best we could, taking some to the first aid station or giving them some food to eat. The food was poor, only hard bread and stale rice balls which the seriously ill had difficulty in eating. Then somebody told me that there was rice gruel in the shelter of the school; so I ran there, but there was no one around. Loneliness pressed in upon me with the darkness. I wondered where everyone had all gone. Overwhelmed with sorrow I ran to the back gate where I met the family of Kinuko Tanaka who told me in sorrow-filled voices, "We cannot find Kinuko."

The night of the tenth I spent in a field near Shoen Temple along with Sister Kikuchi and with a man and a boy who had taken shelter there. All around the area had been turned to ashes. In the dead darkness I felt the damp night dew. With a torch I borrowed from the man, I went around the field looking after the victims, moistening their lips with gauze, putting oil, of which there was little in the first aid kit, over their wounds, and dressing them as best I could. All were very thankful though really I did so little. Sometimes they asked me to turn them over or sometimes they asked me to lend them my rosary. To those who asked for water I had to tell them that there was no water to be found. One of them, Sachiko Tomura, began praying to our Lady of Lourdes for water.

Time passed. I satisfied my hunger with some canned food which I had brought from the first aid station at the Mitsubishi munitions factory. Towards morning Sisters Seraphia and Yamaura came from Koba with fresh rice balls. Those victims who had not been treated up until then were taken to the first aid station in the first floor office of the present Nagasaki University. Here were gathered the bodies of many who had died. It was dark and dreary all around.

As the morning progressed the victims in the fields and in the aid station of the munitions factory were taken to a larger first aid station in the primary school in Tokitsu. We moved them on stretchers and in trucks provided by Mitsubishi Shipping Company. Among those who helped us transfer the victims were students of the Nagasaki Junior High School who had been working with our girls. They took very good care of the wounded; we were most grateful to them. The trucks, of course, could not handle all the patients at once, and so some had to be left out in the hot August sun, which only increased their pain and discomfort. While we were waiting Father Matsushita passed by and spoke to many of them. Sueko Kataoka went with others to the aid station in the Tokitsu Primary School and nursed the victims there. While she was there she

baptized Toshie Kimoto.

Shigeko Yamada who had come along to help at Tokitsu was given some oranges for herself by the head teacher there, but she shared them with others, leaving a few pieces for herself. Many of the victims there, though they were in great pain, were quick to offer thanks to those who looked after them. By noon we had sent all the injured to hospitals, and this left us with the painful task of cremating and preserving the ashes of those who had died.

We then went back out to continue our search. Fujie Nakamatsu, a senior student, was found dead at the entrance of the factory where she had been working. Next to her was Masako Yamaguchi whom we readily identified from her clothes. The charred bodies of Matsuguchi and Uchno, their heads facing downwards, were also found on the grounds of the factory. When we turned the dead bodies on their backs, the name tabs on the front of their clothes served to identify them. Perhaps they had lost their way in the smoke and so were burned alive. They were just as Dr. Nagai said, virgins given to God as burnt offerings for the peace of the world. The charred body of Toshi Matsubara was found in the machine section of the factory. We identified her from a bit of an unburned apron found underneath her body. In a side building we found Shigeko Kamata whom we identified from the savings book in her pocket. Finally by the railroad tracks outside the gates of the factory we found Ikuko Nakamura. We cremated the bodies in the grounds of the factory. The people from Mitsubishi Shipping assisted us in the grim task.

And so we went on with our search, on and on, as long as we could move. The identification of the bodies of our Junshin girls became increasingly difficult, for they were all dressed in the same factory uniforms and many of their faces were bloated beyond recognition. It seems that many of them had fled as far as the river at the foot of the mountain, and had died there sometime during the night of the tenth. Most of them lay face down; some were covered with straw mats placed over them by some kind person. We inspected all these bodies one by one. We would roll them over to look for some sign by which we could identify them, sometimes cutting their clothes open to look for some distinguishing marks.

On August 12 we cremated them and gathered together the ashes and bones. Although I had heard of the ceremony of picking up the bones of the cremated dead, as a Catholic I had never seen this done. A thousand emotions crowded

in on my mind as I picked up the remains of many of our Sisters and students. Sisters Sakata and Nakatani worked with me at this task. I put the ashes of the students in simple, plain wooden boxes furnished by Mitsubishi and carried them carefully to the school shelters. There I laid them out in a small alcove and slept with them that night. Those students who had slept together but a few days before in their appointed classrooms and shelters now rested together in death.

All this while the principal was resting and gaining her strength while staying with the Tagami family at Mitsuyama. We would go there in turns every day to report on the progress of our search for our students. She on her part would offer words of encouragement and give suggestions on how we might proceed.

Sister Uchno, who had been at Isahaya helping out there, now returned to the school. Sister Nakata came down to look for a student named Shime Mori, while Sister Sueko Kataoka helped Father Yamakawa distribute Holy Communion in the Urakami district. Sisters Yamada and Kawabata went by turns to the aid station in Tokitsu. Anytime they heard of students who had been taken to a certain place, the Sisters would go to inquire after them. They went as far as Omura, Kawatana, Haenosaki and Hiu. The Sisters would then report back giving full details of students' names, the condition of their health, and whether the families had been informed.

Concerned about the Sisters' health, Mother Ezumi made some of them take a rest when they came to see her at Mitsuyama so that they could regain their strength and return to the work with renewed vigor. The principal always acted as a real leader of our school, though she was compelled to stay at Mitsuyama because of her injuries.

From about August 12 many of the students' parents came to inquire after their daughters. Some came from a great distance. We felt a little relieved when we could give them definite information about their daughters—information based on on-the-spot surveys and reports from the hospitals—even though they were not always hopeful reports. Our biggest grief at this time was not to be able to tell the parents anything. Kamigawa-san's father collapsed in grief when we told him that his daughter was still missing. The old father had walked all the way from Konoura clinging to the hope that his daughter might be alive. We also had to tell the father of Taeko Riura that his daughter had not yet been found. We would continue our search for her, we assured him, but it was best

for him to stay at home until we contacted him. His hopes were dampened, but he said that he would come every day until we gave him some news.

Some of the parents filled with concern for their missing daughters were astonished at the rough conditions under which we were working. Others so overcome with anxiety were a little impatient and would shout at us Sisters; we understood that anger of this kind was born out of their worry.

Nakamura-san's elder sister cried for a long time at the entrance of the shelter, as did many of the parents as we handed over the boxes of ashes. Some would talk with others about the times they had shared when their daughters were alive. One by one the boxes were handed over as the parents came for them. Often we too would be in tears as we handed them over. As long as the boxes remained in the shelter at least one Sister would stay through the night keeping vigil.

At this time, following the suggestion of the principal, we borrowed a tent from the prefectural high school, and using straw mats to sleep on, set up our home in tents. All of us welcomed a good night's rest and awoke much refreshed.

The bodies of those who died at the Mitsubishi Works were brought into the school yard and cremated that night. The smell of death filled the air. It was by the light of the fire in which the bodies were being burned that we prayed. That same day a number of soldiers set up a guard post in one corner of the school yard.

Around the fifteenth or sixteenth, Sister Rosa came from Tokitsu and whispered, "The war is over. Japan has been defeated." We refused to believe her. "It's true," she told us, "The soldiers who guarded us have now gone away." Then Sister Ikeda, who later died of her wounds, came back from Atagoyama and told us about the solemn proclamation by the Emperor over the radio. Several other people told us the same news. At first we could not believe that the war had ended and that our country had lost the war. But then we noticed that the sirens were now mute. Little by little we realized that peace had come at last, at a bitter price to the students we had loved.

One day, when things were a little settled, the principal sent in a letter of resignation from Mitsuyama. Sister Nagatani and I were told to take it to the head of the educational affairs in the temporary city office. After listening to

our story, the head of the section said, "Could you tell your principal that Junshin High will be reconstructed. Tell her to have courage; I wish her a speedy recovery from her injuries." The resignation was not accepted.

On August 20 the father of Sister Miya Matsushita came to help us build a makeshift 'house' from the material that was still usable from the buildings that were destroyed. It was good to move into a 'house' after many miserable days in tents.

On September 3, the fathers of some of the Sisters and of some of the students came to offer their assistance. Among the men who came was the father of Sister Imamura. However, that same night he suffered a deep vein thrombosis and died. We laid him out in the school grounds along with the other dead. The heavy rain prevented us from keeping a vigil outside. The following day the other daughter and the son arrived while we were cremating his body and the bodies of the others. We were at a loss to express our condolences and sympathy.

On September 12, Hatsuno Fukahori passed away at the aid station in Shinkozen Primary School. Her father and sister carried the body to the school grounds by car. We helped them cremate her while singing the *De Profundis*.

At that time there were discussions in progress concerning moving the school from Nagasaki to Ōmura. This would necessitate some girls leaving Junshin and moving to other schools in the city. Through the kind services of Hyakutake Sensei who had previously done a lot of work with the mobilized students, places were found in Keiho High school and another municipal school.

With Urakami still in ruins, autumn came to Mitsuyama. But we did not have the time to enjoy its beauty: we were simply too busy at the school. However, one evening the principal invited us to visit her at Mitsuyama. There under a full autumn moon she greeted us from her sick bed. As we sat there eating rice dumplings, we breathed in the cool evening air. Peace was in the air. But our work was calling us back; and so before the night drew on, we headed back to the school to rest and to get ourselves ready for another day's work.

About this time Father Yamakawa went in a hurry to Mitsuyama to report that the Americans were coming. Hearing this, the principal's advice to us was that we should make ourselves look as dirty and as shabby as possible so that we

might escape harm from the soldiers. Since August 9 we had been left with only the clothes on our backs and wooden clogs on our feet. Normally when we went out we would walk through ashes and dust, covering our heads with dirty towels to protect them from the scorching sun. With no socks to cover our feet, they had become so dirty that no amount of scrubbing could have made them clean. We had no need to make a pretense of shabbiness.

One rainy day, while shuttered in the house because of the rain, three American soldiers came toward the house. We had seen them talking with one another as they moved through the ruins. Now they came straight towards our hut. One of them stood in front of our narrow open door. We were trembling with fear as we listened to them talking. Catching one single word—'Catholic,' we nodded and pointed to the crucifix on the wall. They smiled and moved away silently. We sighed with relief.

Soon after demobilization Mr. Kataoka, a teacher of our school, came back to deal with various matters of school business. Everything went smoothly and the principal was greatly encouraged by his return. It was finally arranged that the school be re-opened in October in Ōmura city. A former worker's dormitory in the naval dock yard was set aside for us; we owed this to Mr. Kataoka's special efforts, as well as the help of Mr. Tokunaga, and Sisters Nakada and Nakatani.

On October 9, two months after that terrible day, we held a memorial service in the school yard for the students and teachers who had been killed. The list of dead now numbered more than two hundred. As a dirge was sung and the funeral address read, many of those assembled there mingled their tears with the light rain that had begun to fall. Later we gathered again at the Urakami Cathedral, where once again tears flowed as Dr. Nagai read the funeral address in memory of those girls who died in the most miserable circumstances.

The reports from every hospital and every household where our students had been taken care of said that they had died honorable deaths with a spirit of self-control, patience, mortification, and love for others. Although their lives were short, I am certain that they lived more nobly than many others. I feel proud of them, but why do I shed tears every year on the anniversary of their deaths? "Blessed Mother Mary, may this our school and its children be ever under your loving care and protection."

On October 10, we moved to the new school in Ōmura. We took along some

vegetables from the garden in Mitsuyama. In spite of the task we faced in starting all over again, our spirits were high. The land in Ōmura was also devastated from repeated bombings; but here and there wild flowers bloomed, and this cheered us. Finally, we were much encouraged and strengthened by the way the local Catholics and some of the parents from the old school came out regularly to help us.

On November 11, Mitsubishi Shipbuilding Company announced by letter that they would be offering condolence money: 4,097 yen was given for each girl who was working the day the bomb was dropped, and 2,460 yen for each one who was off duty on that day. I went several times to the factory to collect the money and was always treated very cordially. Informed of the money, many of the parents then came to the school to collect it, pausing once more to recall the times when their daughters were still alive.

With the first anniversary of their deaths approaching, the principal, who was now well enough to get up and walk about, went to the Goto Islands to visit some of students' graves and to console their families. She visited some thirty families at that time, praying with them and consoling those who were still wrapped in sorrow and grief. It was in those days that the principal made up her mind to re-establish our school; she had the firm belief that the aims of Junshin Girls' High School had been right. If Junshin was reconstructed and prospered, the dead would receive honor and praise. And this is why Junshin now stands, continuing to inspire love, loyalty, and service.

Later the principal went to pay her respects at the graves of those who were buried in Kita-matsuura and Nishi-sonogi. Also on the third anniversary of the Bomb the bodies of those who were buried in the public cemetery in Tokitsu were exhumed and cremated; half their ashes were sent to their families, and half were buried in the base of the school monument dedicated to those who died on that day in August. At this time the state also began to provide condolence money. And as our inquiries continued, a full list of the names of those who died was slowly put together. Some had been mobilized only a few weeks before the atom bomb was dropped; the records for these students were still incomplete. The city and the prefectural governments also assisted us in our task, with the lists that they were drawing up; and these lists, along with the Mitsubishi lists of the girls they'd employed, were the most helpful. Finally, we were able to draw up a list of the names of the 213 who died on the day of the bombing, or died soon afterwards as a result of wounds or exposure to radiation.

For those of us who survived, unworthy and unfit as we may consider ourselves for the tasks that lie ahead, and unworthy also of the blessings we have received, much remains to be done.

Sr. Ursula Itonaga
Noviciate Mistress