

With Faith in Their Hearts

In July, 1945, as the war drew closer to the mainland of Japan, the imperial portraits, which by law had to be kept in all schools, from primary school on up, were transferred to a safe room in Atagoyama. The teachers of each school were obliged to keep watch by turns. I was on duty with several of the teachers of other schools from eight in the morning on August 8 until eight o'clock of the following morning. Walking down the hill to Urakami station on that morning I took the ten o'clock train for Isahaya. When the train stopped at Nagayo, to allow another train coming from the opposite direction to pass, there was a flash of light. I thought it was an explosion from the engine of the train. I got off the train and took shelter nearby. Two hours later I was able to proceed to Isahaya. Around five o'clock in the evening, crowds of refugees swarmed toward Isahaya.

At the Isahaya Primary School I met Sister Christina Tagawa. While I was talking to her, a voice called me from behind, "Tokunaga Sensei!" I turned in the direction of the voice and saw a girl with a severely burned face whom at first I did not recognize. She was Kazuko Okazono.

I searched for the girls of Junshin High among the victims who had been taken into the high school at Isahaya, to the agricultural experimental station, and to Nagata Primary School. I finally found some of our students in the auditorium of the Isahaya Primary School and in the gymnasium of the Isahaya Junior High School. They had been treated as soldiers because they had suffered while on duty as mobilized students.

On August 10 at Nagata Primary School we moved the Junshin girls, some ten in number, and one girl from Keiho High, into the comparative comfort of the sewing room which had a straw-matted floor; before that they had been sleeping on bare boards. I then wanted to stay with them, especially Haruko Ujimori who was close to death. But I also had to report back to the school where information was being gathered on the condition of the students. I left Nagata very reluctantly.

By August 13, I had found some thirty eight Junshin girls in the various aid stations in the Isahaya area. Sister Christina Tagawa who was with me was much weakened by fatigue, so I persuaded her to rest for a day or two at my own house. She later became weaker and had to be treated at the aid station.

All the Junshin girls bore their sufferings with great courage and fortitude. Ever patient with the doctors who were looking after them, they used to sing hymns to keep up their spirits. In death they were models of the faith that was in their hearts.

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