

The day the atomic bomb was dropped in Nagasaki

Written by Hiroko Miyahara (survivor of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki).

Translated into English by Yukino Perona (her granddaughter of 16 years old in 2025).

August 9th, 1945, 11:02 am, This is the moment when the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. I was 13 years old at that time.

The clear blue sky, the bright sunlight, the cicadas' chant, normally I would miss school when the air-raid siren went off. Although it was a warning siren, I took a day off from Kassui Girls School to go to an air-raid shelter near Nagasaki Medical College, less than 1km from the epicenter of the atomic bomb explosion.

My father passed away when I was in the first grade of elementary school, so that day my mother was away, working at a company on the other side of the mountain.

My older brother was a student at the Nagasaki Medical University's Faculty of Pharmacy, but due to student mobilization, he was working at the Mitsubishi Shipyard across the bay. That day, shards of glass pierced his body, and after a few days, he returned to the house of my mother's friend, where my mother and I were taking shelter.

For some reason, my older sister had taken a day off of work and stayed at home sewing.

When I told my sister I was going to the air-raid shelter, she filled my water bottle up with tea and made a bento lunch box to take with me.

So, I went to the shelter with those things in hand. Still sewing, my sister, facing away from me, waved at me, and said, "See you later Hiroko". "See you later, sister", I replied. That was our last conversation.

The shelter I went to was near the hypocenter by Nagasaki Medical College. It was simply hollowed out of a mountain - humid, damp - a dimly lit place with only a few large stones laid out.

After a while I decided to go outside. There was a lady standing by herself. As I looked up at the sky, I could see white enemy airplanes flying overhead. I saw them and I thought to myself, oh, those are enemy airplanes, and I went back inside. I took about 10 steps and the moment I sat down on the cold stone, a tremendous blast and flash of light swept over the entrance. If I had not seen the enemy aircraft and gone back inside, I surely would have suffered severe burns all over my body.

The lady whom I was with outside the shelter had not come inside the shelter. She suffered severe burns, and her skin had become all sludgy from the damage that the extreme heat had caused.

At that moment, her fate and mine were decided. More than half of the wooden bars that were supporting the entrance broke. If the whole entrance had been broken, I would have been buried alive. Then, a man entered and shouted, "It is too dangerous to come out now. Nagasaki has been completely wiped out."

After some time had passed and I went outside, all the windows of Nagasaki Medical College were on fire, people whose skin was all sludgy and peeling cried to us, "water... water... water..." with their thin voices near small rivers and roads. Small rivers and ditches were overflowing with corpses, writhing in search of water. At the time, I didn't know why but, an adult had told me not to give them water, so I didn't give them the water from my water bottle.

Shortly after, my mother - who had been working on the other side of the mountain - came to look for me and my sister in the air-raid shelter. She only found me standing there.

My mother and I then started desperately looking for my sister amongst all of the dead bodies. We screamed, "Hisako!" in despair. That night, as we were sitting in another bomb shelter, a woman with severe burns came in. "I took your older daughter and my father by the hand, but your daughter said, 'I'm already done for, so please go ahead without me.' so I let go of her hand", said the woman. It was complete darkness outside and there was no means to look for her anymore. We waited for dawn the following day to search around what was left of our home.

Pieces of the clothes she was wearing that day and pieces of her bag were all that were left of her. My sister's body was never found. I still wonder where she burned to death, or where she was taken.

On the road where I was looking for my sister, people had already started cremating a myriad of lifeless bodies. It would be better if it just burned out completely, but if it rains along the way, the fire goes out. Dead bodies that weren't fully cremated just stayed in a squishy and depressing state. The smell of burnt human flesh reminded me of dried squid. I have not once, and I will never, eat dried squid ever since that day, not wanting to recall traumatizing memories.

To this day I still have regrets, and I talk to my sister's portrait. I still blame myself for the series of unfortunate events that occurred. I still ask myself: what if I hadn't gone alone to the shelter that day? Why didn't I ask her to come with me that day? We could have run away together, hand in hand, reassured by each other's presence. My eyes still become teary remembering our haunting farewell, thinking what if...

After the bombing on the 9th of August, coming into the month of September, I had a continuous fever of over 39 degrees, so I went to see a doctor at a university hospital in Fukuoka. It turns

out I had liver problems and a decrease in white blood cells. Consequently, I missed 6 months of school, returning the year after - in April. I entered my second year of middle school.

The radiation that kills humans instantly, the horror of nuclear weapons, the cruelty, the people who have been burnt black, the people, the many people who have suffered and died, is this what war is all about? Bringing misery to people who genuinely thought that all innocent people were doing it for the good of their country. Where is this rage and hatred going to take us? Did my sister also burn black to death? It must have hurt. It must have been painful. It must have been terrifying. What could she have been thinking when she died?

I was only 13 years old when I witnessed the tragic end of countless human lives. I saw the living hell. I was in the bomb shelter that day at that moment, so I have no keloids¹, but my whole body was exposed to radiation. I have accepted my life, thanking god, still waiting anxiously for the moment when the side effects of the atomic bomb and radiation might occur.

It is the sincerest wish of us atomic bomb survivors that Japan ratifies the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and achieve a world where people live peacefully: without having to experience the heartlessness of humanity.

Memories of my mother grieving the loss of my sister

(Written in 2021 - A passage written as a continuation of "The day the atomic bomb was dropped.").

My mother had become more withdrawn after my sister's death, and she finally spoke to me. "Hisako was really kind", she said.

Although it was gut wrenching, I harshly replied: "I, your younger daughter, am still alive! You should be thankful!"

I recalled my mother's striking words that left a lasting impression on me when we were on the train to Kyūshū University in Fukuoka as my high fever continued.

"I already lost Hisako so I will not allow you to die on top of that. I will not let you die..."

They were words of deep sorrow and that were squeezed out from the very bottom of her heart.

After my father passed away, my mother saved us by using her conviction and sheer determination. She kept me alive by any means necessary and provided for the family all by herself.

¹ The word "keloid" refers to the irregular, abnormally protruding scar tissue that formed during the healing process in the burned skin of atomic bomb survivors. (https://www.genken.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/abomb/keloid_e.html)

According to the dictionary, 'otsuya' (the wake) is described as the night before the mourning period or the night before the funeral, but the 'otsuya' my mother referred to was the night before the day of my older sister's death every month.

So at this monthly wake, after my classes ended and while still wearing my school uniform, I would meet my mother at my sister's grave where she was laid to rest.

We visited the temple to listen to Buddha's teaching from the wife of the priest.

I think my mother went there to calm her mind, but all I remember from those visits was the sweet scent and taste of the tea we were served there.

Alone, my mother would go into the room where my sister's picture was placed, to read the Buddhist scripture '*Shinshu Zaike Gongyo-shu*' (*Shin Buddhist Home Practice Book*).

She would mutter those difficult characters and passages to herself. The sutra book my mother - whose back became gradually more rounded with her age - was reading had turned brown and was marked with 'Acquired on December 9, 1945 (Showa 20)'. It was acquired in the fourth month after my sister's death.

My mother passed away at 75 years old whilst saying, "I miss her... I miss her..."

She went to join my father and my sister.

I lost my father, my mother, my sister, and my brother. And all of a sudden, I was left alone.

It has now been 20 years since I also lost my husband. I have two daughters, the oldest (56 years old in 2021) who has Down syndrome with an intelligence quotient (IQ) of 35, not even reaching 50.

My younger daughter works for the United Nations, lives in Geneva in Switzerland with her French husband and with their daughter.

She (my younger daughter) worries about me - who lives all the way across the globe. So, every Sunday, we have video conferences and we speak for sometimes more than 1 hour.

I am currently experiencing life while struggling with my eldest daughter, yet also feeling relieved by her smile

My younger daughter and her family in Switzerland come to see me once or twice a year during my granddaughter's summer and winter vacations.

My current source of emotional support is drawing pictures with pastels. I like architecture in foreign countries. So, during my free time, I enjoy looking at my calendars from different countries, and drawing quietly, while cherishing these peaceful moments.

I believe the younger generation living today bears a heavy responsibility.

I hope that the next generation will create a path where a bright light shines through it and where there is hope for a peaceful world. Not the dark path left behind by my generation, not only by Japan but also the whole world.

I would like to end my story by saying that: all war leaves is sorrow.