
LAST TOMATO

— Hiroshima in my own words —



TAKEMOTO Shigenori

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〈Author's profile〉

A native of Hiroshima, born in 1931. He experienced atomic bombing in Hiroshima when he was a 2nd year student at the Shudo Junior High School.

He is both the ex-President of Co-op Kobe and the Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union. Now Adviser to the Hyogo Association for UNICEF .

PREFACE

At 8 o'clock 15 minutes 17 seconds in the morning, of August 6th, 1945...

In a flash Hiroshima was destroyed in ruins after an atomic bomb was dropped.

At that time I was in a hedge in the west of Hiroshima Municipal Hall building only 1 km off from the epicenter.

"Pica, Ka-boom", when a big flash and a great noise occurred, the surrounding became utterly dark in a moment. Until now many people have written or told about Hiroshima, but the fact that it was completely too dark to see anything under the mushroom-shaped cloud was surprisingly not known. I ran around to escape in that darkness for hours.

While escaping, I saw the dead people or the seriously burned people in countless numbers. I heard the groans of some people under the rubble. Sometimes I still hear that groan deeply in my ears.

As you may know, there are a lot of records about Hiroshima, but not everything has been told yet.

Why I think I should tell the story is that I must tell it in my own "words" and from my own "heart" about my Hiroshima.

This is what I experienced on August 6.

1. AUGUST 6, 1945

I was born on August 22, 1931 in Kusatsu-machi, in the western part of Hiroshima City. It was then the far-west of Hiroshima City, which has now become much wider after the merger of the neighboring small towns and villages.

In Kusatsu-machi there are mountains behind and the Seto Inland Sea is located closer. Also the Sanyo Line goes through the coastal area. Calm Hiroshima Bay stretches before our eyes and if we ran from our houses, we could jump straight into the sea with a big splash.

Early in the morning we could hear put-put boats moving. On a fine day we could see the Miyajima, one of the three most beautiful landscapes in Japan, in the distance from our two-storied house.

Kusatsu-machi was a town of half agriculture and half fishery and there had been a central fish market of Hiroshima for a long time. Inshore fish caught in Hiroshima Bay and Iyo Nada or Sea were brought into the central fish market.

Hiroshima Bay which was within vicinity was famous for its aqua farming site of Hiroshima oysters. It was a sea with shoals and at the same time a seaweed cultivation site in winter. Seafood such as Asari or manila clam, Hamaguri or common orient clam were abundant. There used to be about one hundred and thirty large and small Kamaboko or fish paste factories.

Our house was a single house in the field. We kept chickens and

when we got eggs, we wrote the date on them. Some were kept in chaff with care until they became baby chick. Seeing through an egg in the sunlight, the inside could be seen. "Oh no, blood isin't made yet, when will it hatch out?" was uttered while waiting with anticipation, was one of the exciting moments of my childhood.

Rice paddies and fields stretched around our house, so we often heard the crickets singing while taking a nap during summer vacations. Awaking from a nap, I went out to get the dragonflies or frogs. Rabbits, marmots, dogs and cats were all kept in this natural environment. We kept about thirty carrier pigeons and my immediate older brother and I were so absorbed in them that mother often scolded us, "You boys are not studying!".

Like this, our town was a peaceful one with abundant nature and a relaxing environment.

However, I was born in 1931, when Manchurian Incident broke out and the following year the first Shanghai Incident occurred while grave shadow of war had crept in such as the founding of Manchukuo.

In the summer of 1937 when I entered the elementary school the Japan-Sino War broke out. In that year my brother went to China as a Japanese soldier and advanced to as far as Chosa or Changsha more than 600 km off the coast. I remembered we had sent our brother the cheering bag in which letters or commodities encouraging the soldiers were put.

In December 8, when I was a 4th grader, the Pacific War started at last. Listening to the breaking news of the attack on Pearl Harbor in an elementary school classroom, I remember that I was so much excited though I was a child.

And there came August 6, 1945!

I was a 2nd grader of Shudo Junior High School when the atomic bomb was dropped in Hiroshima.

2. HIROSHIMA CITY, MILITARY CAPITAL THROUGH THE MEIJI ERA

On August 6 in Hiroshima the sky was crystal blue from the morning.

On that day our classes were mobilized as workers of collapsed houses. What we did was to make an open space of 80 meters long by pulling down houses in a certain area and carried the used woods out.

If a fire bomb raids breaks out at the close-packed houses, the fire will continue to spread and the whole city will be burn out to ashes. However, if we make some anti-fire area where no burnable things exist, then the flames will not spread into the city in case of fire. As a result the city has several anti-fire areas in north, south, east and west part.

I went out of my home with a lunch box to gather at the Hiroshima City Hall at 7:50 in the morning. I wore a white short-sleeved shirt, khaki trousers and suits with puttees on the legs. Shoes were not available, so I wore straw sandals. On my left leg was a white gauze bandage wrapped.

That's because I stepped on the nail by mistake the evening before. My sister and I went out to collect the remaining woods of collapsed houses for our bath fuel by dragging the two-wheeled cart and I accidentally trampled on the nail there. It was not so serious, but worrying about its suppuration that morning I bandaged my leg.

The school was a 5 year term under an old educational system.

Train commutation from the nearest station to Koi Station was allowed, but from the Koi Station all students from the 1st grade to 5th walked to the school in groups for about 45 minutes each way. During the war all students walked in order to build their physical strength.

Our school grade was made up of five classes. On that day one class was to dig holes in the mountains in a distance one hour by train ride, another was to study in school, and the other three classes consisting of about 150 students were to be mobilized to do the clearing of collapsed houses.

It was not only us who were mobilized but also other junior high school students, girls' school students, elderly men and women or pregnant mothers who could do the light work instead of heavy ones. Among them were people who came all the way from places which took them more than one hour ride, the city seemed to be full of more people than ever.

It was assumed that at the time of 8:15 there were between two hundred and seventy thousand and two hundred and eighty thousand people in Hiroshima including those who came to work there and those who relaxed at home after eating breakfast.

From spring the carrier-based planes from the enemy carrier vessel had been increasing in numbers flying above Hiroshima City. After dawn a radio broadcast would say, "announcing from the Western Military Area Headquarter, now the enemy carrier vessel

had appeared over the Pacific Ocean far away from the Tosa Bay". As the enemy airplanes approached over the Tosa Bay, the radio broadcast started, "the enemy planes are passing over the Tosa Bay toward Shikoku" with Warning Alert. The enemy planes further came north passing Shikoku over the Sea of Iyo in the Inland Sea between Ehime Prefecture, Oita Pref. and Yamaguchi Pref. Then Air Raid Alert is announced in Hiroshima. All the siren in every elementary school roared out through the city.

When the radio announced, "the enemy planes are intruding over Hiroshima Bay", we could see tens of carrier planes approaching in black formation from the far remote islands.

The formation was made up of ten to twelve or thirteen planes and came one after another. They dived bombs and depth bombs to Etajima Island or Kure Naval Port, which lied beyond the Ninoshima seen in front, and returned to their base.

In wartime Hiroshima City was a military capital with Chugoku Military Area Headquarter and was a fortified area. There were a lot of anti-aircraft artillery and anti-aircraft machine guns deployed for intercepting the enemy planes on the isles in the bay. And in neighboring Kure, which was the largest naval port in Japan, most of the main warships of Imperial Navy docked at the port.

When the formation of planes came, from the ground and from the warships shells were fired all together. However, the airplanes at hyperspeed were not easily shot down. Once in a while we saw a plane going down in a fireball.

This way it became as if we had air raid almost every day. However what I wondered was that there was not such a large-scale air raid in Hiroshima as other cities had suffered.

In 1944 the US started the air raid and the following year the Great Tokyo Air Raids occurred in March and subsequently big cities as Nagoya, Osaka. Near Hiroshima Kure, Iwakuni, Tokuyama and other cities were air raided.

Hiroshima was a very important military capital in which Imperial Great Headquarter was placed not only during the World War II but also in the Meiji Era, when Japanese-Sino War or Japanese-Russo War took place, so it had a number of solders here. In those days horses were also important weapons. Hiroshima was one of larger military bases bringing out solders, horses, weapons and foods.

There was a naval port called Ujina, now located in Minami Ward. As the evening came every day, military ships sailed out smoking from Hiroshima to Yamaguchi, for China or South Asia by way of Bungo Waterway, or for Korean Peninsula or Manchuria by way of Kanmon Strait. From my home I could see military ships coming or going in Hiroshima Bay.

Beyond the Hiroshima Bay being outspread before us lies Etajima Island in which a famous Naval Academy used to be. Kure was lying on the opposite side of it. Kure has still a Maritime Self-Defense Force base. So I thought it was more reasonable to air raid Hiroshima than any other city. I felt strange it hadn't had any large-scale air raid yet.

The reason why it had not got any large-scale air raid was made evident after the war. For the purpose of clarifying the effect of atomic bomb the American Joint Chief of Staff prohibited conventional bombing nor firebombing in four cities as Hiroshima, Kyoto, Kokura and Niigata, which were the target of atomic bombing.

There was one thing I thought later, "that's why". It was before the dropping of atomic bomb. I happened to pick up the propaganda bill which was dispersed by the US Force when I went to get the seashells at the nearby sea. In those days the US Force dropped the propaganda bills from the airplanes saying Japan had waged a wrongful war in order to change the war consciousness of the Japanese people. It depicted the map of Japan and had "?" mark near Hiroshima. I had wondered what it was for a long time, but it had never occurred to me "?" was the atomic bomb!

3. PICA AND KA-BOOM!

After calling over the names we all the one hundred and fifty students started to walk in column of fours to the site of the housing evacuation. The place was about four hundred meters south-east of the City Hall. I was walking in the second column as I was relatively tall in height.

Mr. Iwasaki, our teacher stopped me on our way when we walked about two or three hundred meters.

And he said, "Takemoto, you should return to the City Hall to take care of our lunch boxes." I had to obey the teacher although I thought, "It wasn't at all interesting to take care of them. It was more interesting to do the job with my classmates."

The rest of other students headed to the work site, but after leaving the column, I plodded back to the City Hall alone.

I couldn't figure out why the teacher told me to go back. He may have thought it was impossible for me to do the job having observed my wrapped bandage around my leg. As it was not a serious injury, I thought I made a blunder for wrapping the bandage too much.

Another thing which had become clear later was our class left only one person to take care of the lunch boxes while other classes left two. Our teacher might have noticed it on the way.

Where we gathered, the summer sun had already beat down scorchingly.

In the shaded shrubbery of the west of the City Hall building there were lunch boxes and the clothes they had taken off.

In returning, Mr. SAITO Yoji in my class was alone taking care of those lunch boxes.

“Why! You came back, Takemoto!”

“Yes, I’m back, Saito! Let’s take care of the lunch boxes together!”

For this reason I sat next to him, but there was nothing to do except watching them.

I had to hang around until everybody came back for lunch or did something to kill the time. So we decided to confirm how much to recite the story in the textbook containing Solder Chivalry to each other. The first and second grade junior high school students had to learn the story in the textbook of military training by heart. There were so many things to memorize as I was thinking of becoming a solder in the future. “Why not start?”, said I, when suddenly “Pica, Ka-boom!”, the enormous light & sound occurred. I had never seen such a dreadful light before. And an incredible sound as well as high heat!

In the past the magnesium was fired instead of the flash when a picture was taken at a photo studio. It was really surprising even when the photographer said, “it’s going to flash”, but its thousand times, or tens of thousands times, No, hundred millions times of strong light was exploded in front of our eyes.

At the same time the tremendous noise occurred. When my body

shook wobbly, we were surrounded by enormous hot air.

As we were trained to put our thumbs into the ear so as not to damage our eardrum and to put the rest of our fingers to hide our eyes and cast down, we hid ourselves behind the shrubbery with our ears and eyes covered at once. We didn't know whether we had air raid, but our body reacted quickly to enormous light and noise.

It was at 8 o'clock 15 minutes 17 seconds a.m. That happened in such a moment.

4. A DARKENED TOWN

How much time has passed? I seemed to have fainted into the shrubbery and lost my consciousness for a while.

Then I found myself in an utter dark environment. Till then it had been a clear blue sky without any cloud, but it became totally dark in a moment.

At first I thought I was somewhat dreaming. In a darkness I tried to see my body around hastily. Mr. Saito, who should have been next to me just disappeared. I found myself not in a dream.

I jumped over to the ground after going out of the shrubbery. Not knowing what had happened, what should have been done, I just started to walk heading to the housing evacuation area where my classmates were.

Then I found Mr. Saito who was just next to me a while ago coming from over there. "Hey! Saito!" I tried to say while approaching him, but I lost my voice as if my throat choked. I could not utter a word no matter how hard I tried. He could not recognize me in the darkness. Passing each other in the dark, I could not do but see him off into the darkness.

After that I had no memory where I walked around. Meanwhile I found myself back to the entrance of the City Hall. It was still dark around there.

In front of the City Hall was a spacious driveway where streetcars ran on the main street. However, the overhead wires and power poles were all down and obstructed the street, which made it difficult for me to walk as expected. The streetcars kept being stopped.

When I went to the porch of the Hall, I met quite a few people who ran screaming in panic out of the building. Looking around, many people from all over the area gathered heading for the City Hall.

“We are done!” “We are attacked!”, such voices were heard.

Until then I didn’t recognize that we were done by air raid. But the air raid siren which wailed throughout the city in usual case didn’t alarm on that day. We had a sudden air raid, so it was natural that we had no idea about what was happening then!

Two young women came around and asked while shaking me stunned with fear. “Are we injured?”

Seeing them, their faces and bodies were bleeding with bits of glass being stabbed all over.

But the blood didn’t seem to be red in the darkness. “You got seriously injured”, replied I. Saying, “we are hopeless”, they disappeared into a crowd.

Not only those two women but also people around us got the glasses stabbed all over their body.

There was an old woman with a small child. She grasped his hands strongly and soon started saying Buddhist sutras, “Namu Amida Buddha, Namu Amida Buddha”. I also put my hands into prayers, “God, please help! God, please help!”.

The darkness still stayed and it was not clear. Suddenly I got scared and thought I should run away.

5. PEOPLE STILL ALIVE UNDER THE DEBRIS

I started walking toward the north-east along the Shiden-dori Street in front of the City Hall. If I went straight, I would find the West Square of the Hiroshima Second Unit. That place is where Central Park and Hiroshima Prefectural Office are now located.

The reason why I headed for the West Square was that the area had huge and spacious field with no worries of being burned to death in the fire. Another reason was that there was Fukuro-machi on the way, where Hiroshima branch of Bank of Japan was located. My elder sister Suzuko was an employee there.

At this time of the day my sister should have been at the bank. She must have run away in the dark. I was thinking of trying to find her and escape together.

However, no matter how far I went, the darkness was not cleared. I knew we had an air raid, but I couldn't figure out why the surrounding was still dark. No matter how far I walked, it was plain dark.

When I tried to stare carefully in the darkness, the streetcar's overhead wire was hung in midair over the stone path and I could see the streetcar tumbled over on its side. The houses around were all squashed.

After passing two stations, I saw a fire blaze ahead. "It was no good to advance", I gave up going to my sister, and decided to head towards south. But the fire went up from the south too. People all

at once came toward me. I thought for a moment that I better go around with them, but thought twice I would have been burned if I had not run into that fire, and I started to walk toward the fire with courage.

The reason why I dared to go into the fire was due to the story I heard from my classmate in Kure.

Two weeks before the drop of atomic bomb in Hiroshima, there was an air raid in Kure. My friend, son of a navy lieutenant general, told me the detailed fact about how the US forces carried out their air raid which he had heard from his father.

According to what he said, B29 was said to have dropped their fire bombs in a circle around the city outskirts. Encircling it made people in the city unable to go out. With the people being trapped like a rat, the US forces tried to fire the city crosswise afterwards.

That's why I dared to go out crossing the fire circling the city, no matter how dangerous it was.

However, there were no roads to continue to follow. All the buildings collapsed covering the roads!

Reluctantly I had to walk over the roof tiles crashed from the Shiden-dori Street. Clapping the roof tiles, I just crawled over and stepped over them. From under the roof tiles, I heard someone shouting "Help! help!"

People survived under the debris. They were trapped under the crashed houses and couldn't escape. I couldn't do anything to help

them.

I felt myself being pulled from behind and that was it... I clearly remember those cries in my ears even today.

Having felt helplessness that I could not do anything and having been pushed by that feeling, I decided to escape to a safe place immediately. I found myself heading towards the south which was opposite direction to the Nishi Renpeijo or West Square without realizing it.

How could I think of removing the debris by myself as I was only a junior high school student? If I had remained there, I would have been killed by fire soon or later...

I asked myself repeatedly, "But, but,...,You!" Every time I said to myself, "It cannot be helped" and I tried to escape without thinking about it.

Was I really not able to help them? It still occurs to me and does not leave me...

6. HUGE CLOUD COLUMN

I had no idea of how much time had passed, where and how I had gone. Darkness still prevailed, but seemed I had gone back to the place all the classmates had engaged in making anti-fire zone.

While wondering what happened to them, two junior high school students suddenly grabbed at me. "Please take us! Please take us!"

They were found to be naked. Only the belt was on the waist. Skins were burned as if the rag had been hanging down. As they were barefooted, I thought I was seeing the ghosts.

"Which school were you from?"

"We are the first grade at the Hiroshima Sanyo Junior High School." They were one year younger than I was. I thought I had to take those younger guys to the safer place by all means. "All right! Let's leave here. Go together!"

We came to the large pond. We were about to lose our way because we ran in the darkness. We believed to walk toward the south.

Sooner or later tens of girl students came from the direction we were heading to. Without wearing any monpei or women's trousers, they were almost naked just as my male followers... Their hair was burned frizzing, and their skin were hanging down like beat-up rag...

They were escaping from the direction which I thought was safe, and I asked "How come you came here?" They replied, "That area

began to burn!”.

In a moment I thought I might go back with those female students. I saw many fires blaze up all over the direction, which made me think it might be different from the air raid I heard from my friend in Kure. However I decided to go out of the city crossing the fires in order to be saved, so leaving the girls, I headed toward the south.

Soon the blaze approached me.

It was so hot, and the heat was beyond description.

Boy students going with me also cried, “Hot! Hot!”.

Both of them, being burned all over their body, cried “Ouch! It hurts! Hurts!” as the fire was so hot!

It was so unbearable, but without going through this fire, we would not survive. While encouraging the two who hesitated to go into the fire, I myself went through the fire desperately.

From that fire appeared a woman who grabbed me. While I was trying to separate from her, she grabbed my clothes firmly and wouldn’t let them off. “My child is in the fire! Please help him! Help!”

Hearing it was a child, I felt my head shaking... I felt awfully sorry, but if we had stayed there, we would have been burned to death too. We had to escape with the mother’s hands off.

I shall never forget her heartbreaking cry!

After some time it got a bit brighter, so we could see only ten

meters ahead. Seeing around, the pillars and walls were all blown off and the roofs covered those debris as if the pieces fell during the "Daruma Otoshi" game. I saw fire blaze up in all directions, but there seemed to be no new flames around me.

Thinking that I might be saved somehow and turning around, those high school students were lost on the way.

As a result, it turned out to be a luck to have gone toward the fires southward. The girl students who escaped to the central part might have been burned to death.

Walking for some time, there was a manual pump for lifting well water on the left side of the road. A middle-aged man in front of it found me and said, "Excuse me, but could you get water with this pumping?"

Surprisingly, the man's head was cracked into two and one part saw me standing next to him while his body faced in front! He whispered to me, "My eyes cannot see any more." From the broken head the blood burst out and covered his body like a pool of blood. The blood entered his eyes and he could not walk.

He wanted to wash the blood, so that's why he asked me to get the water. I managed to do so, and went further heading towards the south.

Sooner or later I came across the river. There ran seven big rivers in Hiroshima at that time, and one of them called Kyobashi River. Reaching there, I turned back to the road I followed.

I have no idea what time it was, but it was actually only before noon. However, it was as dark as just before the sunset.

I felt very eerie as if to see the clouds springing up from the ground like mushrooms.

They were red, black and somewhere purple.

Seeing the clouds high in the sky, it was an immensely huge pillar of cloud. I began to realize it was totally dark because it was under that cloud.

7. DREADFUL HELL SCENE ALL OVER THE PLACE

Crossing the bridge over the Kyobashi River and looking down, I found a number of naked people going down the bank and entering into the river.

The river was packed with people who tried to escape from the heat. But on touching the water, they got dead. People dared to go into the water for all that. It seemed as if the river had swallowed the people!

I went on and headed towards the south detouring the foot of the small hill called Hijiyama, on which the Hiroshima Municipal Modern Museum was later built after the war.

People whom I met on the way had almost no decent clothes. Most of them were naked or close to it. Women walked hiding their front body by picking up burnt woven mat or ragged cloth.

I met a mother holding a baby.

Arriving at the back of Hijiyama, I found a house without any damage.

“Please give me water, Madam!” I asked the old woman in the house and got a glass of water.

Drinking the water, I regained my calmness. And then I took a glance at my body for the first time.

I had no burning scars even after going through the flames. Moreover, I didn’t notice my bare feet in escaping head over heels

and it was fortunate I didn't step on any pegs.

However, I couldn't take it easy, I managed to pass by the flames, but I escaped to the opposite direction to my home.

The air-raid siren continued to go on. The enemy's carrier-based planes arrived and repeatedly strafed random the people from the machine guns of the airplanes. The carrier-based plane flied as low as to identify the pilot's face and fired machine guns, which the bullets flied cutting the wind and grazed our ears. Being frightened, I plunged into the air-raid shelter after running a bit and then after a short rest, I went on. I could not advance ahead in spite of my feeling I wanted to go home as soon as possible.

In all air-raid shelter there were people who could not move or who got injured. Many areas in the city were with flames. Where no fire was seen, everything was completely clashed. No matter how far I went, a horrible hell scene was in front of me.

After some time, a familiar Miyuki Bridge was approaching. It was near my Hiroshima Shudo Junior High School. The school was located about two thousand five hundred meters from the epicenter.

I was curious to see what the school looked like and found out nobody in the schoolyard. All the wooded school buildings were clashed except one reinforced building.

There were no cicadas singing which usually would make tremendous noise and not a sound was to be heard in the schoolyard. It was such an eerie silence.

It seemed such a short moment from the explosion, but it's already three in the afternoon. The clock on the reinforced building, which seemed to stop, only ticked down silently.

For quite a long time it was dark and it became bright suddenly and the sunshine of summer came back. Reflecting the strong sunlight, the sands on the school ground looked quite glaringly white. The schoolyard looked like an utterly different place though I had been accustomed to it.

I tried going to the place where my class used to be. A big joist supporting the class fell, and under it a student was seen clashed between the desks.

I was so surprised that I returned to the street I came from. The student who was clashed under the joist seemed to have no breathe, which made me too dreadful to approach. He turned out to be Hosokawa-kun, whose class was only held in school then. Other students, at the time of the explosion, dived beneath their table and were all safe.

Crossing the bridge over the Motoyasu River, there was Oota River called Hon River, with its wooden bridge burned down.

Many people who tried to walk through the river couldn't move being stuck and killed in the river.

8. NAME WRITTEN ON BODY BY INK

Going down the bank, somebody called up closely, "Takemoto, Takemoto!" Wondering who it was and looking around, I couldn't find him due to so many people around. I finally found him but his face was not familiar to me.

"Who is it?" asked I, "It's me. Me. Kawabata!" he answered.

"Wow!", I thought. Mr. Kawabata was the close friend of my class who was just with me this morning. But his face changed and I saw him to be another person.

"Takemoto! I'm Kawabata. I'm Kawabata!", cried the person. He sat just behind me in the class and we saw each other every day, but I couldn't recognize him. His face had swollen about twice as large as before and he didn't look like what he used to be. Looking at his shoes with his name "Kawabata", I finally recognized him.

There should be a town Eba if we cross the Oota River. There was a house of Mr. MASUMOTO Nobuyuki, whom Kawabata and I were close friends with in the same class.

"All right, Kawabata! Masumoto's house is right there if we cross this river. Let's go there. Till we get there, let's hang in!"

Cheering him up, we started crossing the river holding Kawabata on my back.

Reaching the opposite side of the river, we went up the bank and looked for Masumoto's house, which was fairly close there.

There were his mother and elder sister. Asking whether he was all right, "Nobuyuki came back before the noon, but he was burned over his entire bodies, so he was brought to the Military Hospital." She replied.

Kawabata should also go to the hospital immediately. With the help of Masumoto's sister, he was on the "rear car" and carried to the Military Hospital.

On the road in front of the hospital were fallen people and others being packed.

People laid on the "mushiro" or woven mat and the door board were more or less fortunate. There were people lying directly on the ground. There were also people whose body were swollen red and had already stopped breathing.

Some people with their eyes open had become unable to speak but still survived.

Those who continued to say, "Give me water, give me water!"

Tile piece or wooden piece next to those lying people were written as "Yamanaka" or "Oomachi" for instance. They were their names. Some naked people remained with their names on their body by ink.

Rescuing people were lacking in number and not all the people would receive the first aid.

All they could do was to listen to their names while they could speak and write them on their bodies. Quite a few people died, not being identified by their name without such rescue hand.

It would have been lucky if the people got painted on their burned skin with food oil instead of white plaster or medicine. Most people received no treatment there. The road in front of the hospital was crowded with so many people, it seemed it was difficult for them to access a doctor.

We managed to get to the mid-garden at the hospital, but it was hard to tell which was which. So I asked other people to take care of Kawabata. I couldn't remember who I asked, whether it was a nurse or a military person? Later I tried to recall the person, but was in vain.

I felt sorry for Kawabata, but I parted with him there. That was the last time to see him.

About Mr. Saito, who was also in charge of bento or lunch boxes then, I thought he was dead. However, about forty years later, he showed up at the reunion held in Shinjuku, Tokyo. He also thought I was dead, so it was a miraculous reunion!

9. ARE YOU ALIVE?

After returning to Masumoto's house from the Military Hospital, I was given two rice balls and ate them.

Then crossing the drainage canal of Tenma River and Oota River, I managed to come across the National Route #2 connecting Hiroshima and Kita-Kyushu. From there, it was about four kilometers to my home.

It had been ten hours since the moment of atomic bombing and it was past six o'clock.

National Route #2 was also crowded with people who came to do rescue work in the city center, those who evacuated with their futon and other household items and those who fell down on the roadside.

While moving forward with great force, from ahead, a man riding a bicycle shouted "Shigenori!" It was my father.

"Oh, Father!" "You are alive! I thought you were dead!" My father found me and got surprised, because there was information he heard at home that all the students in the three classes of the 2nd grade of Hiroshima Shudo Junior High School were dead around Hiroshima City Hall. So he thought I might not be living and gave up. He tried to confirm his daughter's safety who worked at the Bank of Japan by riding the bicycle.

After telling me what to do later, he started to pedal his bicycle heading towards the destroyed city with raging blazes.

I returned immediately to my home and pulled out the rear car. Putting futon on the rear car, I carried it with my elder sister who lived in our neighborhood to the place about 3 kilometers nearer to Hiroshima, where my father asked me to go.

Around nine o'clock at night my father returned with my elder sister on the back of the bicycle. She was said to have been in the basement at the office of Bank of Japan. Putting her on the futon of the rear car, I ran to carry it desperately as far as three kilometers to our home. I almost lost my breath several times, but I felt desperate in thinking she should sleep on the tatami as soon as possible. Even in dark, I found her condition rather serious.

The location of the Bank of Japan was within five hundred meters from the epicenter. Returning home and laying her on the tatami, I found that she was burned all over her body and was not even a mere shadow of what she looked like...

After taking his daughter back home, my father went out again. As he was the head of the neighboring community, he had to take charge of rescuing people at the local primary school.

The school was an accommodation place for people evacuating from Hiroshima. Those who had a narrow escape would die one by one. Those dead people had to be carried out from the classroom to the schoolyard. Otherwise living people may not receive the first aid treatment. He had his daughter dying at home, but he had to go and take responsibility for that.

Instead, I sat near my sister all the time.

Her consciousness was solid, and after a while she said, "I would like to go to toilet."

She had some vigor to stand up by herself. Near her futon, there was a potty. So I told her, "You can use this. You don't have to go." But she insisted on going to the toilet. No other option, I gave her hand and let her go there as she desired. And I held her from her back and let her piss.

There was a bath room opposite to the toilet with a dressing table of the keepsake of my mother who passed away four years ago when I was in my fifth grade.

"My goodness!" I gasped after recognizing that the mirror stand was there.

And I severely reproached my carelessness.

But it was too late! She saw herself in the mirror with her own eyes.

She did not only suffer heavy burning on the whole body but also had three holes in her head. Which was not a twenty-aged woman or a human appearance.

What have I done it for?

She, who was seriously damaged, should have been encouraged in any case, instead I let her see her ugly appearance...

Seeing herself, she said and cried "I am not a human. This is not a human face!"

"I am not a human. I cannot live with such an appearance."

Until then she dared to stand up by herself, on seeing the mirror she was discouraged.

Without that mirror... No, if I hadn't let her go to the toilet, she wouldn't have had the chance to see her own ugly self... Thinking so had made me much regretful, no matter how much I repent, it's not enough! No matter how I regretted, it was irreversible. It was the most stupid thing I had ever done in my life.

During the night my father returned home once, but he soon went out. Elder sister, grandfather and my brother's wife with a new-born baby including me took care of her all the night without sleep.

10. LAST TOMATO

Next morning after five o'clock my father returned home. Tired of the all-night job, he sat with his legs crossed on the kitchen floor. He seemed to think for a while, and suddenly he sat upright and called me.

"Shigenori, go to the backyard and get me some tomato!" said he.

"Goodness!" I thought. He sat straight with his eyes fixed on one point. I was only in the 2 grade at the junior high school, but I suddenly recognized his preparedness.

Coming back after picking the tomato, he began making tomato juice in a teapot.

Tomato was my elder sister's favorite.

"Suzuko likes tomato very much..." he murmured.

After squeezing juice he went to her side and put the pot end into her mouth.

She drank lapping up, "It's tasteful. Good taste!"

One becomes thirsty when he or she gets burned or injured. People dying from the atomic bomb said, "Give me water! Please give me water!", they suffered in agony. But when water was given, they died.

"If you drink water, you would die, so you shouldn't drink water.", said everybody without giving any water. Just as praying to the Buddha, people implored, putting their hands together, "Please give

me water. Water please. I don't care to die, so give me water!"

My sister also wanted the water. Knowing she might die with water, I would give no water to her. We only moistened her lips with soft cloth being wet in water.

Seeing my sister was a little stabilized, my father went out to the school to help other people.

However, around nine o'clock my sister got worse in breathing. Father wasn't back. Around her were only grandfather, another sister and my brother's wife with her baby and I.

"Father, father!" shouted my sister even though my father wasn't there.

We tried to cheer her up, but she seemed not to recognize. I thought she has lost her vision.

"Mother will come to see me soon!", said she.

I thought she would be prepared to die then.

After a short while she opened her mouth and said, "Father, forgive me for dying before you!"

"Don't say that. Never give up. If I could be in you, I would like to die in place of this child...!", said my grandfather, but I couldn't hear his words in a tearful voice.

"Be strong, Sister! I would become a navy pilot, and I will never fail to avenge for you. So hang in there, Sister!"

But for all these encouraging words, she passed away.

It was at nine o'clock forty minutes, on the morning of August 7th. It was her quiet dying death.

11. THE CRUELEST THING WAS

Even if a person died, there was no casket. All we could do was to set up a casket-like accommodation made by available woods, into which my sister's body was laid and covered with a white cloth. All our family members carried it to the mountain. We dug a hole in the mountain, put firewood into it, installed the casket on them and cremated the body.

In the town most of the families became victims. Every family had the same kind of experience, and how sad the father felt when he had to cremate his own child. I myself have become old with children, so I could now understand how my father had felt on that day.

In atomic bombing or in wars so many cruel things happen in uncountable numbers.

However, the cruelest thing to me was there were such people as my father who had to cremate his children by his own hands.

Thinking of my sister who was brought home, got treatment and passed away surrounded by family members was rather fortunate. Tens of thousands of people died without seeing any of their families...

The town of Hiroshima continued to burn for two weeks. The sky over Hiroshima seen from my house turned red at night.

After the atomic bombing I visited Hiroshima many times. Dead bodies were laid here and there in the town. There were people who

died sitting to bathe in the fire water tank, who died just entering half into the tank, who died flipping upside down.

People who were attacked by heat and fire, sought for the river when there was, or they wanted water when there wasn't a river nearby.

Not only human but horses and cows also fell down. The stomach of horse was swollen greatly. Cars and streetcars were also overturned.

In the midsummer the dead body easily went decomposed. Once decomposed, they smelled! In spite of it everyone sought for their family and friends.

Every river was filled with dead bodies floating on their stomach and burned wood pieces. When the tide came in, they flew upstream and when the tide was at the ebb, they came back to where they had been, they stayed for about two or three weeks.

People, seeing the dead bodies from the bridge, entered the river and tried to overturn the bodies on their stomach and identify them. As several days had passed since the death, with their faces deformed, they could not tell whether they were their families or not. Nevertheless, they could not help overturning them to identify.

In the town I witnessed the mother seeking for her child day after day... Finding the dead body floating in the fire water tank, she tried to overturn and confirm it might be her child.

Yesterday and today after the sunrise they visited the accommodation places where the dead or injured people were collected. For five days or six they continued by saying, "Not today. Not today either." They saw all the places, but they still sought them. Who could do such devoted activities unless they are parents?

There is a word "Battlefield psychology". We of today think it's awful to see a person fall in a traffic accident. However in Hiroshima after the atomic bombing just as in the battlefield, walking day after day in such a situation with piles of dead bodies, we got indifferent to see dead bodies... How dreadful it is, but we human have such mysterious aspect.

In this way many people died without seeing their families. There weren't any other way to burn the piled dead bodies except spreading gasoline.

Even if cremated, there were no place to bury those ashes and they were put into air-raid shelter. But the air-raid shelters were full of remains soon. There were so many remains which were not identified.

Was this tragedy allowed? Was this hell allowed? I thought many times.

In the summer of 1995, 50 years after the atomic bombing, I attended the memorial service jointly mourning the dead people

by the atomic bombing at the Shudo Junior High School, which I graduated from. On the back of the large stone monument with the word "Memorial" were carved the names of the one hundred and thirty six teachers and students killed by the atomic bombing.

In reading the name by touching with finger, those teachers' and friends' faces of fifty years ago appeared vividly behind the eyelids. However, many of their remains haven't been found yet. Probably theirs may not be found ahead... Where they died will never be confirmed forever.

12. WE SHALL NEVER REPEAT THE EVIL

It was a long time after the war when I visited the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital & Atomic-bomb Survivors Hospital. There was a map of Hiroshima City posted in the hospital. The big difference of this map from an ordinary map is that there were red and yellow short needles stung on it.

Uncountable needles were stung on it. Red means the dead people, yellow seriously injured. Naturally the nearer to the epicenter, the more needles there were. Within the circle of radius of one kilometer where I was exposed, the needles were mostly red.

However, within that radius, I was saved without any injury. The doctor at the hospital told me it was an extremely rare case like a person among hundred people. According to the data, within the radius of five hundred meters 96.5% people died, one kilometer 83% died.

In Hiroshima hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives when the atomic bomb was dropped. Among them 65% were children, elderly and women. After that people suffering from the atomic-bomb disease died one after another.

Nevertheless, why could I survive while I was only one kilometer from the epicenter?

Moreover, I didn't get burned nor suffered from the atomic-bomb

disease which had tormented many people.

One thing which was fortunate was I headed for the south of the city by changing the direction on my way. It was not because I thought the south was safe, but because I could not go further to help but change my direction by being obstructed by the pile of rubbles like a mountain.

After the atomic bomb dropping, in the northern part of the city, which was about two thirds of the area, there fell the rain which later became famous as “Black Rain” written in the novel by IBUSE Masuji. That black rain contained very high levels of radioactivity, and most people who were hit by this rain died. I was lucky the black rain didn’t fall in the southern part where I was evacuated.

Another thing was, at the moment of the dropping, I got stuck to the wall of the City Hall building. The atomic bomb exploded about six hundred meters high in the sky, so unless I was in a shadow of the building, I would have been burned all over my body by the direct heat wave, blown off by the violent wind, which struck at some place. Since the sun was shining very much from the morning, I was lucky to rest in the west by avoiding the direct sunshine. If it had been around noon, it would have been a place to get the direct heat wave.

AT THE END

On the memorial stone at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park wrote,

“Let all the souls here rest in peace; For we shall not repeat the evil.”

On the day when Hiroshima was atomic bombed, it was just before my fourteenth birthday and now I am old enough to have my grandchildren. People who knew that day in Hiroshima are getting fewer and fewer.

Everyone should take this word profoundly. I have read the sentences asking to whom this word was said.

But I think we'd better read these as we like.

This could be the words of myself who lost an elder sister for instance.

Yes, they should be our own words. At the same time I think it would be better to say it from our “heart”. We should tell it as our own “words”, and from our “heart”.

My sister, Suzuko, please rest in peace. Mankind, including me, should never repeat such a stupid thing as war. So please rest in peace.

These words are what is commonly desired by humans, what we cry, and my sincere words from my heart.

AFTERWORD

In 1991 when I was the president of Coop Kobe, I visited the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital & Atomic-bomb Survivors Hospital. Coop Kobe has donated "Peace Fund" from members to the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital & Atomic-bomb Survivors Hospital since 1985, and to the Nagasaki Red Cross Hospital & Atomic-bomb Survivors Hospital for supporting the treatment of A-bomb victims suffering after-effect.

There, the internal organs of two thousand eight hundred fifty patients who were hospitalized and died from 1945 to then, were preserved with caution together with the files of their disease history and autopsy report. Each was labeled with a plate with their death date, age and name written on it.

A doctor who had been engaged in the treatment of the atomic bomb diseases since the post war, said, "When we use these internal organs as a research material, we pray and use even a piece of it with care. These are precious asset forever to mankind. Because they cannot be invented again, nor be made again."

That's exactly right. I also felt same, "If mankind repeats this mistake again, it would be terrible." In order to pass down these solemn issue about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, these words should be preserved forever.

And for the present and for the next generations, the memory of people who experienced the atomic bombing should not be faded. This story "Last Tomato" was made from such feelings of mine. Please read it with your child.

April, 2010 TAKEMOTO Shigenori

<Material>

Fact about Atomic Bombing in Hiroshima in 1945

The first atomic bomb in human history was dropped in Hiroshima.

On August 6, in 1945, 8 o'clock AM 15 minutes 17 seconds...

The dropping of an atomic bomb had destroyed Hiroshima into ruins in a moment. The atomic bomb exploded about 600 meters above the ground, making a fire ball like the sun. The central degrees of the fire ball exceeded one million degrees in centigrade, and the degree of earth surface around the epicenter reached 3,000 to 4,000 degrees. At the moment of that explosion the strong heat wave, the radioactivity and the super-high pressured blast wave occurred and those caused huge damages to Hiroshima City. Moreover people who survived have had radiation damage and suffered from residual disability for a long time. The death toll from the atomic bomb is not known precisely even today. Until the end of December in 1945 when acute disorder from the radioactivity was abating, about one hundred forty thousand people were estimated to have died.

Translator's words

The reason why I wanted to translate Mr. Takemoto's book "Last Tomato" was based on his talk as ex-President on June 17, 2010 at the study meeting for the JCCU employees. He talked about his experience of atomic bombing in 1945 when he was a junior high school student. Mr. Takemoto's talk really touched me and I was shocked by his personal experience.

And this April, the 2015 NPT Review Conference will be held in New York and would probably be the last chance for the atomic bomb victims to take part to talk about their own experiences. So I thought the translation of his book could be of some help to convey his own experience to people overseas in English.

I hope my translation will be helpful in posting Mr. Takemoto's wishes not to repeat that tragic war and atomic destruction in the future.

Lastly I wholeheartedly thank Dr. Isaac Asiedu for supervising my English translation of this book.

YOKOTA Kazuhiko
March 26, 2015

Date of issue; April 20, 2015
Author; TAKEMOTO Shigenori

Edited and published by Public Relations Department of the Japanese Consumers'
Co-operative Union
3-29-8 Shibuya, Shibuya-ku Tokyo
<http://jccu.coop/eng/>

Interior design and layout by Guynastaff Co.Ltd.
Printed by Seiou Printing Co.Ltd.

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