

The Voices of the Atom Bomb Survivors

The Voices of the Atom Bomb Survivors

Honoring the Anniversary of the Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

On August 6, 1945, America dropped a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima. Three days later, the U.S. dropped a second bomb on Nagasaki. In Hiroshima, the intense heat of the blast generated a lightning storm and cyclone, while massive fires engulfed the city and its inhabitants. The sunny sky turned black, producing a thick, tarry rain. Hiroshima's population was at that time 350,000. Seventy thousand died immediately from the blast and another 70,000 died within five years from radiation sickness. In Nagasaki, (with a population of 270,000) where the terrain prevented the bomb from doing as much damage, 70,000 people died within the year. Death was often slow, cruel and painful.

Following are excerpts from the accounts of four of the Hibakusha (the Japanese word for atom bomb survivors)...

To see how you can help ensure that we never see another day like that, send your message to Obama.

Honoring the Anniversary of the Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

On August 6, 1945, America dropped a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima. Three days later, the U.S. dropped a second bomb on Nagasaki. In Hiroshima, the intense heat of the blast generated a lightning storm and cyclone, while massive fires engulfed the city and its inhabitants. The sunny sky turned black, producing a thick, tarry rain. Hiroshima's population was at that time 350,000. Seventy thousand died immediately from the blast and another 70,000 died within five years from radiation sickness. In Nagasaki, (with a population of 270,000) where the terrain prevented the bomb from doing as much damage, 70,000 people died within the year. Death was often slow, cruel and painful.

Below are excerpts from the accounts of four of the Hibakusha (the Japanese word for atom bomb survivors). To see how you can help ensure that we never see another day like the one described below, visit www.StopNewNukes.org.

Dr. Michihiko Hachiya lived about 1 mile from the explosion's epicenter. Soon after the explosion, Dr. Hachiya and his wife make their way to the street. As the homes around them collapse, they begin their journey to the hospital.

...Our progress towards the hospital was interminably slow, until finally, my legs, stiff from drying blood, refused to carry me farther. The strength, even the will, to go on deserted me, so I told my wife, who was almost as badly hurt as I, to go on alone. This she objected to, but there was no choice. She had to go ahead and try to find someone to come back for me.

Yaeko-san looked into my face for a moment, and then, without saying a word, turned away and began running towards the hospital. Once, she looked back and waved and in a moment she was swallowed up in the gloom. It was quite dark now, and with my wife gone, a feeling of dreadful loneliness overcame me.

...I paused to rest. Gradually things around me came into focus. There were the shadowy forms of people, some of whom looked like walking ghosts. Others moved as though in pain, like scarecrows, their arms held out from their bodies with forearms and hands dangling. These people puzzled me until I suddenly realized that they had been burned and were holding their arms out to prevent the painful friction of raw surfaces rubbing together. A naked woman carrying a naked baby came into view. I averted my gaze. Perhaps they had been in the bath. But then I saw a naked man, and it occurred to me that, like myself, some strange thing had deprived them of their clothes. An old woman lay near me

with an expression of suffering on her face; but she made no sound. Indeed, one thing was common to everyone I saw—complete silence. **

Ms. Hiroko Fukada was 18 years old when the bomb was dropped. She was 1 km away from the center of the explosion. She lost her parents and one sister. Since the end of the war, she has been taking care of her two younger brothers who survived.

...The memory of that day seems to be gradually coming back to me.... Everybody was terribly injured. We were even embarrassed because we were not injured. I have no words to describe the scene. A flood of people went down this cliff just like dominoes down. ...I was almost crashed and it was very hard to stay on this side [of the river]. And the other side was burning and a tremendous heat attached us on this side, too. And more and more people came from behind me crashing us and crashing us. And since it was so hot, I dipped my face under the water so many times.

...I was pushed into the river with many other people. And since I thought it would be dangerous to stay on this side, I swam over to the other side. It was so frightening. ...Well an awful thing happened when I reached the other side, and was relieved. I was suddenly spun around by the current. And then large pieces of hail begin to fall and my face started hurting. So to avoid that I again plunged my face into the water time and time again. And then I spun around again and again. It just didn't stop. ...The water was swirling around me and later I learned that was a tornado. And my friends somehow managed to survive it. ...The faces of my family came to my mind one after another. And I really thought I was dying because I drank a lot of water, too. *

Ms. Taeko Teramae was 0.5 kilometers away from the hypocenter when the bomb what dropped.

When the bomb fell, I was 15 years old. ...I saw something shining in the clear blue sky. I wondered what it was, so I stared at it. As the light grew bigger, the shining thing got bigger as well. And at the moment when I spoke to my friend, there was a flash, far brighter than one used for a camera. It exploded right in front of my eyes. There was a tremendous noise when all the buildings around me collapsed. I also heard people crying for help and for their mothers. I was caught under something which prevented me from moving freely. I was so shocked that I couldn't believe what had happened. I thought maybe I was having some kind of nightmare, but of course, I wasn't. ...I tried very hard to move my arms and my legs and finally I was able to move a little. I was so surprised to see the dark sky with all the red flames through the window because it was only a few minutes before when the sky was blue and clear. It was all quiet and the city was wrapped, enveloped in red flames. Mr. Wakita came to help me. He asked me if I wanted to swim across the river. ...I had no choice. I could barely see by then, though. And Mr. Wakita took my arms and told me to swim across the river together with him, so together we went into the river and began to swim. ...Finally, we reached the other side. What surprised me so much was that all the cries of the students for help and for their mothers. It just didn't stop. I couldn't see anything. ...I asked my teacher, I asked him what was going on. Mr. Wakita explained to me how the high school students were burnt and crouching in pain in the streets. ...There were many students who were mobilized to destroy buildings to widen the streets ...that day. And since they were outside, they were directly exposed to the bomb. Many of them died, many of them died right there. Someone called for help in vain, and some jumped into the river and drown to death. If my teacher, Mr. Wakita had not come to help me, I would have died in the river. *

Mr. Isao Kita was 33 years old when the bomb fell. He was working for the Hiroshima District Weather Bureau 3.7 km from the hypocenter. He kept observing the weather even after he was exposed.

...It was not really a big flash. But still it drew my attention. In a few seconds, the heat wave arrived. ...Even though there was a window glass in front of me, I felt really hot. It was as if I was looking directly into a kitchen oven. I couldn't bear the heat for a long time. ...I realized that the bomb had been dropped. As I had been instructed, I pushed aside the chair and lay with my face on the floor. ...And I started to count. You may feel that I was rather heartless just to start counting. But for us, who observed the weather, it is a duty to record the process of time, of various phenomena. So I started counting with the light flash. When I counted to 5 seconds, I heard the groaning sound. At the same time, the window glass was blown off and the building shook from the bomb blast. So the blast reached that place about 5 seconds after the explosion. We later measured the distance between the hypocenter and our place. And with these two figures, we calculated that the speed of the blast was about 700 meters per second. The speed of sound is about 330 meters per

second, which means that the speed of the blast was about twice as fast as the speed of sound. It didn't move as fast as the speed of light but it moved quite rapidly.

From Koi, looking towards Hiroshima Station, you could see the black rain falling. ...based on the information I heard later, it seems that the rain fell quite heavy over a period of several hours. It was a black and sticky rain. It stuck everything. When it fell on trees and leaves, it stayed and turned everything black. When it fell on people's clothing, the clothing turned black. It also stuck on people's hands and feet. And it couldn't be washed off. ...The atomic bomb does not discriminate. Of course, those who were fighting may have to suffer. But the atomic bomb kills everyone from little babies to old people. And it's not an easy death. It's a very cruel and very painful way to die. I think that this cannot be allowed to happen again anywhere in the world. I don't say this just because I'm a Japanese atomic bomb survivor. I feel that people all over the world must speak out. *

* From the video "Hiroshima Witness," produced by Hiroshima Peace Cultural Center and NHK

** From "Surviving the Atomic Attack on Hiroshima, 1945," EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2001).