My Experience in Hiroshima
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60 years ago, at 8:15 in the morning, on August 6th 1945, an American bomber dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima city. I was a 16 year-old student at the time. Most of the cities in Japan had been burnt down by incendiary bombs dropped from B-29 bombers.

On that day the sky was clear and the sun was strong, even early in the morning. I could still hear the faint engine noise of a B-29, even though an air-raid warning siren had been called off 40 minutes before. I had just finished sweeping the floors and was standing in a room in the middle of the house.

Suddenly I saw white, yellow, and red flashes coming through the window and thought a big incendiary bomb must have exploded in front of my house. After a few seconds I saw a wall crack and crumbled down in a cloud of dust. The boards of the ceiling were hanging down and there were piles of broken furniture and shards of glass on tatami floor. The room was filled with dust. I couldn’t bend my left arm. It was bleeding.

All the nearby houses had broken windows and doors. The roofs were all warped like waves and sliding down, showing red clay underneath the tiles. As if hit by a tremendous storm, the streets were littered with broken roof tiles and pieces of furniture. The sky was now cloudy, allowing no sunlight to come through. Everything was eerily quiet.

The gymnasium of the elementary school in front of our house caught fire, but it was quickly extinguished. My house was located about 2.7 kilometers west of the hypocenter. A house about 70 meters away from our house was burning. The flammable materials of the house allowed the fire to spread fast. Judging from the enormous devastation, I thought that a huge bomb must have been drooped nearby.

The elementary school was made into a temporary aid station for the evacuees. Seriously injured people started coming one after another. Some had burnt skin hanging from their arms and fingertips. Many of them were filthy from head to toe, wearing only
tattered clothes, barefooted. There were people bleeding from their wounds, barely walking with a stick to support themselves. I saw children whose heads had only the portion of hair, which had been covered by their school hats. More and more arrived from the city center, not only to the school but also to the nearby houses, including mine. At the door, my mother applied cooking oil to the burns of the injured. They dipped their peeled fingertips into it.

During the following week, I was kept busy, looking after the people staying at my house. When one of them died, we put the body on an old door and carried it to the school. Then we dug a hole in the playground, filled it with firewood and cremated the body. The crematorium about 1 kilometer away from our house was in constant use. Even its backyard was used to burn corpses. There, ashes and bones were piled up high. I could see dusty, brown decomposing bodies, too. As the crematorium had too many bodies to handle, we had to carry the dead to the school playground.

In my house there were up to 29 people. Three breathed their last there. Among them I remember a young woman whose back had been very badly burned. Maggots hatched and grew between her peeled skin and her flesh. Although her mother picked out maggots with tweezers every day, the number of maggots seems to increase by the next morning. The daughter was clearly in agony as the maggots ate deeper and deeper into her flesh.

At the school, in the classrooms, corridors, and the schoolyard under the blazing sun, hundreds of people were lying, sitting or leaning against the garden rocks. As their bodies were swollen and reddish, their faces burnt and deformed, it was difficult to tell who they were, or if they were alive or dead. The whole place was filled with moans and the stench of the dead.

Every time I entered the school gate, I had to stop and brace myself, trying to be numb to the situation, lest I go mad. I didn’t have the chance to enter the school building itself, but I saw things when I carried corpses to the schoolyard. It was hard for me to imagine how the injured and dying people, the doctors, nurses and others were enduring the pain.

One evening, some hundred of corpses were burnt on firewood arranged in the schoolyard. Just as the flames were blazing high up into the night sky, an air-raid siren
sounded. I could never forget the terror that I felt then. For a week, we didn’t take off our shoes in our house. At night, we took out the paper doors and slept on them. Fortunately my health was not badly affected. For a while I felt weary and had diarrhea, but did not experience hair-loss or any other symptoms that many others had.

My experience is of course limited: only one of some 350,000 victims. The estimated number of deaths in Hiroshima by the end of the year 1945 is said to be about 140,000. In many places in the world today – Semipalatinsk, Chernobyl, Nevada, the Marshall Islands, Hiroshima and Nagasaki – the victims of radiation are facing a number of difficult problems.

Let us strive to increase all the people’s awareness about the damage and the aftereffects of atomic bombs and nuclear testing. By doing so, I hope that we can strengthen our movement to eliminate these internationally outlawed nuclear weapons. I have recently been talking to students who come to Hiroshima on school excursions. I tell them about my experiences after the explosion of the atomic bomb. They listen to me earnestly and I can see their hopes for peace in their eyes.

I sincerely hope that the U.S. government will return to the fundamental position of the complete abolition of nuclear arms, which many nations have agreed upon by signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

And in Japan, we are relying more and more on America’s “Nuclear Umbrella.” We must demand that the Japanese government adhere to Japan’s non-nuclear principles: “We shall not own nuclear arms. We shall not produce nuclear arms. We shall not let nuclear arms be brought into our country.” We also need to be watchful of the Japanese government obey our peace constitution. A few years ago, Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force engaged in a joint mission with the American Navy in Indian Ocean. This was clearly in violation of the Japanese Constitution. We cannot conquer terrorism by the violence of war. Placing the UN at the center for international dialogues, we need to keep thinking why terrorism occurs, how we can begin a dialogue with terrorists, and stop the senseless killing of innocent people. We need to learn more, talk more, and act for peace.