My experiences as a survivor of the Atomic Bomb

Tadahiko Murata

I was born in the city of Hiroshima in February 1940. I was the youngest of six children and received a lot of attention from the rest of the family. I had a very happy childhood.

On that day, August 6, 1945, my father, Hisashi Murata, was serving in the prefecture as a colonel in the army. My mother, Toyo, had traveled to the city of Kumamoto to take care of a matter there. My eldest brother, Hirohiko, had been killed in an air fight just a year before in September 1944. My eldest sister, Sachi, was helping at home and taking various lessons to prepare herself to be a bride. My sister, Taka, was in her fourth year at girl's academy and on that day was taking part in the student mobilization at a military provisions warehouse. My sister, Sada, was in her first year at the girl's academy and that morning she was working on the demolition of buildings and houses as part of the student mobilization program. The sister closest to me in age, Setsu, was at school that morning, being a third grader at the public elementary school.

I was out in the street in front of my house, playing war. August 6, 1945 was a beautiful day. There wasn't a single cloud in the sky. Wearing a straw hat and wooden clogs on my feet, I was playing war with some other children from the neighborhood. We had been playing under the dazzling sun, but at that moment everything became suddenly dark.

When the atomic bomb was dropped, at first there was a bright flash and then a resounding boom, which gave the bomb the nickname of "pikadon" -- tremendous flash and sound. I saw no flash and heard no sound. I only remember being left in complete darkness, crying.

Why had it become suddenly dark? I had been swept from the street I was playing on into a neighbor's house by the wind from the atomic blast. That house was approximately 3 meters from the road. The house was filled with ashes and dust and so
everything looked completed dark. As I lay there crying a survivor from Hijiyama came into the house, took me by the hand and led me out into the light.

I ran towards my house, which had stood ten meters away It must have received the full impact of the blast wind. The two-story structure had collapsed completely and my sister, Sachi, who was pinned underneath was screaming, "Help me! Help me!" I began to work furiously to lift the wood and debris off her, calling her name all the while. But it was impossible for a child of only five to lift the heavy beams, so I was hovering about helplessly not knowing what to do.

I didn't know how much time had passed. The sister next to me in age, Setsu, got home from school. She had been horribly burned on her left side, from her face all the way to her feet. The skin that had come off her shoulder and arm was a dripping mass, hanging from her fingertips. The skin had come off the left half of her body and the raw flesh was exposed. Her hair was standing on end and she didn't even look like a human being.

Setsu and I began calling "Sister Sachi, Sachi!" and the two of us worked together to try to free her. But we were just two small children. We didn't have enough strength. We called to people, who were running by, and begged them to help us, but everyone was so set on getting away for their own sake that no one paid any attention to us.

Eventually the flames spread to our house. A neighbor who was fleeing took Setsu and me by the hand and pulled us away. I owe my life to this woman. The memory of leaving Sachi in the flames crying, "Tadahiko, help me! Setsu, don't leave me!" does not fade as the years pass. On the contrary, I remember it more vividly as I get older. I have mixed feelings, like thinking "I was only a child. I couldn't have done anything," or on the other hand, blaming myself for her death. This struggle of emotions makes me even more miserable.

Setsu and I spent one night at the army post and to the Yokoyama's home in Yasumura. Two soldiers accompanied us. They made a bed of straw in a wagon and laid Setsu on it on her right side. I sat in the back and watched as we passed through the still-burning city of Hiroshima.
People who had been terribly burned were sitting about or lying down amidst the rubble as they didn’t have the strength to stand. They were staring blankly into space. They were crying out weakly, "Water! Water!" Uncountable numbers of people lay dead. I saw a dead horse with its four legs sticking into the air, its belly torn and guts spilling out. An army truck throwing out bags containing hard tack and crystallized sugar overtook our wagon. I got hold of one of the bags and ate what was in it.

Sada, who was several years older than Setsu, was working on the demolition of houses just 600 meters from the hypocenter and was killed instantly, or so we believe. We never found any of her belongings or the remains of her body. The records at the girl’s academy simply say “All parties dead.” When my sister, Taka, got back from Kurume and saw the burnt out ruins, she immediately went to the Yokoyama’s house.

My mother heard the news on the radio that “a new type of bomb” had been dropped on Hiroshima, and hurriedly tried to return to Hiroshima. But at Kurume City along the way, a Grumman fighter which had taken off from an aircraft carrier swept the train with machine gun fire. The bullets hit my mother in the chest and she was killed. It was August eighth.

My father hurried back to Hiroshima to see if the family was safe. Setsu and I received some treatment while at the Yokoyama’s house, but since there was no medicine available, all they could do was apply Mercurochrome. The only burn I received was a 5 by 10 cm. burn above my right knee. At a distance of only 1800 meters from the epicenter, it was truly a miracle that I escaped with only this wound.

Setsu’s burned flesh became infested with maggots and when Taka tried to pick them out, Setsu cried because of the horrible pain. When we had to remove the gauze or bandages, she screamed in pain. Our hair fell out and both of us had bloody stools. Our bodies swelled up all over. Many times we were close to death on September tenth. Towards the end she repeatedly said “I want to eat yudetamago (boiled egg)” and then she died. I felt lonely to lose three of my sisters, but for Setsu’s sake, I think it is a blessing that she died. It would have been really hard, as a woman, to go through life self-conscious of the hideous burns and keloids on the entire left side of her body.
I started elementary school in 1946. I was a sickly child and very withdrawn. From that particular day, my bright and pleasant home had been destroyed. My mother was dead. Home was a dismal place.

When I was in the third grade, men came from the ABCC (Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission), interrupted our class and forcibly took children like me who had survived the bomb away in a jeep. They stripped us naked and photographed us. They drew blood samples and performed many experiments on us. The thing that I could not forgive was that they strictly refused to give us any treatment even if we were ill. They gave us no medicine, they gave us no injections, only used us for their experiments. They kept it up year after year. I heard that this data is in the strict custody of NASA in the United States.

My father died in June 1971. That very day a representative of the ABCC came to say they would like to perform an autopsy. It had been 26 years since the bomb had been dropped.

There are five times as many incidences of cancer in atomic bomb victims than normal. My two children seem healthy, but no one knows what effects might appear in the second and third generations of bomb victims. The survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the first people in the world to survive the atomic bomb, so we continue to be used as experimental animals. No one knows what will happen to us.

In August, 1945, especially after Russia’s declaration to enter the war, Japan’s defeat was certain. If they did not use the atomic bomb at once, they would forever lose the chance to drop the bomb on a populated area. They could not really tell the effects it has by testing it in the desert. For some reason, Hiroshima had never experienced air raids and was as it had always been. The United States decided to drop the atomic bomb as an experiment on Japan, a country with no more gasoline, no more guns. And only bamboo spears to defend themselves within the nuclear age to come. And in the U.S./Soviets cold war, America wanted to maintain their superiority. To win in the nuclear struggle, they sacrificed the city of Hiroshima.