My HIROSHIMA

Junko Morimoto
Hiroshima is the town of my memories. It is surrounded by green mountains and looks towards the sea. Through it flow seven beautiful rivers.
I was the smallest in our family. There was my father and mother, my brother and two elder sisters.

Sometimes I liked to be alone. I would stay at home and draw many things — all day I would draw, it was what I loved most.
I had many friends but my best friends were Fumi and Haruko. We played lots of games — our favourite was “Oranges and Lemons”.

Summertime was fireworks time. It was fun going with my family to watch the beautiful colours and patterns as they burst overhead. They looked so large and high above the bridge where we stood.
I didn't like going to school. Every morning I would hold tightly to my brother's jacket and follow behind him.

My teacher wore glasses with heavy, black frames. I liked him best when he taught us painting.

In the winter of my fourth year at school, a big war started.
As I grew up, the world around me changed a lot. By the time I reached high school I had to wear special clothes, because the war our country was in influenced everything.

There were fewer and fewer goods in the shops. Everyone had to spend their summer holidays doing military exercises.
The people of Hiroshima had just begun their day’s work. Suddenly, the sirens sounded, warning that a plane was approaching, but the sirens soon stopped and everyone went about their work.

This day I had a pain in my stomach and was not going to school. My sister and I were in our room talking.
I thought I heard the sound of a plane, but it seemed a long way off and very high up.
I was hit by a thunderous flash and an explosion of sound.

My eyes burnt — everything went black. I held my sister.

Everything faded away — I thought I was dying.
I woke up. I was alive. But my home was completely destroyed.

When I crawled outside, I found that the whole of Hiroshima was destroyed. Everything was blown away, torn apart. Everything was burning.
The banks of the river were crowded with people, everyone wanted to be near the water.

I saw a girl with her skin hanging from her nails.

There was a child, screaming, trying to wake up her dead mother.
I was very lucky, my family were all alive and we were together, sheltering in a cave.

Father's face was badly burnt and swollen. My brother's back was full of pieces of glass from the window he was sitting beneath. My eldest sister had her teeth sticking through her lip, she had been using chopsticks.

We watched as hundreds and hundreds of people escaped from burning Hiroshima, under the strong sunlight of summer.
Every school became a hospital for the badly injured. I heard people screaming and moaning in pain, and there was a horrible smell of burnt skin.

Many people died, one after another. Their bodies were taken to the school’s playing field and burnt.
Several days later we heard the announcement that the war was over.

Half a year passed.

The students who had survived went back to their schools. From the dirt of the burnt earth I took an aluminium lunch box with burnt, black rice inside. I found the bones of many of my friends.
Many, many years have passed and I have returned to my school again.

It is still a miracle that I survived.

All I see now is clean, white ground and peaceful images of young students, who are just like I was so long ago.

Author’s note

Japan had long been involved with war, even before I was born. Educated in militarist times, we were taught that if Japan were defeated, we were to ‘die honourably’. The two atomic bombs dropped on Japan put an end to the war, but they caused overwhelming devastation, the like of which had never been seen before. Standing amidst the ruins, the realisation of the importance of peace came to us. However, not all survivors were blessed with peace. The radioactivity the bombs dispersed continued to poison and destroy many lives. In the days immediately after the detonations, many died. No medical practitioners were able to diagnose or knew how to treat those who were exposed. Many died after three days. Still more died after weeks of agonising pain, and still more died after teetering for months between life and death.

There were some that were able to overcome their acute symptoms and were fortunate enough to regain family life, but their lives were taken by aggressive forms of fatal illness. Then there were those that spent half of their lives in hospital, finally dying after 40 years. Some of the symptoms of radiation have now been documented by specialists, yet many illnesses are unresolved. I am one of those who, when feeling unwell, immediately fear the cause to be radiation. Only humans can do such things as start wars, drop atomic bombs or build nuclear power plants without all the safety assurances in place. All done by adults with no consideration of the importance of all lives. It is our responsibility to teach our children to respect human life and value nature and not to grow up to be such adults.

My message is that the war and the atomic bombs were not simply historical events, distanced by time. I will be happy if a deeper understanding is gained through reading the experiences of a child living through that horrible event and its aftermath.
FOR
AI YONEDA
WHO ENCOURAGED ME TO SET THIS DOWN
IN MEMORY OF MY MANY FRIENDS

TO THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD.

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