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My Experience of the A-Bomb and the Movement to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

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In 1945, I lived in Nagasaki. As a sixteen-year-old apprentice mason, I worked under my father and went to school at night. Around 10:00 A.M. on August 9, I started from the workshop on a bicycle on an errand for my father to Hamaya Department Store in downtown Nagasaki. There, I was asked by a shop clerk to deliver a letter to a garrison of the military police. About twelve or thirteen minutes after I left the shop, when I was riding in the Katsuyamamachi district (about three kilometers from ground zero), I heard an extraordinary sound. I jumped off the bicycle to flatten myself on the ground. I saw bluish-white rays and felt a strong blast run through my body. That was the moment of the A-bomb explosion. It was to be six or seven years later that I finally learned about the atomic bomb, where and when the bomb fell, and the distance I was from the blast center.

I managed to reach the garrison, but the whole place was in chaos. I could not find the person to whom I was supposed to hand the letter, so I decided to head home, located about five hundred meters from the center of the blast. As I passed the Nagasaki railway station, I saw more and more houses flattened to the ground. Beyond Zenizamachi (two kilometers from ground zero) was a sea of fire. I took a detour to the right toward a hill. From the hilltop of Kompirasan, I saw the entire city in conflagration. "What kind of bomb could engulf the whole city in flames in just thirty minutes?" I wondered. On my way through hills and dry fields, I helped a young woman out from under a collapsed farmhouse, which took me about two hours, so it was more than three hours after the blast when I reached home. About ten houses in my neighborhood, including ours, were all fallen down, but they had escaped the fire. All other houses were completely in ashes. I cried out for my mother and younger brothers, but I heard no response. I then realized I could not hear any kind of sound. In the field about ten meters away, I saw a small black thing moving slightly, so I rushed there. It was my four-year-old brother. He was burnt all over his body, and he was breathing only faintly. Not able to touch him on his bare burnt skin, I took off my jacket, covered his body with it, and carried him in my arms. "Brother, I want water. Give me water, water...." He begged me in a feeble voice. But as I had heard that giving water to the seriously injured would shorten their lives, I said, "No, you cannot have water now. Have a little patience." And I carried him to the dry riverbed of a nearby mountain stream. Within thirty minutes, he had breathed his last. I feel my heart wrenching whenever I remember my little brother's last moments, and I regret that I refused him the water that he wanted so much.

Around 8:00 A.M. the next morning, my thirteen-year-old brother came home after walking several kilometers with a heavy load of food on his shoulder. Luckily, he had been sent by our mother, who was nursing our baby sister, to the countryside to buy some food for the family, so he had not been home when the atomic bomb exploded. We worked together to remove the rubble of our house and found the remains of our mother and five-month-old baby sister. She was covered by the body of our mother, who must have instinctively tried to protect the baby at the moment of the explosion. My ten-year-old brother was nowhere to be found. On the morning of August 11, we cremated the remains of our mother, little brother, and baby sister. And in the afternoon, I went to find our father, who should have been at the workshop, located three hundred meters from ground zero. But there I found nothing but burnt-out ruins: no debris, no trace of remains. I was at a loss for some time, standing at the ruins but was resigned to gather some black ash from the spot where my father must have died. I put the ash in my pocket, later putting it in the wooden box which contained the ashes of three other members of my family. If my father had not sent me on an errand that morning, and if I had not been asked to deliver a letter, I would have shared the same fate as my father.

I naturally joined the movement of the *Hibakusha* to oppose war and to abolish nuclear weapons because of my own experience of losing five members of my family. What has moved me most was the lingering death of my little brother, who survived almost four hours after the bombing amidst the death and the complete destruction around him. I did not see my other family members die, but seeing him suffer and die impressed upon me the atrocity and the cruelty of the atomic bomb.

When war breaks out, it is innocent civilians who are sacrificed most, especially if nuclear weapons are used. I will continue to work to create a peaceful world by opposing war and by appealing for the abolition of nuclear weapons.