
IV. HIROSHIMA UND NAGASAKI

STORY OF HIBAKUSHAS

What does it mean when a nuclear bomb is dropped?

Today only a few people live who have survived the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and those who still live are very old. But also their children and grandchildren call themselves Hibakusha – those who survived horror. Together they tell the story of people who went through hell. Those are stories of cruelty but also of humanity. They are telling their stories to prevent that it is happening again. So their cry is “No more Hiroshimas, No more Nagasakis”.

METHOD: AUGUST 6, 1945 IN THE JOURNAL OF HIDETO SOTOBAYASHI

Material: printed story, or beamer and Laptop with internet and loudspeakers.

Time and Location: depending on length of the story 10-20 minutes plus 15 minutes for discussion

The stories of survivors are telling impressively what it means when a nuclear weapon is dropped. There is video material available in English or Japanese, for example at: <http://www.nhk.or.jp/no-more-hibakusha>. You can find also some videos on you-tube. If you read out the story or show an interview to your group, you must carefully watch the group and if needed stop the presentation.

REMARK: If there are youth under 16 years you should rethink using this method or plan enough time to discuss thoughts and feelings of the participants afterwards. The group then should be small and know each other well already.

Story of Hideto Sotobayashi

I was 16 years old and a student at the elite school. The students there were released from forced work in the industry to be able to carry out the normal daily lessons. At 8 am on the morning of August 6, 24 students were attending chemistry class. The classroom was on the second floor of the school building, which was built out of wood and was at a distance of 1.5 kilometers from the center of impact of the nuclear bomb. Suddenly, during the lessons at 8:15 am there was a flash followed by thunder, which caused the school building to collapse. In Japanese, flash or lightning is called “Pika” and thunder “Don”. Therefore, the residents of Hiroshima call the explosion of the nuclear bomb “Pika-Don”. When I regained my consciousness, I saw light from above through a hole and after the removal of some rubble I was in the position to free myself. Then I saw that all the surrounding buildings had collapsed and fire had broken out in places.

I found my friend Komyo stuck under the rubble of the building. He was injured and was pleading for help. I cleared the obstacles out of the way with all my strength and helped him to free himself from his distress. Meanwhile, the fire had spread. If I would not have fled quickly, the fire would have gotten me. Although I heard calls for help from beneath me, I had to lead my injured friend Komyo away immediately. He had a head injury, one ear hanging only just to his head, but he was able to walk. We attempted to flee in the direction of my parent’s house in Funairi, which was nearby. But there were two rivers to cross. One could not cross on foot because the wooden bridges there had burnt. I searched and found a small boat, brought my friend on board and I pushed the boat in the water myself to the other side. I repeated this procedure at the second river. It was said, that a provisory clinic was set up in Eba, south of Funairi. It was there I brought my friend and separated from him. He was from Himeji. I heard later that he was able to return to his parent’s house and where he passed.

My house in Funairi, which laid two kilometers south from the impact center of the atomic bomb, was built out of wood. Through a flash of the explosion, the bed sheets that were airing out in the garden caught on fire. Because my father was in the house at that time, he was able to immediately put out the fire and therefore prevent the burning of the house. Early that morning, my mother was in the city center, due to mandatory work service, to widen a street through the removal of a house. My father was a teacher in a middle school and he normally should have also been in the city center because of his required work with the students. Since my mother left the house early in the morning, my father stayed at home a little longer. If my mother would not have had mandatory work service on that day, then she would have been at home and my father would have been in the city center. In any case, one of them would have been in the city center at that time. If the bomb would have exploded later, both of them would have been in the city center.

During that time, the student Okimasu, who was the son of family friends from the surrounding countryside of Hiroshima, lived in our house. We had to search for Okimasu and my mother. First for Okimasu. His workplace was near the Honkawa Bridge, close to the center of impact of the atom bomb. We headed in this direction around noon. As we drew nearer to the city center, we were gradually offered a more and more hellish view. The skin of the people detached itself from their arms, due to burning, and stayed attached at the fingertips, hanging down long. The people's bodies were completely colored black. The people wandered around disoriented. A screaming woman held her dead child in her arm.

At the Honkawa Bridge, we were offered a very ghastly sight once more. In the search for water, the people laid tightly cramped next to each other on the steps on the bank of the river. There were many corpses floating on the surface of the water. One corpse grabbed my attention, as the sleeping position with the head down looked very similar to Okimasu. In order to identify him, I went down the steps to the river, while pushing the fallen people to the side. During which I found out, that these people were no corpses, but rather survivors. The people grabbed my legs with their hands, begging for "Water" or "Please contact my home!" But unfortunately, I could do absolutely nothing. I swam towards the corpse that caught my eye and recognized that it actually was Okimasu and we brought him to my house. Okimasu's parents came shortly afterwards and we were able to hand over the corpse. This was at 3 p.m. on August 6.

Now, to look for my mother, we went to the supposed Red Cross Hospital. This hospital was near the location where I had experienced the atomic bomb. We were not able to cross the bridge because of the fires in the morning, but it was possible in the afternoon. The Red Cross Hospital building still stood because it was built out of reinforced concrete. But a fire was spreading out gradually. Each room was filled with casualties. It was there we searched for my mother, but without success. The fires spread further and the people were driven on. Fortunately, we found my mother in a room in front of the fire. She was conscious and had no surface wounds, but she could not move. If we had found my mother any later, she would have been already in the fire. With a bicycle trailer, we brought my mother home that evening. This was on August 6.

Three days later, on the 9th of August, she died at 35 years old. We built the coffin and laid her body in it ourselves. We cremated her corpse on a nearby field. We were very happy that we had found my mother and were able to care for her until her death and we could pay her the last respects. Later we learned, that on that same day, August 9, the second atom bomb was dropped over Nagasaki – my birth city.

Relatives and friends, who were living in the city center, fled to our house. These people had seemingly no injuries. But later, their hair fell out and their gums bled, similar to acute Periodontosis. This was the typical atomic bomb sickness. These people died still in the same month.