

Keisaburo Toyonaga

Hiroshima Survivor Interview (Translated and Edited)

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Thank you for coming to Hiroshima and for taking an interest in the stories of atomic bomb survivors.

Also thank you for telling me about your father and his participation in Operation Crossroads at Bikini Atoll in 1946. I appreciate learning more about him and that he later died from radiation-related illness at the age of 57.

Two years ago, as you said, you traveled to the Marshall Islands to meet survivors of the nuclear tests and to express your personal regret for your father's involvement. I was interested to hear that story because it reminded me that the effects of nuclear weapons have reached far beyond Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This is my Atomic Bomb Survivor's Health Handbook. All officially recognized *hibakusha* receive this certificate. It identifies where we were at the time of the bombing and serves as proof of our status as survivors. Through this system, we receive medical examinations and health support. The booklet contains records of my medical examinations over many years. Even today, I continue to receive regular checkups.

To help explain my experience, here is a map of Hiroshima. My home was located in Onaga-machi, near Hiroshima Station. The map shows the areas that were completely destroyed by the bombing and the distances from the hypocenter. My house stood within the devastated area, where almost everything was destroyed or burned.

On the morning of August 6, 1945, I left home early by myself. I was nine years old. I do not remember the exact time because I did not own a watch. I walked to Hiroshima Station and boarded a train. I was traveling to Saka, a town located about eight kilometers from Hiroshima because I had an infection in my middle ear and was receiving acupuncture treatment.

I arrived at Saka Station and was on my way to the acupuncture clinic when I suddenly heard a tremendous sound behind me. Instinctively, I hid under the eaves of a house. A short time later I learned that a huge bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. I immediately returned to the station because I wanted to go back home. When I looked

toward Hiroshima, I saw the mushroom cloud rising over the city. The sight made a powerful impression on me.

As a child, I interpreted what I saw through the wartime education we had received. Looking at the cloud, I imagined I could see the faces of Roosevelt and Churchill within it. That may sound strange today, but Japanese children were raised in a highly militarized environment. We were taught that the United States and Britain were brutal. We learned songs and slogans portraying Roosevelt and Churchill as devils responsible for Japan's suffering. One song we sang described Roosevelt and Churchill crying while Prime Minister Tojo laughed at them. That was the atmosphere in which we were educated. At nine years old, I understood the world through those lessons.

Despite the explosion, I still wanted to return to Hiroshima. I waited at the station for a train. At first, no trains arrived. I did not understand why, and I simply waited. Eventually a train came from Hiroshima. As passengers emerged, I saw something I had never imagined. People stumbled from the train with their clothes torn and burned. Their skin hung from their arms and hands. Their bodies were blackened and swollen.

At the time, I did not understand what I was seeing. I only knew that something terrible had happened. The images remained with me for the rest of my life. Even now, I can still remember those people stepping off the train.

I continued waiting, hoping to find a way back to Hiroshima. Finally another train arrived, and I boarded it. The train traveled part of the way toward the city but could go no farther because of the destruction. It stopped many kilometers from my home. The city was burning.

As a nine-year-old child, I could not continue alone. Instead, I decided to go to my grandparents' house in Funakoshi, the town next to Kaita. I remembered where they lived and believed they would be able to help me find my family. Late that afternoon, I arrived at my grandparents' home.

I found my grandfather there and asked him to take me back to Hiroshima to search for my mother and younger brother. My grandfather refused. The city was still burning, and it was too dangerous to enter. That night, August 6, I stayed with my grandparents. I had no idea whether my mother and my younger brother were alive.

The next morning, August 7, my grandfather, my cousin, and I decided to go into Hiroshima to search for my mother and my younger brother. My cousin was a middle school student. The three of us took a cart with us because we thought that if we found family members who were injured, we might need some way to carry them.

As we approached the city, we saw many people leaving Hiroshima. They were wounded, exhausted, and covered with burns. The sight frightened me. We continued toward my neighborhood. When we arrived, we found that our house had already burned down. There was nothing left. My family was not there. We searched the area, but there was no sign of my mother or my younger brother.

As evening approached, we returned to my grandparents' house. The following day we searched again. Still we found nothing. On August 9, we entered the city once more. This time we finally found them.

To understand how they survived, I must explain what happened to my mother and my younger brother on the morning of August 6. At that time, the government was mobilizing civilians to help demolish wooden houses in Hiroshima. The purpose was to create firebreaks to prevent the spread of fires during air raids. These projects had been underway for some time before the atomic bombing. Residents from different neighborhoods were assigned to specific work locations.

My mother had been ordered to participate. She could not leave my younger brother at home because he was only three years old. Therefore, she took him with her. They arrived at the work site a little after eight o'clock that morning. Several small children were there with their mothers. Because it was a hot summer day, the children were sitting in the shade while the adults prepared to begin work.

Then the atomic bomb exploded. My mother saw a brilliant flash. The next thing she remembered was waking up on the ground. Her face and right arm had been badly burned. For a time she had been unconscious. When she regained consciousness, she discovered that my younger brother was underneath her. Miraculously, he had not been injured. To this day, we do not know exactly what happened. I believe my mother instinctively threw herself over him and protected him with her own body. Whatever happened, her actions saved his life.

The demolition work immediately stopped. People began fleeing in every direction. My mother took my brother and tried to return home. She crossed a bridge and looked down into the river. The water was filled with injured people. Many were drifting downstream. She continued toward a nearby Hijiyama Hill, hoping to find a route back to our neighborhood.

The city was burning. Fire blocked many of the roads. Because she could not take the direct route home, she was forced to make a long detour. She was badly burned and in great pain. She was also feeling responsible for a frightened three-year-old child. By late afternoon, she finally reached our house. The building had been severely damaged by the

blast. Parts of the roof were gone, window glass had shattered, and debris was scattered everywhere. But the house was still standing.

She entered and rested. She was desperately thirsty. My brother had already finished the water they had carried with them. Fortunately, before the bombing, families throughout Japan had been instructed to prepare for air raids by storing water for emergencies. Like many households, we kept water in our bathtub. My mother and brother drank from that water. Years later, she said it was the most delicious water she had ever tasted in her life. She never forgot it.

Soon afterward, my brother pointed toward the window and said, "Mother, the fire is coming." Flames were approaching the house. They could not remain there. My mother's face was swollen from her burns and she could barely see. My brother took her by the hand and guided her outside. They made their way to a nearby vegetable field and rested there.

People from the neighborhood soon warned them that the area was unsafe. They told them to evacuate. Along with many other survivors, my mother and brother were taken to the slopes of Mount Futaba behind Hiroshima Station. The mountain became a refuge for survivors escaping the fires. There they waited among countless injured people. Meanwhile, I knew nothing of what had happened. I was still searching for them.

On August 9, my grandfather, my cousin, and I went once again into Hiroshima to search for my mother and younger brother. By then, survivors had gathered in many temporary refuge areas throughout the city. One of those places was Mount Futaba, behind Hiroshima Station. Many injured people were there, and many were lying on the ground.

As we searched among them, my grandfather repeatedly called out my mother's name. After a while my brother called back, "Grandpa." We went there and asked him, "Which one is Mom?" He said the person next to him was my mother. At first, I did not recognize her. Her face was terribly swollen from burns. Her eyes were nearly closed. Her appearance had changed so much that she was difficult to identify. That is how we found them. I was overwhelmed with relief. For three days I had not known whether they were alive or dead. Now, at last, we were together again.

We placed my mother and brother in the cart we had brought with us and took them back to my grandparents' house. My mother's burns were extremely painful. There were very few medicines available. Japan was devastated by war, and medical supplies were scarce. Relatives and neighbors tried to help in whatever ways they could.

My aunt grated potatoes and cucumbers and applied them to her burns in an effort to cool the wounds. I do not know whether it was medically effective, but people did whatever they could. During the war, even vegetables were precious. Cucumbers and potatoes were not food in this case. They were used as a kind of treatment because there was little else available. My mother endured tremendous pain.

My younger brother faced a different danger. Although he had escaped burns, he had been exposed to radiation. Soon afterward he developed severe diarrhea. It continued day after day. He became thinner and thinner. He was only three years old. At one point he became so weak that he could no longer stand. He lay beside my mother while both struggled to survive. I remember looking at him and thinking that he might die before my mother did. That is how serious his condition became.

Fortunately, relatives helped care for us. Little by little, both my mother and my brother improved. Our extended family became essential to our survival. My grandparents' house was crowded, and nearby there was a large house belonging to my aunt. Only two people were living there. About a month after the bombing, we moved into that house. My aunt helped support us during those difficult months.

Gradually my mother recovered enough to stand and move about. Eventually, the three of us began a new life together. My mother faced enormous challenges in raising two children.

Before the war, our family had lived in Yokohama because of my father's work as a police officer. I was born there. After several years, my parents decided to return to Hiroshima, which was my father's hometown. A few years after returning, my father died from a lung disease. As a result, my mother was already supporting the family before the atomic bombing occurred.

Fortunately, she possessed valuable skills. While living in Yokohama, she had studied dressmaking and received certification as an instructor. After the war, despite losing nearly everything, she used those skills to support us.

Our house was gone. Our possessions had been destroyed. Photographs, books, and family belongings were lost in the fire. We had almost nothing. Yet my mother never gave up. She was an extraordinarily strong woman.

Although she suffered severe burns, she gradually regained her health. Unlike some survivors whose burns resulted in severe keloid scars, her injuries healed relatively well. The outer layers of skin had been badly damaged, but the deeper tissues were less severely injured. In time she became active again and continued raising us. She eventually lived into her nineties. Looking back, I am amazed by her strength and

determination. Without her, my brother and I could not have survived those difficult years.

My mother eventually recovered enough to resume a relatively normal life. She was an extraordinarily strong woman. Despite the burns she suffered on August 6, she lived for many years afterward. She was hospitalized from time to time because of various health problems, but she continued on with her life and devoted herself to raising her children. People sometimes ask whether her later illnesses were caused by radiation. The truth is that we do not know.

As she grew older, she experienced various health problems, as many elderly people do. Whether those conditions were related to radiation exposure is impossible to say with certainty. She eventually lived until she was 95 years old.

My younger brother also survived. As a child, however, he remained physically weak for several years after the bombing. Because of the radiation exposure and the severe illness he experienced afterward, he was often absent from school. Until about the second or third grade, his health was not very good. Then something changed. As he grew older, he became stronger.

By the time he reached middle school, he had recovered physically, but he became a very energetic and sometimes troublesome teenager. My mother was often called to school to discuss his behavior. He was full of energy and difficult to control. Although he completed compulsory education through junior high school, his teachers would not recommend him for senior high school because of his conduct.

Instead, he went to work. He joined construction crews and performed physically demanding labor, helping build foundations and other structures. It was difficult work, but he was strong and capable. He continued in construction for many years. Eventually, after decades of hard labor, his body could no longer tolerate that kind of work. He later became a taxi driver.

Today he is still alive. He lives nearby, and we see each other often. He is in his eighties now and remains surprisingly healthy. When I look at him, I sometimes think about how remarkable his survival was. As a three-year-old child, he seemed close to death after the bombing. Yet he recovered and went on to live a long life.

My own path was very different. I was a quiet child and spent much of my time studying. I was not an outstanding student, but I worked hard. My mother strongly encouraged me to continue my education. She believed that education would give me opportunities that she herself never had.

Following her advice, I continued my studies and eventually entered Hiroshima University. I studied in the Faculty of Literature. After graduating, I decided to become a teacher. At that time, Japan's postwar baby boom meant that many schools needed teachers, and employment opportunities were plentiful.

Ordinarily, public school teachers could be assigned anywhere within the prefecture. My mother, however, wanted me to remain close to home. She still worried about my younger brother and felt that the family needed me nearby. Because of that, I chose to work at a private high school rather than in the public school system. The school was close enough that I could commute by bicycle. It turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life.

I taught there for more than thirty years. Over time I became vice principal and served in that position for eight years. Eventually, I was expected to become principal. But I decided that administration was not what I loved most. What I loved was teaching. So before becoming principal, I retired from the school system. I was fifty-seven years old. In those days, people could begin receiving a pension at the age of 59.

Around that same period, I became more involved in activities related to Hiroshima and atomic bomb survivors. There was a group of survivors who met students visiting Hiroshima on school trips. Many Japanese students travel to Hiroshima to learn about the atomic bombing and the importance of peace. Our role was to meet them and share our experiences. I joined that effort and gradually became more involved in survivor education and peace activities. What began as occasional volunteer work eventually became an important part of my life.

For many years, I have spoken with students who come to Hiroshima on school trips. I tell them about my experiences as a nine-year-old boy and about what happened to my family after the atomic bombing. My mother was also involved in these activities for many years. She participated for about ten years, sharing her own experiences with younger generations.

As for my own health, I have faced several challenges. After the age of sixty, I developed cancer. The first cancer was discovered and treated successfully. I was hospitalized for about a month and underwent surgery to remove it. Later, another cancer was found in my stomach. Fortunately, it was discovered at an early stage. The doctors recommended radiation treatment rather than major surgery. For about a month, I traveled to the hospital every day to receive treatment. Afterward, I underwent regular examinations. Each time the doctors checked, they told me the treatment appeared successful.

Even today, I continue to have periodic examinations to make sure everything remains under control. As atomic bomb survivors, many of us live with uncertainty about our

health. When cancer develops, it is natural to wonder whether radiation exposure played a role. But in many cases, it is impossible to know with certainty. I am grateful that my cancers were discovered early and treated successfully.

Because I am a registered *hibakusha*, I receive medical assistance through the survivor support system. There are various categories of assistance depending on a person's medical condition. Survivors who develop illnesses recognized as potentially related to radiation exposure can receive additional benefits. In my case, I receive a monthly allowance connected to my medical condition. More important than the financial assistance, however, is the access to medical care and regular examinations. Those services have helped many survivors.

Today, my greatest health concern is not cancer but my kidneys. I have chronic kidney disease and must be extremely careful about what I eat. My doctors monitor my condition closely. If it becomes worse, dialysis could become necessary. I hope to avoid that for as long as possible.

My wife helps me manage my diet, and together we pay close attention to our health. At my age, every year is important. One reason I work so hard to stay healthy is because I still want to continue telling my story to students. As long as I am able, I want younger generations to hear directly from someone who experienced the bombing. That responsibility has become increasingly important as the number of survivors continues to decline.

Every year there are fewer of us left. When survivors are gone, only the stories will remain. That is why I continue this work. I believe it is important not only to remember what happened in Hiroshima, but also to help younger people understand why these events still matter today.

As we continued our discussion, you asked me about my thoughts on war, nuclear weapons, and the responsibilities of Japan. These are questions I have spent many years thinking about. When people talk about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they often focus only on Japan as a victim of war. Certainly, the atomic bombings caused tremendous suffering. But I believe it is important to remember that Japan was not only a victim. Japan was also an aggressor. Japan invaded other countries in Asia and caused suffering to many people. That history must not be forgotten.

One example that is especially important to me involves the Korean people who were living in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the time of the bombing. Many Koreans had been brought to Japan during the colonial period. Others came because they had lost opportunities and livelihoods in Korea under Japanese rule. Large numbers lived and

worked in Hiroshima. When the atomic bomb was dropped, many of them became victims just like Japanese citizens. After the war, many returned to Korea.

Yet for many years, they were denied the same support and recognition that Japanese survivors received. This became a very important issue for me. As a child, I remember that prejudice against Korean people existed in Japan. Many Japanese, including children, grew up with discriminatory attitudes. Looking back, I believe that was wrong. When I became a teacher, I tried to teach my students that discrimination against Korean people was unacceptable.

Later, in 1971, I visited South Korea for the first time. Seeing conditions there and learning more about the lives of Korean atomic bomb survivors had a profound effect on me. Many of them had suffered greatly. They were victims of the atomic bombing, yet they often received little support.

After returning to Japan, a group of us decided that we needed to do something. We established an organization to support Korean *hibakusha* and to help them obtain the benefits and recognition they deserved. For many years, the Japanese government argued that survivors who lived outside Japan were not entitled to the same assistance as those living within the country. As a result, Korean survivors who had returned home faced enormous obstacles. Many were denied survivor certificates and medical benefits.

Court cases followed. The legal process took years. Cases moved from local courts to higher courts and eventually to the Supreme Court. Again and again, survivors and their supporters challenged the government's position. Eventually, the courts ruled that survivors living outside Japan also had rights. This was a major victory.

The principle was simple. If a person was a *hibakusha*, that fact did not change simply because they lived in another country. Whether they lived in South Korea, Brazil, the United States, or elsewhere, they remained atomic bomb survivors. They deserved recognition and support. I became actively involved in those efforts.

Today, survivors living outside Japan can receive assistance that was once denied to them. The process is still not perfect, but important progress was made. For me, this work became deeply personal. Partly it was because I had witnessed discrimination during my own lifetime. Partly it was because I believed that Hiroshima's message should be universal.

The suffering caused by nuclear weapons does not belong to one nationality alone. The lessons of Hiroshima belong to everyone. That conviction eventually expanded my thinking beyond Japan and Korea. I began to see that radiation victims exist throughout the world: People affected by nuclear testing. People affected by uranium mining. People

affected by nuclear accidents. All of these people deserve our concern and support. The movement for peace cannot be limited only to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It must become a global effort.

As our conversation continued, we spoke about other people around the world who have been affected by radiation exposure.

You told me about the Marshall Islands, Operation Crossroads, the downwinders in New Mexico, and the Navajo people who were affected by uranium mining. I am very interested in these stories. For many years, I have believed that the experience of *hibakusha* should not be viewed only as a Japanese issue. Radiation has affected people in many different countries.

The victims of nuclear testing in the Pacific, the downwinders in the United States, people exposed through uranium mining, victims of nuclear accidents such as Fukushima: All of these people share something in common. They are part of a global community of people whose lives have been affected by radiation.

Because of this, I believe that peace activities must also become global. We cannot limit ourselves to thinking only about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We must learn about one another and work together. The problems created by nuclear weapons do not stop at national borders. They belong to all humanity.

Many people throughout the world still believe that nuclear weapons provide security. Some argue that the atomic bombings ended the war and prevented even greater casualties. I understand that this argument exists. I have heard it many times. Yet I also believe that human beings must continue to ask difficult questions. What happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki should never be repeated. No one who has seen the consequences of nuclear weapons can easily accept the idea that they should ever be used again.

When I speak with students, I often think about the future. The younger generation will inherit a world that still possesses enormous nuclear arsenals. That reality concerns me. Your grandson just asked an important question. He explained that many young people today are worried about growing tensions among nations and the continuing expansion of nuclear weapons. He asked what his generation should do.

My answer is simple. First, share what you have seen and heard. Tell others about it. Talk to your friends. Communicate. That is where peace begins. People cannot learn from history if they do not know the stories.

The experiences of Hiroshima should not remain only in museums or books. They should be passed from person to person. That is why conversations like this matter. I do not believe another nuclear war can be survived. The destructive power of today's weapons is far beyond what existed in 1945. A future nuclear war could threaten all humanity. For that reason, education and communication are more important than ever.

You then told me about your plan to create a new section on your website devoted to *hibakusha*, the survivors of Operation Crossroads, and the downwinders of New Mexico. You explained that you hoped to combine photographs and personal stories so that people could better understand the human consequences of nuclear weapons. I think that is a wonderful idea. Personal stories have the power to reach people in ways that statistics and political arguments cannot.

As our discussion came to an end, we returned once more to the question of responsibility. You said that you hoped one day political leaders would acknowledge the suffering caused by nuclear weapons and work toward a world without them. I appreciate hearing that.

I find hope in the many young people who visit Hiroshima from around the world, including large numbers of Americans. When they come to the Peace Memorial Museum and see the evidence with their own eyes, they gain a deeper understanding of what happened. Perhaps future leaders will come from among those young visitors.

Perhaps their experiences in Hiroshima will influence the decisions they make later in life. That possibility gives me hope.

Before we conclude, I want to emphasize one final point. The movement for peace should not belong only to survivors. It must belong to everyone. The number of *hibakusha* grows smaller each year. Soon there will be no one left who can speak from direct experience. When that time comes, younger generations must carry the responsibility forward. They must continue telling the stories. They must continue educating others. And they must continue working toward a world in which nuclear weapons are never used again. Thank you for listening to my story.