

Sadae Kasaoka (Born, 09/20/1932)

Hiroshima Survivor Interview (Translated and Edited)

May 19, 2026

I was twelve years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Due to the atomic bomb, I lost both of my parents.

Today I speak about my experience because I want people to understand how terrible the atomic bomb was. Many people died without ever having the chance to tell their stories. Because I survived, I feel it is my responsibility to speak for them.

Before the war, my family was large. We have a photograph that was taken in 1938. There were 10 people in our family then. By 1945 my three older sisters had already married and left home. My oldest brother had died while serving in the military during the war. At home were my father, my mother, my grandmother, my younger brother, and me. At the time of the atomic bombing, I was a junior high school student.

During the war, students could not spend much time studying. As the war became more intense, students were mobilized to support the war effort. Every day we were sent to demolition sites of houses in Hiroshima. Houses were being torn down to create firebreaks in case air raids caused large fires. We carried roof tiles, pillars, and rubble by hand.

More than 8,000 students participated in this work. When the bomb exploded, more than 6,000 of them died. On August 6, 1945, I should have been working, but I had the day off. That is why I am alive today.

My parents had already left home early that morning to work at a demolition site. The night before there had been air raid warnings, but around 7:30 in the morning the all-clear signal sounded. People felt relieved. They went to work, and students went to their assigned jobs. Because I was off that day, I stayed home. I washed the breakfast dishes, did the laundry, and hung the clothes outside to dry.

On August 6, 1945 at 8:15 in the morning, I had just returned inside the house. Suddenly, there was an intense flash, and everything changed. The window glass shattered instantly. Fragments for glass flew through the room like rain. The light was unlike anything I had ever seen. It was bright orange and strangely beautiful, almost like a brilliant New Year sunrise. I did not know what it was.

There was a tremendous sound, and because of wartime training, I threw myself to the floor. After that I remember nothing. I had lost consciousness. When I opened my eyes, I touched my head and found blood on my hand. A piece of glass had cut me.

I called for my grandmother. We knew we had to get to safety. Like many families we had a neighborhood shelter dug into a hillside, and we went there immediately. After some time, things became quieter outside, and we cautiously came back out.

The first person we saw was a man returning from the center of the city. His clothes had been torn away. His skin hung from his body in strips. He was burned pink and raw. He told us that something terrible had happened and that almost everyone in Hiroshima had been killed. He had been about one kilometer from the hypocenter.

My home was about 3.5 kilometers from the hypocenter. The people closer to the center had suffered far worse than we had. For the first time, I understood that this was not an ordinary bombing. Where a person had been standing determined whether they lived or died.

Soon fires began spreading across the city. Many houses had collapsed. People were trapped beneath them. We could hear voices crying for help, but there was nothing we could do. The fires grew larger and larger. Everything seemed destroyed. People, Animals, Trees.

Many of my classmates had been working near the center of the city that morning. Their parents hurried to the city searching for them. I wanted to search for my own parents, but I was only twelve years old and my grandmother was ninety. There was nothing we could do. A neighbor tried to enter the city center but soon returned, saying that the fires made it impossible to go farther.

Then my older brother returned from college. As soon as he learned what had happened, he went into the city to search for our parents. He searched everywhere but could not find them. Later relatives sent word that my father was at their house about four kilometers from the hypocenter.

My brother took a two-wheeled cart and went to bring him home. When I saw my father, I could hardly recognize him. His entire body was terribly burned and swollen. His skin was scorched black. His lips were everted. Only when he spoke did I know this terribly injured man was my father. The first thing he said was, "Give me water." Then he told us he had been with my mother when the bomb exploded, but they had become separated. "Please find Kichi," he said, calling my mother's name.

We had no medicine. Nothing at all, but we had a small vegetable garden. We picked cucumbers and potatoes, grated them, and put the juice and pulp on his burns hoping that it would help. The moisture dried almost immediately because of the heat coming from his body. We repeated the process again and again. His skin came off very easily. The burns covered all over his body.

He desperately wanted water. But people believed that if you gave water to badly burned people, they would die. So, we did not give him any. Instead of giving him water, I remember going out to the vegetable field to find something. I found a tomato and put it in the basket.

When I looked up, what I saw remains with me to this day. Figures were walking slowly toward us from the city. At first I thought they were ghosts. Their hair stood straight up. Their bodies and faces were gray-white, with dust and ash. They held their arms straight out in front of them. Their clothes were torn to pieces. Hanging from their arms were strips that looked like torn cloth.

Then I realized it was not cloth. It was their skin. The blast had burned their bodies so severely that their skin hung from their arms and hands. They moved slowly and silently. A hospital was near our neighborhood, and many of the injured were trying to reach it.

I was terrified, I ran home, but there was no medicine there. All I could do for my father was to fan him. I moved back and forth between the shelter and the house. I was frightened another bomb might come. I wanted to stay with my father, yet I was overwhelmed with fear. I would run home to be with my father, then become frightened and run back to the shelter. Then I would worry about him and return home again. Two days later my father died on August 8.

Even in death there was little dignity for the victims. So many people were dying throughout our neighborhood that normal funerals were impossible. We lived near the sea. My older brother and I gathered pieces of driftwood from the shore, and together we used it to cremate my father's body. Because the strength of the fire was weak, the cremation took nearly 10 hours. Around us many families were doing the same thing. The smell of burning bodies filled the air, but we were living through such extraordinary circumstances that I barely noticed it at the time. We were beyond shock.

That evening I saw bluish lights floating above the fires. As a child, I believed they were the spirits of those who had died, people whose lives had been cut short before they could fulfill their hopes and dreams. My father was only fifty-two years old. He still had many things he wanted to do. He wanted to live. Nobody wanted to die. While we were mourning my father, we were still searching for my mother.

Many of my friends died as well. Before the bombing, we talked together about our dreams for the future. Some dreamed of becoming teachers. Some dreamed of becoming beautiful brides. Some dreamed of raising families of their own. Some simply wanted to live ordinary lives. They died before any of those dreams could come true. They had done nothing wrong. That thought has remained with me throughout my life. That is why I feel a responsibility to tell this story. The people who died can no longer tell their stories.

Many victims were desperate for water after the bombing, and they crawled to the rivers seeking water. They drank but were too weak to stand again. Their bodies were carried away by the current. Hiroshima had seven rivers. All of them became filled with the dead although soldiers tried to recover the bodies. Many victims were taken to small islands where temporary aid stations had been established. My older brother continued searching for my mother. Eventually he traveled to one of those islands and examined a list of names at the aid station. There he found my mother's name. She had already died.

My brother was given a small paper envelope that contained what remained of her. In the envelope were bits of ash, fragments of bone, and some hair. There was no way to know for sure whether those remains were truly hers. In those terrible days, identification was often impossible. But that was all we had. At twelve years old I had lost both my mother and my father.

The wound on my head gradually healed, but afterward I developed painful boils over much of my body. Since there was still very little medicine available, my grandmother gathered a

medicinal herb called *dokudami*. She boiled it and applied the juice to my skin. It took more than six months before I recovered.

Although the boils eventually disappeared, I continued to suffer from anemia for many years. The saddest thing, however, was not my illness. It was growing up without my parents. Before the bombing, when I came home and my parents were out working and I could not find them, I would ask, “Where is Mother?” or “Where is Father?” After the bombing and I came home, there was nobody there to greet me.

My older brother left college and found work to support us. My older sisters helped whenever they could. My grandmother cared for us. Together they kept us alive. We still grew vegetables in the field. We shared what little food we had and helped one another. Without my family, I don’t think we could have made it through those years. Eventually I was able to graduate from high school, but life was still difficult.

Many survivors faced discrimination because they had been exposed to the atomic bomb. Some found it difficult to obtain jobs. Others found it difficult to marry. People worried that we carried unknown diseases or that our future children might be unhealthy. My younger brother and I both experienced this prejudice. But there were many people who suffered even more.

Thousands of children had been evacuated from Hiroshima during the war and were living away from their parents. When the war ended, some families came to reclaim their children. For many others, no one came. The bomb killed their parents, and many became orphans moving from one relative’s home to another’s, often feeling unwanted and alone. My brother and I had a hard life, but I know these children suffered more. We still had our grandmother, older brother and sisters. Even after losing my parents, I still had family.

When I think about the atomic bomb, I also think about what happened afterwards. Hiroshima was completely destroyed. After the bombing, people said nothing would grow in Hiroshima for seventy-five years. Yet the following spring grass appeared. New buds grew on trees. People gathered scraps of wood and metal and built shelters. Soldiers returned from the war. Families reunited when they could. Everyone worked together to rebuild the city. At first, food was scarce, and daily life was difficult. As time passed, conditions improved. Little by little, Hiroshima came back to life. Even so, I never completely stopped thinking about radiation. To tell the truth, I am still afraid of it. There are still many things we do not fully understand about radiation.

I never expected that I would marry, but I did. My husband was also a *hibakusha*. He appeared healthy for many years, but years later he developed cancer and died at the age of thirty-five leaving me to raise two young children alone. My children were only two and six years old.

Many survivors lived with the fear that illnesses might appear decades after exposure. They worried about whether survivors would be able to have healthy children. We never knew when the effects of radiation might emerge. I often think about Sadako Sasaki. She was only two years old when the atomic bomb was dropped. Years later she developed leukemia. People around the world know her story because of the one thousand paper cranes she made. When people hear about Sadako, they understand that the effects of radiation do not always appear right away. That

is why I say that the atomic bomb is “mass of evil”. The explosion lasts only a moment, but the suffering continues for years.

When I was young, I used to say that I hated America. But over time my feelings changed. After the war, people from many countries came to help Hiroshima. Doctors and relief workers brought medicine and cared for the injured. Many lives were saved because of their kindness. One of them was Dr. Marcel Junod of the International Committee of the Red Cross. He brought medicine when medicine was desperately needed. He treated survivors and many lives were saved because of his efforts.

There were others such as Norman Cousins who worked tirelessly to help the victims of Hiroshima and advocate for peace. Many people from other countries showed kindness and compassion. Because of that, I no longer say I hate America. Now I say that I hate nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are what caused this suffering. They took my parents. They took my husband. They took my friends. They took the futures of many people. This is what I hate. Eventually I realized that my enemy was not a nation.

In Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park there is a cenotaph containing the names of the victims. The inscription reads: “Let all the souls here rest in peace, for we shall not repeat the evil.”

More than 340,000 names of the victims are now recorded there. New names continue to be added every year. They include Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Americans, and people from many other places who were in Hiroshima at the time of the bombing. Beyond the Cenotaph burns the Flame of Peace. It will continue burning until all nuclear weapons have been abolished from the earth.

I hope to live long enough to see that flame extinguished. That is my wish. I do not want anyone else to suffer as we did. I do not want children to lose their parents. I do not want anyone to see their friends die before they have a chance to live their lives. I want a peaceful world where everyone can live without fear.

I survived when so many others did not. Because of that, I believe I have a responsibility. As long as I have a voice, I will continue telling this story so that people remember what happened in Hiroshima and so that future generations will never repeat it.

As we talked together, you told me that you hoped to share these stories with other people. Your grandson said that he also wanted to tell his friends what he had learned and do whatever he could to help. That made me very happy.

The number of *hibakusha* grows smaller every year. Soon there will be no one left who experienced the atomic bombing firsthand. When that time comes, younger generations must continue telling these stories. That is why I keep speaking. That is why I continue meeting visitors. I want people to know what happened. I want them to remember. And I want them to help create a peaceful world without nuclear weapons.

That is my wish. Thank you very much

