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# Living with a double A-bomb surviving parent

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## **The speaker's profile**

Toshiko Yamasaki is a daughter of Tsutomu Yamaguchi, who survived both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings. The topic is “Living with a double A-bomb surviving father.”

She was born in Nagasaki as the eldest daughter of Tsutomu Yamaguchi in May 1948. She is a so-called “second generation of Hibakusha.” After graduating from Nagasaki Girls’ Commercial High School in March 1967, she worked at a notary office and got married in May 1974. Her brother was exposed to the A-bomb at the age of six months and died of cancer. In 2005 on this occasion her father, Tsutomu, devoted himself to the peace movement as a storyteller. He appeared in two documentary movies and continued to give lectures in Nagasaki and the UN Headquarters until he died at the age of 93. The BBC featured Yamaguchi in its comedy program QI, referring to his as “The Unluckiest Man in the World,” and it emerged as social issue by Japanese expatriates and embassy. She speaks about life with Hibakusha, a desire for peace, and her mission as a second generation of Hibakusha through various symposiums and lectures. Now she is living in Nagasaki with her husband and son.

## **YAMASAKI's lecture**

Good morning. Thank you for your coming today. I am Toshiko Yamasaki, the daughter of Tsutomu Yamaguchi who

was affected by both Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings.

My father had worked at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. He was exposed to the A-bomb while on a three month business trip to Hiroshima. He went three with his colleague, Iwanaga. Iwanaga has also been affected by both Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, and he is still alive. According to Iwanaga, my father returned alone to his dormitory when he realized he had forgotten something. He was not the kind of person to forget something, but at that time, he had returned twice because he had left something. Iwanaga was at the shipyard when the A-bomb was dropped. The moment the building light flashed, he huddled under a desk before the heat wave blasted. A supervisor with him was terrified at the blinding light and couldn't huddle under a desk. The bomb blast shattered a window, and the supervisor got fragments of broken glass in his eyes. He lost sight and died. If my father had been there, it could have happened to him. I was thinking my father was out of luck, but now I am thinking that things left behind helped him.

He was outside the shipyard at the time of the explosion. He suffered great burns on the left side of the body and the skin was peeling when he regained his senses. The following day he returned to Nagasaki by train. He returned to Nagasaki with his body wrapped in bandages. At the time of the second atomic bombing, he was telling his supervisor about the A-bomb in Hiroshima. Listening to him, his colleagues didn't believe him, saying, "Don't be silly, you engineer? A single bomb would never destroy a city. Have you lost your mind?" At that moment, the A-bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. My father advised them to open windows because there was the danger of being injured by fragments of broken glass. The moment the bomb was dropped, he huddled under a desk like Iwanaga had done. However his bandages were spattered, and his wounds

were exposed to dust. Then he took refuge in a mountain. Later, he suffered from a high fever. While he was bedridden with a fever in a shelter, his body was infested with maggots. Around that time, my mother had her hands full taking care of their five-month-old son and cleaning the city. There was nothing she could do for her husband. There was not even medicine. My father has never told of the time. When I asked my mother what she had done when he had been bedridden, she said she had no memory. That time slipped out of her memory. She remembered little of that time. My father got fired from Mitsubishi because he was no longer productive.

He spoke English, and was asked to work for the American occupation forces as an interpreter. He started working there. He became good friends with young Americans. He said nothing, but he was not pleased with US for dropping the A-bomb. One day a young American asked him to write a letter. In those days, the American educational system was undeveloped, so many people couldn't read or write. The opening sentence of his letter was "Dear Mom and Dad, I hope you two are doing well." It was not much different from a letter which Japanese wrote. My father felt that all people have the same heart. They were innocent, simple, and nice young American people. Although they were different in language and race, he realized that the warmth of people's hearts was the same all over the world. Then he got rid of concepts of nationality.

I was born in 1948, three years after the war. Many of bombed pregnant women gave birth to deformed babies. The babies were born with some type of birth defects. Both my father and my mother were A-bomb survivors. Even three years after the war, people around my mother were opposed to giving birth because there was a risk of having a child with a

birth defect. However, she had me. I asked why she had me against protests around her, and she said "I believe human was born as a human." I respect her faith. Four years later, my sister was born. After the bomb she dug a shelter and cleaned the city in the soaking black rain containing radioactive material. The blackrain felt slimy and clung damply to the body. It was disgusting. She was admitted to hospital because of high fever after soaking in the black rain. Because nobody knew the black rain contained radioactive material, they couldn't define a source of fever. My sister was born in 1952, seven years after the war. My mother suffered from pregnancy-induced hypertension when she was pregnant. She looked pale and it turned her liver. I was four years old then. She had got thin, and only her belly was sticking out. She was vomiting very often. She always looked kind of sick. No treatment could reverse pregnancy-induced hypertension at that time. A doctor recommended an abortion, but she refused and gave birth to my sister. The terrible pregnancy-induced hypertension may have been caused by radioactive material.

My father always bent his ear to me when I was talking to him. I didn't know why he did so, and my mother told me that he had lost hearing in his left ear. The Hiroshima Explosion had ruptured the inner ear. And he always wore glasses. I asked if he was nearsighted, and he replied that he wasn't sure. In fact he had a cataract. Later in his life the cause of cataract was identified as the light of the A-bomb. No wonder glasses couldn't correct his vision. Every time summer came, my father's hair started falling out and he got bald when I was twelve. His severe burn was persistent due to the effects of the A-bomb, and he was always bandaged. He also suffered from leukemia which is a decrease in the number of the white blood cells found in the blood. Therefore he was always diagnosed and again to leave his job in order to concentrarate on

treatment because he could die at any moment if he kept on working. He had to work to provide for his parents and three children. He asked the doctor many times to falsify the number of white blood cells in order not to be fired. He had never shown his weaknesses and any regret to us. Therefore I took a strong father for granted. I'm now really sorry for him, but at that time I had no feeling seeing him with the bandages. On the contrary, I thought he was hideous.

He had worked as an English teacher for three years since I was born. In those days, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries was suffering a shortage of engineers. Because many people got fired or quit the office due to radiation disease. Thus, they sent notice of callback to ex-employees. My father didn't want to work at the company for firing him. When I was one year old, he was posted to Takashima island to work at Takashima junior high school. He had worked there for five years. Just then, he received a notice of callback from Mitsubishi. Thinking about his thought, he decides to go to back to Nagasaki and work at Mitsubishi again. He quit teaching and returned to work as an engineer. Actually, my mother couldn't become accustomed to life on an island. She was delighted to hear that she would be able to go back to Nagasaki. Just around that time, my sister was born.

She said that the baby girl brought us good luck, and it made me quite upset. "I am useless. No one needs me." I thought. I shut my mind off from her unconsciously. There was a gap between she and I. She loved me, but I had refused her affection. However I didn't know why she said to me "You are a contrary person." I had never realized before she became demented that I had shut my mind off from her.

She gradually began to show signs of dementia when she was around seventy years old. However we didn't want to admit it. "She is just tired. She is just frustrated." I thought.

But it was a sign of dementia. I had not accepted her heart so far. I decided to treat my sick mother with love. Then she became reliant on me. I found I could accept her without realizing it. My brother told me before that I was always out of the family. To be sure, I liked to play outside rather than spending time at home.

When I was a junior high school student, Senji Yamaguchi, who is also an A-bomb survivor, was working hard for peace in the world. Watching him, my father said, "He is a great. In contrast, I did nothing even though I was affected by both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bomb." He wondered about his duty as an A-bomb survivor. Then he told his family that he wanted to participate in the peace activities. The whole family opposed it. He had a cataract, unilateral hearing loss, and after effects from burns. He had been losing hair until 15 years after the war. However he appeared healthy at a glance. If he participated in the movement, there was a possibility to convey misleading information about the power of the A-bomb because a double A-bomb survivor was doing fine. We opposed because he might let Yamaguchi's efforts go down the drain. He didn't go against our opposition. If I were him, I would have done. However he didn't because there was social discrimination against A-bomb survivors. My brother, sister and I didn't know that. Maybe our parents protected us against discrimination. My friends' parents and grandparents were also A-bomb survivors, so I didn't think being exposed to radiation was something out of ordinary. I had never thought they had been discriminated against. Once, I was shocked to hear that people suffered discrimination just for carrying 'the Issuance of Atomic Bomb Survivor's Certificate' in urban areas. I couldn't figure out why on earth they were discriminated against by fellow countrymen.

Media including TV and newspaper had come to my father to get an interview with a double A-bomb survivor ever since I was in a junior high school. They gathered his information out of curiosity, not to appeal for peace and elimination of nuclear weapons. I had my doubts about their journalism. Maybe their theme was simple. "He is so rare." I wanted them to report a deep message seeing the question from an A-bomb survivor's viewpoint. Unfortunately no media talked about appealing for peace or elimination of nuclear weapons. Every summer, they interviewed my father, but I opposed to him being interviewed.

It was about 30 years ago that he started saying again "I want to convey my A-bomb experience." The late Pope John Paul II visited Nagasaki in 1981. He said "People can abolish war because war is caused by people. We can eliminate war." When my father heard this, he decided to convey his experience. However I was opposed again. He didn't notice when he was spoken to from the left side because he was hearing-impaired in his left ear. Therefore he was sometimes seen as rude. I was opposed because he could be misunderstood due to unilateral hearing loss, and he would be in trouble. He didn't say any more.

Both my sister and I got married and had children. My parents helped us raise our children, but we didn't pay much attention to them.

My father had continued to write tanka poems since his youth. There were even some tanka poems written about abolishment of nuclear weapons. And he always sent the tanka poems to the newspaper. Seeing his tanka poems in the newspaper, I always felt guilty because I had twice opposed his participation in the peace movement. My brother felt the same way.

Since my mother became demented, my parents lived together with my brother and his family. It was difficult for

him with A-bomb disease and her with dementia to live on their own. He never answered the phone because of his unilateral hearing loss. Seeing her take a phone call, he asked who was calling, and she said "I don't remember." This has happened on numerous occasions. As it might be hard for him to take care of her alone, they lived together with my brother. He worked very hard everyday for the family, and he didn't allow himself the luxuries. He loved writing tanka poems and reading books. My brother wanted him to do whatever he wanted. He was preoccupied about not having done his duty as an A-bomb survivor. My brother decided to support him in his peace movement. Just about at that time my brother was diagnosed with carcinoma. His carcinoma was found in May 2004, and he realized that he didn't have much time. He knew he couldn't live with them anymore. In spite of feeling bad, he liked for a nursing home where our parents could be taken care of properly. However there was nowhere to take care of our mother with dementia.

One day I found a vacant apartment in my neighborhood. However the room had not been cleaned for rental despite three months having passed. Later, my sister also found a room, and she encouraged our father to move into the apartment. He was very happy. My brother was also very happy with a big smile. I will never forget his smile. My brother came to help with the removed, but he felt bad. After that, he went into hospital saying, "Toshiko, please look after them for me." I wanted to say "Leave it to me," but I couldn't. I said to him, "You will get well soon, and you can live with them." My mother used to say "I want to live with a married son rather than a married daughter. A daughter will become good a conversation partner, but I will be wary of her husband because he is a son-in-law. But I can stay comfortable with my son."

The next year in February 2005, he passed away. My father lost his first-born son before we were born. He was starting to get desperate when the second son died. That had never happened before, but he had become cold toward my sister and me. He said to us “What can daughters like you two do?” Before, he ate my cooking saying “It’s delicious,” but now he said “Do you feed your husband such nasty meals?” I couldn’t work out what was going on inside of him. I was really upset because I have done my best so far. Looking up into the night sky, I couldn’t stop asking myself, “What is my purpose in my life?” One day I told him “You are my father forever.” He didn’t say anything, and he returned to his usual kind of self from the next day. We got over my brother’s death. Sometimes I became tired of taking care of my parents and wondered “If he had lived...” Each time I got pessimistic, I reminded myself “Stop blaming others, it’s all for myself.” “I support my parents without regret.” I made a pledge to myself. I decided not to express my ego, but I became frustrated easily. My father took each day as it came. I have no regret about the things I have done. But I don’t want you to experience such a thing. You don’t have to. You don’t need it. I don’t want anyone to be in a relationship like ours.

My brother passed away in 2005. His carcinoma was found in 2004. He was exposed to the A-bomb at the age of five months, and he suffered from infant tuberculosis. When he was in the first grade of elementary school, he was given five months to live. We went to the hospital by ship as we were living in Takashima-island at that time. We went to see by far the most famous doctor in Nagasaki, and were told my brother did not have much time left. On the way home from the hospital, my parents didn’t explain to me anything about him, but I half expected that. I felt a sense of anxiety. On the way,

an abandoned puppy followed my brother. He loved animals, He held the puppy and asked our parents to take it home, but they said he couldn't because dogs were not allowed on the ship. He was resigned to let go of the puppy, but it followed us. Seeing this, they allowed him to keep as he only had five months to live. It grew up into a good German shepherd. One day, the dog bit a 'yakuza' (Japanese Mafia), and they claimed a large amount of medical expense against us. We got into trouble with the police. The police said to my father, "Being a teacher, you should avoid a dispute. You should settle out of court." As a result we were forced to give up the dog, and it was taken care of by our relative.

Although my brother's life expectancy was five months, he lived to be 59. I believe that dog gave him the gift of life.

A shadow in his chest X-ray was found during a health examination two years before his death. He didn't ask any more, but he was pretty sure it was radiation. He had nine cancers at the same time. He who was exposed to radiation suffered from multiple cancers. During surgery it was found that the cancer was spreading through his body.

My father began coloring in Buddhist pictures for his son. And also he drew "Bombed Mary" as on a picture in newspaper. Looking at the picture of Mary drawn by him, I felt a constriction in the chest. I imagined beautiful Mary, but the face of bombed Mary was drawn in black. He wanted to show his comatose son the picture. But I slapped out away saying "He is in a coma. He would never see it," and I only took him to the hospital. Seeing his son sleeping, he was lost for words. I patted him on the back, and he called the name in a weak voice, "Katsutoshi." Then, my brother opened his eyes wide, and he said something. It was as if he was saying, "Dad, Mam, I'm sorry. I can't go on any longer." On the following day, he passed away. And my father made up his mind. He decided to convey

how much danger the effects of radiation have on young people.

Just then he got a letter from director Inazuka who directed “Twice Bombed: The legacy of Yamaguchi Tsutomu,” as if it had been prearranged. He thought “This is it!” and quickly sent a reply. The following year, director Inazuka visited Nagasaki to see my father. My father told him that our message would not reach people all over the world unless we called for the elimination of nuclear weapons in the US. Inazuka suggested, “Then, let’s appeal for it in the UN in New York.” Around that time, my daughter got pregnant for the first time, and I wanted to help her as far as possible. When I gave birth to my first child, my mother-in-law helped me because my mother was struck down by a heart attack. But I couldn’t completely depend on her. Through such experience, I wanted to be involved in my daughter’s delivery. She said “Mom, please support granpa.” Since the baby’s due date coincided with the day my father left, my son went to the UN with him. He was working at a construction company in Tokyo. He took time from his busy schedule to go to the UN with my father. They had a lot of experiences through the trip. When he came back home, my father said “It would have been too much for you. It was best that I went with my grandson.”

After that, he started conveying his experience. Due to health reasons he turned down offers to lecture in junior high school. It was a last stage cancer, and his advanced age rendered it inoperable. I could see the extent of the cancer on the X-ray, and it spread throughout the body. I didn’t let him know that he had cancer, but he perhaps knew it. He pretended to know nothing for me. We lived together after he was diagnosed with cancer.

His last lecture was for international students in June 2009. He gave the lecture while attached to an intravenous drip. He

didn't complain about anything and didn't look in pain. He did his best and I appreciated his efforts. His strength began to decrease after the last lecture.

He was officially recognized by the Japanese government as a double A-bomb survivor in March 2009. It was a correspondent, Mr. Miyashita, who suggested that the fact being a double A-bomb survivor should be recorded as historical evidence. I would never have guessed that it would be broadcast all over the world. Mr. Miyashita brought my father's Atomic bomb Survivor's Certificates to where I worked in the field. He wanted to interview him and take a picture of me as well. I didn't want to be photographed, but he did it anyway. The next day, my friend saw my picture in the paper along with the article saying "You bring dishonor to Japan." Certainly I was wearing no makeup at all and looked awful. And I realized I couldn't hide the truth.

My father received a surprise from San Marino in April. They gave certificates of merit and some presents to him for his contribution to peace. Until then, we felt we had still had our duty. But we couldn't avoid his aging. When we were about to give up, San Marino gave us presents. It really encouraged us. My father said, "Thanks to them, I could show renewed vitality."

We met Ms. Catherine Sullivan, an American peace activist, in 2009. We also met the author Charles Pellegrino and the Canadian movie director James Cameron. They gave my father the final word. Cameron told him "You have done your duty." He couldn't be happier. I think his various memories were erased in a moment. He had so much support and got to heaven. His death in effect was not the end, but the beginning. I said "When you get to heaven, please support people who work for peace all the way." He answered "Of course" in a low voice. The voice was still powerful that made me think he was

still lively. I was filled with various memories when he passed away. He was thankful that you received his will. He died filled with gratitude. The BBC featured him in its comedy program after he was gone. The thoughts of A-bomb victims have yet to reach. We must not allow the experiences of those victims to be repeated. It's nonsense. I don't want any other people to be A-bomb victims. The nuclear accident occurred at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. I want to convey to you who will lead Japan. My father was exposed to high levels of radiation. Because he went to find acquaintances and attended funerals after the bombing. This caused reproductive dysfunction around the age of 40. The effects of radiation are terrible. Young people must get married and have children. It will be the end of world if we can not keep on providing descendants for later generations. My father and I want people to know about the horror of radiation. He said "Nuclear weapons are not needed in the human world." We believe that this is our destiny. However, please do not dismiss the horror of nuclear weapons as someone else's problem. Think about the future, and create a world where every people can live as a human. Please work toward a lasting peace and nuclear abolition. Thank you for your kind attention.

### **HARADA's lecture**

I am a granddaughter of Tsutomu Yamaguchi, and I am a third generation of Hibakusha. I'm glad to have this opportunity to speak. If my grandparents hadn't told me that they were A-bomb survivors, I would have lived without knowing it. They were nice to me and seemed like a normal couple from the days of my childhood. Among you as well, there are some who are third generation of Hibakusha. A student spoke to me in my lecture last time, and it gave me a

supportive push. Let me tell you a little about it. I learned they were A-bomb survivors when I was in elementary school. I had to listen to A-bomb survivors talk about their experiences and do a writing and drawing assignment. They told me that a number of people received great burns and their skin were was peeling and hanging of so that it was impossible to identify their sex. It was like hell. People were wailing, "Give me some water, help me!" It was a frightful spectacle, but they didn't remember what they had been feeling at that time. My grandfather suffered great burns on the left side of his body, but he thought strongly he had to save his own life for his family. He only thought about living for the family. I was surprised, and learned about the horrors of nuclear weapons. I realized they had suffered severe psychological trauma as A-bomb survivors. Every year around August 9th, my grandfather took me to Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum and A-bomb Exhibition, and he told me his experience on our way home. My grandmother used to tell her experience, but she began saying that she didn't want to recall anything anymore about the A-bomb as she got older, because she felt so bad and sad. When the A-bomb was dropped, my uncle was six months of age, so he was of course not walking or talking yet. She raised him in the midst of chaos. I feel the strength of mother. My mother was born to the father of a double A- bomb survivor and the mother of a Nagasaki A-bombing victim. When my grandmother was pregnant with my mother, she met opposition from people around her because of the risk of childbirth. However she gave birth and raised her children with conviction. Many mothers who were exposed to radiation gave birth with trepidation. Such grief was all because of the War. She was sensitive to smells like roast fish, and she hated it. Maybe it's because the smell of burning people remained lodged in her brain.

My elderly grandfather devoted himself to the peace movement at home and abroad although he had cancer. My mother helped him. As he was hearing impaired in his left ear she said “I will be his left ear.” We didn’t inform him that he had cancer. His health was becoming worse, and he lost his voice. He took out his stress on my mother and got her in trouble. She supported him both mentally and physically as a daughter. Even though he vomited blood, he accepted an interview for Switzerland by sheer force of will because the country was permanently neutral. Sometimes she cried alone in secret. He couldn’t do his peace activities without her. The bond between the two made me think about relationships within the family. Before he died, he told us “Bring up my great-grandchild very carefully. Every body has a conscience. We can communicate what is in our heart because there is a certain conscience that transcends any differences in race or language. I hand over my my life to you.” Essentially, what my grandparents experienced is not needed for our life. It’s my turn to help my mother as she did. I am grateful to my grandfather who opened the way to the future and brought me an encounter with peace activists worldwide. I have a role to appeal for a nuclear-free world and to convey the experience of my grandparents. I felt the burden of being the granddaughter of a double A-bomb survivor, but I got strength from you because among you are some who are third generation of Hibakusha. Thank you.

### **Q&A**

—Have you ever been the victim of discrimination as a second and third generation of Hibakusha?

**YAMASAKI:** We never have. As far as I know, there isn’t such discrimination in Nagasaki. Yet A-bomb survivors were

detestable to people because of external injuries.

—What was the happiest day of your life?

**YAMASAKI:** I was a daddy's girl. Liberally raised, I am optimistic. He told me about many things. I have no particularly pleasant memories with him, but the fact that he accepted me just as I am was my best memory.