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Living in Nagasaki

IKEDA Sanae

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The speaker's profile

Sanae Ikeda was born in Ohmura city, Nagasaki prefecture, in 1933. He moved to the district now called Eri-machi, Nagasaki city in 1940, and entered the Nishiurakami National Elementary School in 1945. He was exposed to the A-bomb on the road, 2 kilometers from the hypocenter. Most of his brothers were at home then, and he lost all of his brothers within ten days. About two years later, his father had to retire the prefectural office because he lost his sight to cataracts. Working at the same time, he went to the civic commercial part-time high school and got a position as a prefectural official of transportation in 1951. He lost his parents during the ten years after the end of the war.

IKEDA's lecture

Stated in the introduction, When I was 12 years old, the U.S. carried out the second attack of atomic bomb. The bomber called B-29 loaded with the atomic bomb was not intended to fly to Nagasaki in the morning August 9th. It was to bomb Kokura, but the sky had been covered over with cloud and the target was hard to recognize. The B-29 changed the target to Nagasaki, and turned there via the Ariake sea and Shimabara peninsula. Not a red alert but a yellow alert was raised over Nagasaki then. This alert was just to tell people the enemy was approaching, and people had not to flee to the shelters. However, when the siren sounded, B-29 had already been flying over Nagasaki. It had been for years since the war had

started, and people had been bombed many times so they distinguished easily the Japanese aircraft from the enemy ones. People who wondered why the air-raid siren didn't sound looked up into the sky. I was in the area called Koebarugo then, 2 kilometers from the hypocenter. I was looking for B-29 flying when the intense deep green light struck my eyes. I lost my sight and sense and don't remember about the blast. I found myself trembling and holding the roots of a tree. I saw my mother lying down on the grass 15 meters from me.

We were on the way to a farmer's house to get something to eat. In the morning, I asked my mother if I could follow her to the village, but she refused it because we hadn't had enough meal and I had been increasingly weary. Since the war had occurred four years before, we had had no food other than the grounds of squeezed soybeans and a few vegetables. In such circumstances my mother sometimes had gone to a farmer's house and been given a few vegetables. That day I wanted to follow her and left home by the back door. My mother found me waiting for her on the mountain path and take me with her.

After a few minutes walk, three young men stopped us and said, "Could you allow us to follow you? We are students called up to work at Ohashi factory. We weren't fed in the dormitory this morning and lack the energy to go to work. Could you take us with you?" But my mother didn't accept their request, saying "If you visit the farmer's houses one by one, they wouldn't have much food to give you." I supposed the students had been very hungry because they had come from all over Kyushu Island. I said to them, "You may follow us. We might find some pear trees in the boundary between the field and the mountain. I suppose they can be eaten." The students got a few pears there and left us.

When the bomb blasted, as I said, we were in a field 2 km

from the hypocenter, and I lost my sight due to the strong light, and then trembled, holding the root of a tree. Many later, my mother and I fled from there. It was getting dark, and hard to see because the bomb ash covering the sky shut out the sunlight. I saw a farmer's cow moaning and running around with its back burned because of thermal energy of the bomb. I couldn't understand anything but that an extraordinary bomb had been dropped. We reached Teguma and people there said different circumstances such as "glass was broken" "unbelievable blast" "the fire colored the sky red", but I couldn't understand any of them. When an ordinary bomb was dropped, it made a hole as large as this classroom on the ground and people standing at that point almost died but people a bit further away survived. Unlike those cases, the atomic bomb exploded in the sky and killed everyone. We were given some vegetables by a farmer and hurried to Nagasaki.

On the way, I saw bombed and burned people. The first person I encountered since the bomb had been dropped was a charred middle-aged man. His face had been melted down and the skin was hanging down. His hair had got charred. His clothes were hanging from his body. He approached me but had lost his voice. He motioned to my mother to give the water in her hand. Drinking the water, he got his voice back and said, "Nagasaki city was annihilated." I asked him, "What do you mean 'annihilated'? Did the U.S. plane drop a lot of bombs?" But he said, "No, only a few aircraft blasted an extraordinary bomb up in the sky and we all have got burned." He also told us that many people were crawling and running away from Nagasaki but they wouldn't survive. Hurrying to Nagasaki again, we encountered young people in better condition than the middle-aged man, but their clothes also were ragged.

There was a cannon in the place I had waited for my mother that morning. The cannon was so small that its cannonballs

couldn't reach the enemy planes. Nevertheless our soldiers had taken the cannonballs there everyday, saying they intended to bring down a B-29. "It's the fact of this war. We can never beat them." I would have been saying such things with my friends, but of course in a low voice. That day the soldiers had already been burned to death when we passed there.

Going down the hill a few minutes, there was a cave type shelter in the wall. People would run into shelters when the red-alarm was rung. We saw in the shelter a crying woman, Morikawa-san, who had fled from down the hill. My mother asked how she was, and she said, "I dragged my brother with me. He got terribly burnt because he was climbing a persimmon tree and catching up cicadas in the back field. He kept on crying in a croaking voice." My mother asked about our home and she answered, "No house made of wood has remained. All of them have collapsed. Most people have been killed, and no one might survive." My mother assumed my brothers left at home were dead. She made me go home and find out for her.

But approaching my home, the path became hard to follow, for it was littered with things such as pieces of roof and poles. I took an indirect route through the center of a field, which was near my home. A middle-aged man stopped me. He was lying on his back in the field and backoned me. "What do you want, sir?" I approached him. He asked me to set him up. Something sticky with his blood and flesh was hung from my hand which had held his back. I set him up but he kept merely sitting and moaning.

There was nothing I could do, so I left there hastily to my home. Nishimachi, a district now called Erimachi, where I lived has a ditch about a meter in width. Many pieces of burning poles and bodies were lying in there. I looked for my young sister's body, who I had been told must be there by my

elder sister. I had to judge only by her shape but all the bodies were burned to black. It was hard to find my six-year-old sister, Suzuko. I found body with a rubber band of shorts 10 cm on its waist. I turned over the band and understood it was hers by its floral pattern. I went back to the center of the field where the bodies had been collected, with my sister in my arms. With a lot of tears in my eyes, I put her on two mats I had stripped from the debris, saying "I hate America."

All night through U.S. planes flew at a low altitude, dropping flare bombs and taking pictures of the ruins. I felt hunger in the middle of the night and crept to a field. There were many charred bodies around the field. Avoiding these bodies, I picked and ate eggplants under the bombs' light. Very sticky eggplants. I heard a lot of crying throughout the night. This crying got wearing gradually till dawn. I understood almost all of the people had died.

I visited my best friend whose father worked for JNR (The Japanese National Railways) as a caretaker of the official residence. His wooden house was burned out and no one survived. There were charred bodies of my friend and a few people lying in a hugging position. I prayed for him and left for another friend with tears in my eyes.

I jumped across a narrow ditch which was dug for the official residence. I saw something long and round lying in the ditch. I wondered what it was, so I took a glance at its side and recognized a swollen bowel out of a woman's stomach. The morning sun warmed it up and I saw something moving through the clear surface of the bowel. I prayed for her and said, "I'm sorry but I don't recognise such a long thing is in the human body." After 15 meters walk, I recognized the site of my friend. Yamashita's house but no house was there. I saw a body of a five or six-year-old boy who seemed to be beaten on the ground. He was lying down with his head melting. Looking

over a lot of corpses before me, I got felt too sad to walk for my friends.

I stopped walking. I went back to where I had put down my sister. I gathered up wood around there and helped my father cremate her body. A queue of people carrying an cremation didn't stop all day long.

The day after the bomb had been dropped, a relief train stopped at a crossing near to my town. My father and I took my brothers toward where I heard the whistle blowing. The train was loaded with a lot of straw which was for letting people lie on. About the crossing many people who had been unable to catch previous trains had died. Later I read a driver of a relief written that he didn't allow people who were either fit or too sick to survive aboard the train. My father decided that my brothers couldn't be helped and we took them back home.

On August 15th, a man passing by my hut said to me that the war was over and we had lost. I remember that word clearly though I was twelve then. I thought that my brothers were dying one after the other but I would survive. The war was over and I was not to be killed by U.S. armies. That night my sister tried to rescue my four-year-old brother whose waist had been caught between poles. It was dangerous because burning wood around them was falling down toward them. Then fortunately a man less injured helped her to pull him out.

My father made me, twelve-year-old boy, cremate my brother, Saburo. I put him in the same place we had cremated my sister. A lot of wood was gathered there. I put my brother who was rolled in mats on it and lit the bottom of the wood. My brother went up in flames. At the time the sun setting in the west shone its light on me. I sat in front of my brother whose elbows and knees groaned and said good-bye. I shed tears.

I can never forget that the sunlight and the fire burning my

brother both colored my teardrops red. At the end of cremation, I said to him, "I'm sorry that you couldn't live in a time without war." He was born on the night when the Pearl Harbor Attack occurred and died on the day of the end of the war. He hadn't had any sweets or played much. In the end, he knew nothing except living with war. I remember the words I said with tears in my eyes, "what a merciless thing war is!"

The next day, my ten-year-old brother, Yoji, died. And the next day my sister died. I lost my brothers day after day and at last there was just my sister and I left. I thought my sister looked better and would survive. But on August 19th, ten days after the bomb had been dropped, she died. On that day my parents had gone out to get some food and my sister and I were in our hut. I noticed something fly by in front of me. It was a dragonfly. I wanted to look at it clearly, because I hadn't seen anything moving since the bomb had burned everything. The dragonfly paused on the end of a stick standing in a pond. I walked into the pond and tried to look at it carefully. Just one red dragonfly was there. I appreciated the value of life.

I expected her to catch the dragonfly with me. But she called to me in the pond, and told me that she had a terrible numbness in her hands and legs. I rubbed her hands and legs, saying "I would be lonely without you, so please survive." Many pieces of glass stuck out of her body. Dark red spots of blood stood out from her head to her feet. A man in my neighborhood said that spots were the result of poison gas emitted by the new type of bomb and if the spots were seen on a human body, he would die. Now I think that poison gas means radiation.

My sister asked me whether we had won the war. She didn't know anything because we had no radio or newspaper. I nodded and said "yes". She stood up unsteadily and gave a cheer for the emperor. Then she fell dead in front of me. I lost

all of my brothers and sisters within ten days after the bomb attack. On the day when the bomb was dropped, she was working for the Ohasi armory of Mitsubishi as a devoted member of staff for the emperor. I remember that day I delivered her lunch and she took it happily. Her name is printed on the monument near this building.

Several months later, my father lost his sight and necessarily retired from the prefectural office. My mother, who died on June 9th 1955, got sick and bedridden from December the previous year. Without any protection or medicine, leaving my parents lying, I went to the river to wash my mother's napkin and then boiled rice in an iron pot. It took about 40 minutes. I didn't have enough money, so had to pick up wood. It was hard work. Before going to work, I put several rice ball beside my mother's head.

The day when my mother died, she caught me by my waist band and refused to let me go, saying "Today is the day when your brothers died. Today is the day when the bomb was dropped, so can you stay home today?" I had to go to work and managed to explain to her. Around 4:00 pm I received a message that she had died and I got back home quickly."

When I came home, my father said to me, "your mother was talking about you all day long. Lie down beside her." I got into her bedclothes and felt her body temperature. It made me particularly sad. I lost my mother after the experience of my brothers' death.

My hard experiences didn't finish then. My father who had lost his sight and I were all that was left of my family, but he needed my help. After a few months, following my mother's death I got sick. I lost my hearing and had difficulty in walking. I couldn't go to the hospital because I couldn't walk properly.

One day I met an English teacher working for an evening class. He made me go to the university hospital, saying "if you

lost your hearing and sense of balance, it might be an abnormal disease. I know a doctor in the otolaryngology department of the university hospital. You should check with him. Remember that you have been exposed to the A-bomb.” I had an operation soon. When I was in hospital, the first anniversary of my mother’s death came. On that day I wanted to have a particular lunch which was served in the hospital. I explained about it to a nurse and got permission. Then the nurse asked me questions about myself. As we talked about each other, I got intimate with her and married her. We had two children and now two grandchildren.

I planned to build a Hibakusha-farm with the prefectural officials’ trade union. It was for rehabilitation of the prefectural officials who were on leave of absence from work mainly due to mental disease. But after all we couldn’t realize the plan because of administrative difficulties. I bought a field personally as a Hibakusha-farm. When I kept the farm with two Hibakusha, students of Hitotsubashi University visited us and camped out there in the summer holidays.

Thank you very much. Do you have any questions?

Q&A

—You said you hated the U.S. when you were exposed to the A-bomb. Do you have the same feeling about the U.S. now?

IKEDA: I have represented such things in “pray for peace” in the ceremony for peace held by Nagasaki City. But I expressed my hatred for the U.S. clearly when I visited a private high school in the U.S. Then I was asked whether I had such hatred for the U.S. as I had expressed that feeling in front of American people, and answered that I once had that feeling but now didn’t hate the U.S. I want you to understand my words as hatred for the A-bomb.

—What do you think about the Japanese government in wartime?

IKEDA: I had been told by my parents that we have to hate the opponents. But when I heard a man saying “the war is over”, I remembered hateful aspects of war which I had heard about U.S. Army’s landing on Okinawa. So I need to say that feeling is hatred for war. I suppose U.S. armies begun to land in Nagasaki in the beginning of September. When a U.S. soldier came to near my hut, they took a photograph of my father, though it has never been seen in Japan or the U.S. From that time, I began to think that the U.S. soldiers wouldn’t necessarily kill us.

—How old did your sister begin to work for the factory?

IKEDA: As I remember, she already worked for the factory when she was fourteen.

—I heard that you began to talk to people about your experience in 1981. What made you do so?

IKEDA: Students of the Faculty of Sociology of Hitotsubashi University visited a group of Hibakusha which I participated in for on the spot fact-finding. During research I got accustomed to talking about my experience.