

Ursula Gelis

My Family Was Used to Test the Atomic Bomb

Interview with Mr. Masanori Nakashima (82 years old) from Nagasaki



After the nuclear attack from August 9, 1945.

When uranium and plutonium bombs were dropped over Japan in August 1945, humankind entered a decisive new stage. Can we preserve life on Earth by advocating peace and the abolition of nuclear weapons, or are we heading for the end of humanity?

Mr. Masanori Nakashima: On the 9th of August I was working at the Mitsubishi Electronic Company about 3 kilometers south from the epicenter of the bomb's explosion. I worked with parts for military planes and flashlights to search for planes in the night sky. We felt safe from regular bomb attacks because the whole facility was located underground.

When the plutonium bomb hit at 11:02 am, all the lights went off and it was totally dark. After about 3 seconds I felt a strong blast. The tunnel I was working in pointed in the direction of the center of the explosion. Therefore the blast caused me to fall down but I was still conscious.

About three hundred people were working in the tunnel, dealing with valuable military equipment. More than 2,000 workers were in the area of the factory. It was a secret how many people actually worked there.

The end of the tunnel was destroyed. Injured people from outside came inside for shelter. I tried to bring colleagues who could not walk anymore into the tunnel.



Mr. Masanori Nakashima. Nagasaki Atomic Bomb museum, 11th of August 2012.

Because the factory was destroyed they sent us home. I had no clue that this devastation was caused by an atomic bomb! So I went home, which was about 700 meters from the epicenter of the explosion.

Outside the many fires meant I had to climb a mountain to avoid being burned. Here I saw children surrounding their dead mother. I saw many desperate injured people around me. Dead bodies lay all over the place, dead horses too. The streets were burning. I decided to walk in the river.



Yosuke Yamahata. Nagasaki, August 1945.

Many dead bodies were floating in the water, so burned by heat waves that I could not distinguish between women and men. I did not feel the heat and I do not remember when I finally got home.

Normally it takes 30 minutes to reach home but on this day with the river full of corpses, it took much longer. When I finally reached my place I found my mother and one brother

heavily burned and dead. Other people were lying around with organs hanging out of their bodies.

My father brought my dying brother and sister to a shelter. They could not drink water and were blind. Five days later my siblings died. From my family, only my father and one of my sisters who worked in Omura city survived; and me.

We were educated to be strong and ever ready to die for the Emperor – maybe from that I had developed the strength to cremate my own mother and brother. It took 30 hours until they vanished. We were influenced by the Kamikaze Ideal. I thought that survivors have to do whatever was needed to cope with the situation.

After the war I could not imagine how life would continue. When the American army came closer, a lot of people escaped to the mountains. They were afraid of being killed.

The factory was gone and I went to relatives in Tokize, a town nearby and cared for my injured father. Two months later I started working again in another factory.

Why did my mother and brothers and sister live here in Nagasaki? Was it their fate to be killed by the atomic bomb? War has no justification. My family was annihilated by a nuclear weapon. The atomic bomb decided over their lives. War should be abandoned completely. My family should not have been used to test the bomb.

Mr. Masanori Nakashima is the head of a Hibakusha (survivors of the Atomic bomb) Association.

Interview at the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, 11th of August 2012. Interpreters: Sakae So/Miyuki Matsumoto.