

Testimony of Yoshitaka Kawamoto

Mr. Yoshitaka Kawamoto was thirteen years old. He was in the classroom at Zakoba-cho, 0.8 kilometers away from the hypocenter. He is now working as the director of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, telling visitors from all over the world what the atomic bomb did to the people of Hiroshima.

KAWAMOTO: One of my classmates, I think his name is Fujimoto, he muttered something and pointed outside the window, saying, "A B-29 is coming." He pointed outside with his finger. So I began to get up from my chair and asked him, "Where is it?" Looking in the direction that he was pointing towards, I got up on my feet, but I was not yet in an upright position when it happened. All I can remember was a pale lightening flash for two or three seconds. Then, I collapsed. I don't know much time passed before I came to. It was awful, awful. The smoke was coming in from somewhere above the debris. Sandy dust was flying around. I was trapped under the debris and I was in terrible pain and that's probably why I came to. I couldn't move, not even an inch. Then, I heard about ten of my surviving classmates singing our school song. I remember that. I could hear sobs. Someone was calling his mother. But those who were still alive were singing the school song for as long as they could. I think I joined the chorus. We thought that someone would come and help us out. That's why we were singing a school song so loud. But nobody came to help, and we stopped singing one by one. In the end, I was singing alone. Then I started to feel fear creeping in. I started to feel my way out pushing the debris away little by little, using all my strength. Finally I cleared the things around my head. And with my head sticking out of the debris, I realized the scale of the damage. The sky over Hiroshima was dark. Something like a tornado or a big fire ball was storming throughout the city. I was only injured around my mouth and around my arms. But I lost a good deal of blood from my mouth, otherwise I was OK. I thought I could make my way out. But I was afraid at the thought of escaping alone. We had been going through military drills everyday, and they had told us that running away by oneself is an act of cowardice, so I thought I must take somebody along with me. I crawled over the debris, trying to find someone who were still alive. Then, I found one of my classmates lying alive. I held him up in my arms. It is hard to tell, his skull was cracked open, his flesh was dangling out from his head. He had only one eye left, and it was looking right at me. First, he was mumbling something but I couldn't understand him. He started to bite off his finger nail. I took his finger out from his mouth. And then, I held his hand, then he started to reach for his notebook in his chest pocket, so I asked him, I said, "You want me to take this along to hand it over to your mother?" He nodded. He was going to faint. But still I could hear him crying out, saying "Mother, Mother" I thought I could take him along. I guess that his body below the waist was crashed. The lower part of his body was trapped, buried inside of the debris. He just adhered to go, he told me to go away. And by that time, another wing of the school building, or what used to be the school building, had caught on fire. I tried to get to the playground. Smoke was filling in the air, but I could see the white sandy earth beneath. I thought this must be the playground, then I started to run in that direction. I turned back and I saw my classmates Wada looking at me. I still remember the situation and it still appears in my dreams. I felt sorry for him, but it was the last time I ever saw him. I, so, was running, hands were trying to grab my ankles, they were asking me to take them along. I was only a child then. And I was horrified at so many hands trying to grab me. I was in pain, too. So all I could do was to get rid of them, it's terrible to say, but I kicked their hands away. I still feel bad about that. I went to Miyuki Bridge to get some water. At the river bank, I saw so many people collapsed there. And the small steps to the river were jammed, filled with people pushing their way to the water. I was small, so I pushed on the river along the small steps. The water was dead people. I had to push the bodies aside to drink the muddy water. We didn't know anything about radioactivity that time. I stood up in the water and so many bodies were floating away along the stream. I can't find the words to describe it. It was horrible. I felt fear. Instead of going into the water, I climbed up the river bank. I couldn't move. I couldn't find my shadow. I looked up. I saw the cloud, the mushroom cloud growing in the sky. It was very bright. It had so much heat inside. It caught the light and it showed every color of the rainbow. Reflecting on the past, it's strange, but I could say that it was beautiful. Looking at the cloud, I thought I would never be able to see my mother again, I wouldn't be able to see my younger brother again. And then, I lost consciousness. When I came to, it was about seven in the evening. I was the transportation bureau at Ujina. I found myself lying on the floor of the warehouse. And an old soldier was looking in my face. He gave me a light slap on the cheek and he said, "You are a lucky boy." He told me that he had gone with one of the few trucks left to collect the dead bodies at Miyuki Bridge. They were loading bodies, treating them like sacks. They picked me up from the river bank and then, threw me on top of the pile. My body slid off and when they grabbed me by the arm to put me back onto the truck, they felt that my pulse was still beating, so they reloaded me onto the truck, carrying the survivors. I was really lucky. But I couldn't stand for about a year. I was so weak. My hair came off, even the hair in my nose fell out. My hair, it started to come off about two weeks later. I became completely bald. My eyes, I lost my eye sight, probably not because of the radioactivity, but because I became so weak. I couldn't see for about three months. But I was only thirteen, I was still young, and I was still growing when I was hit by the A-bomb. So about one year later. I regained my health. I recovered good health. Today I am still working as you can see. As the director of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, today, I am handing my message over to the children who visit. I want them to learn about Hiroshima. And when they grow up, I want them to hand down the message to the next generation with accurate

information. I'd like to see him conveying the right sense of judgment so that we will not lead mankind to annihilation. That is our responsibility.

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Testimony of Akiko Takakura

Ms. Akiko Takakura was 20 years old when the bomb fell. She was in the Bank of Hiroshima, 300 meters away from the hypocenter. Ms. Takakura miraculously escaped death despite over 100 lacerated wounds on her back. She is one of the few survivors who was within 300 meters of the hypocenter. She now runs a kindergarten and she relates her experience of the atomic bombing to children.

TAKAKURA: After the air-raid the alarm was called off, I walked from Hatchobori to the Bank of Hiroshima in Kamiya-cho. I arrived at the bank some time around 8:15 or so, and signed my name in the attendance book. When I was doing my morning routine, dusting the desks and things like that, the A-bomb was dropped. All I remember was that I saw something flash suddenly.

INTERVIEWER: Can you explain the flash?

TAKAKURA: Well, it was like a white magnesium flash. I lost consciousness right after or almost at the same time I saw the flash. When I regained consciousness, I found myself in the dark. I heard my friends, Ms. Asami, crying for her mother. Soon after, I found out that we actually had been attacked. Afraid of being caught by a fire, I told Ms. Asami to run out of the building. Ms. Asami, however, just told me to leave her and to try to escape by myself because she thought that she couldn't make it anywhere. She said she couldn't move. I said to her that I couldn't leave her, but she said that she couldn't even stand up. While we were talking, the sky started to grow lighter. Then, I heard water running in the lavatory. Apparently the water pipes had exploded. So I drew water with my helmet to pour over Ms. Asami's head again and again. She finally regained consciousness fully and went out of the building with me. We first thought to escape to the parade grounds, but we couldn't because there was a huge sheet of fire in front of us. So instead, we squatted down in the street next to a big water pool for fighting fires, which was about the size of this table. Since Hiroshima was completely enveloped in flames, we felt terribly hot and could not breathe well at all. After a while, a whirlpool of fire approached us from the south. It was like a big tornado of fire spreading over the full width of the street. Whenever the fire touched, wherever the fire touched, it burned. It burned my ear and leg, I didn't realize that I had burned myself at that moment, but I noticed it later.

INTERVIEWER: So the fire came towards you?

TAKAKURA: Yes, it did. The whirlpool of fire that was covering the entire street approached us from Ote-machi. So, everyone just tried so hard to keep away from the fire. It was just like a living hell. After a while, it began to rain. The fire and the smoke made us so thirsty and there was nothing to drink, no water, and the smoke even disturbed our eyes. As it began to rain, people opened their mouths and turned their faces towards the sky and try to drink the rain, but it wasn't easy to catch the rain drops in our mouths. It was a black rain with big drops.

INTERVIEWER: How big were the rain drops?

TAKAKURA: They were so big that we even felt pain when they dropped onto us. We opened our mouths just like this, as wide as possible in an effort to quench our thirst. Everybody did the same thing. But it just wasn't enough. Someone, someone found an empty can and held it to catch the rain.

INTERVIEWER: I see. Did the black rain actually quench your thirst?

TAKAKURA: No, no it didn't. Maybe I didn't catch enough rain, but I still felt very thirsty and there was nothing I could do about it. What I felt at that moment was that Hiroshima was entirely covered with only three colors. I remember red, black and brown, but, but, nothing else. Many people on the street were killed almost instantly. The fingertips of those dead bodies caught fire and the fire gradually spread over their entire bodies from their fingers. A light gray liquid dripped down their hands, scorching their fingers. I, I was so shocked to know that fingers and bodies could be burned and deformed like that. I just couldn't believe it. It was horrible. And looking at it, it was more than painful for me to think how the fingers were burned, hands and fingers that would hold babies or turn pages, they just, they just burned away. For a few years after the A-bomb was dropped, I was terribly afraid of fire. I wasn't even able to get close to fire because all my senses remembered how fearful and horrible the fire was, how hot the blaze was, and how hard it was to breathe the hot air. It was really hard to breathe. Maybe because the fire burned all the oxygen, I don't know. I could not open my eyes enough because of the smoke, which was everywhere. Not only me but everyone felt the same. And my parts were covered with holes.

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Testimony of Yoshito Matsushige

Yoshito Matsushige was a 32 year old cameraman for the Chugoku Newspaper at that time. He was at his home in Midori-cho, 2.7kilometers from the hypocenter when the A-bomb was dropped. He walked around the city right after the bombing and took five photographs which have become important historical documents.

MATSUSHIGE: I had finished breakfast and was getting ready to go to the newspaper when it happened. There was a flash from the indoor wires as if lightening had struck. I didn't hear any sound, how shall I say, the world around me turned bright white. And I was momentarily blinded as if a magnesium light had lit up in front of my eyes. Immediately after that, the blast came. I was bare from the waist up, and the blast was so intense, it felt like hundreds of needles were stabling me all at once. The blast grew large holes in the walls of the first and second floor. I could barely see the room because of all the dirt. I pulled my camera and the clothes issued by the military headquarters out from under the mound of the debris, and I got dressed. I thought I would go to either the newspaper or to the headquarters. That was about 40 minutes after the blast. Near the Miyuki Bridge, there was a police box. Most of the victims who had gathered there were junior high school girls from the Hiroshima Girls Business School and the Hiroshima Junior High School No. 1. they had been mobilized to evacuate buildings and they were outside when the bomb fell. Having been directly exposed to the heat rays, they were covered with blisters, the size of balls, on their backs, their faces, their shoulders and their arms. The blisters were starting to burst open and their skin hung down like rugs. Some of the children even have burns on the soles of their feet. They'd lost their shoes and run barefoot through the burning fire. When I saw this, I thought I would take a picture and I picked up my camera. But I couldn't push the shutter because the sight was so pathetic. Even though I too was a victim of the same bomb, I only had minor injuries from glass fragments, whereas these people were dying. It was such a cruel sight that I couldn't bring myself to press the shutter. Perhaps I hesitated there for about 20 minutes, but I finally summoned up the courage to take one picture. Then, I moved 4 or 5 meters forward to take the second picture. Even today, I clearly remember how the view finder was clouded over with my tears. I felt that everyone was looking at me and thinking angrily, "He's taking our picture and will bring us no help at all." Still, I had to press the shutter, so I harden my heart and finally I took the second shot. Those people must have thought me duly cold-hearted. Then, I saw a burnt streetcar which had just turned the corner at Kamiya-cho. There were passengers still in the car. I put my foot onto the steps of the car and I looked inside. There were perhaps 15 or 16 people in front of the car. They laid dead one on top of another. Kamiya-cho was very close to the hypocenter, about 200 meters away. The passengers had stripped them of all their clothes. They say that when you are terrified, you tremble and your hair stands on end. And I felt just this tremble when I saw this scene. I stepped down to take a picture and I put my hand on my camera. But I felt so sorry for these dead and naked people whose photo would be left to posterity that I couldn't take the shot. Also, in those days we weren't allowed to publish the photographs of corpses in the newspapers. After that, I walked around, I walked through the section of town which had been hit hardest. I walked for close to three hours. But I couldn't take even one picture of that central area. There were other cameramen in the army shipping group and also at the newspaper as well. But the fact that not a single one of them was able to take pictures seems to indicate just how brutal the bombing actually was. I don't pride myself on it, but it's a small consolation that I was able to take at least five pictures. During the war, air-raids took place practically every night. And after the war began, there were many foods shortages. Those of us who experienced all these hardships, we hope that such suffering will never be experienced again by our children and our grandchildren. Not only our children and grandchildren, but all future generations should not have to go through this tragedy. That is why I want young people to listen to our testimonies and to choose the right path, the path which leads to peace.

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