



Interview – The Atomic Bomb Survivor, Sakue Shimohira

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The day our lives were shattered by the bomb

By **Matt Jones**

Sakue Shimohira was barely 10 years old when the United States dropped an atomic bomb on her hometown of Nagasaki.

On the morning of August 9, 1945, Sakue and her family were hiding in an air raid shelter in the Aburagi district of the city, near the Catholic cathedral at Urakami.

Despite cloudy skies, the authorities were fearful of a bombing raid and had sounded an air raid alert. The feared raid didn't come, however, and when the all-clear signal was given, Sakue's mother left the shelter, telling the schoolgirl to wait inside for her. She never returned.

After Sakue's mother left the shelter, the American B-29 bomber Bockscar passed over Nagasaki, having abandoned plans to drop its atomic bomb on the primary target city of Kokura because of thick cloud.

Minutes later, at 11.02am, an atomic bomb nicknamed Fat Man exploded 500 metres above the northern part of the city, killing 73,884 people in an instant and injuring 74,909 more. Sakue's mother, elder brother and elder sister were among those killed.

Hiding in the shelter, Sakue, along with her younger sister and nephew, were only 800 metres from the bomb's hypocenter. In an interview with the *South Wales Echo*, Sakue now 60, recalled: "I remember only the flash and heat before I was knocked unconscious. I cannot say how long I was unconscious, but when I woke up I found people whose eyes and stomachs were hanging out.

"I didn't go outside the shelter until about midnight. I stayed next to the carbonised corpse of an adult for some kind of comfort, waiting for my mother to return. She never did. The strange thing was that out of everyone in the shelter, only the children and one Korean lady survived.

(more)

matt jones

Registered at Dubai Media City

Journalism • Photojournalism • Travel Writing • Scriptwriting • Copywriting • Press & Public Relations

matt jones

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“When we came out, our hair stood on end with shock at the devastation. Even at that time of night, it was still bright and we could see everything. Everything was nothing. The children I had once played with were scattered and the smell was very bad.”

Young Sakue eventually found the badly burned bodies of her mother and sister and cremated the remains. She said: “At first I reasoned that there could not be a God. But nevertheless I served water and burned incense in memory of the dead.”

The three young survivors took to the mountains, where Sakue, suffering nosebleeds, bleeding gums, hair loss, skin blotches and diarrhea, ate grass and longed to die.

The children then made their way to a relative’s house 20 kilometres away, but were separated because there wasn’t enough money to care for them all.

After a year living apart, the three youngsters returned to the shattered city. Gradually, more people returned and a new city rose like a phoenix from the ashes of the old.

Sakue, who now suffers from a bad back, a constant headache and a frequent desire to vomit, became a peace campaigner in 1979, after 34 years’ silence. A resident of Nagasaki, she travels the world, testifying for the Nagasaki Foundation for the Promotion of Peace, which is linked with the city’s Atomic Bomb Museum.

“In Nagasaki, I have witnessed the resilience of human beings,” she said.

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