

## 80th Anniversary Special Program in Hiroshima: Inheriting Hibakusha's Experiences into the Future, August 4

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### A-bomb Survivors in Utero and I

As of the end of March 2025, 6,403 A-bomb survivors in utero are holders of the Hibakusha health handbook issued by the government. By definition, A-bomb survivors in utero are those who were born before May 31, 1946 in Hiroshima or June 3, 1946 in Nagasaki, from mothers who had been directly exposed to A-bomb radiation. The holders include 11 people with microcephaly caused by strong radiation exposure at short distances (about 1.5 kilometers) while in womb (two to four months of pregnancy).

Let me first talk about my parents.

My father was receiving treatment for stomach cancer at the A-bomb hospital. On June 9, 1960, he was in critical condition. Voices from outside called "Teacher Mimura, hang in there". I looked down from the window and saw many people looking up at the hospital. Among them was a group of students shouting to cheer up my dying father. I was moved by their cheering. I felt tears rolling down my cheeks. My father passed away later on that day. He was 62. I learned that these students were members of a group Orizuru, or **folded paper cranes**, and that those who were looking up at the hospital window were participants in the 10,000-kilometer Great Peace March from Okinawa to Tokyo, organized by Gensuikyo. In that evening, about 4,000 peace marchers assembled in the concluding rally in the Peace Park. The Chugoku Shimbun reported: "Learning the death of Mr. MIMURA Shigeo, the marchers mourned and prayed for the rest of his soul in silence".

I joined the Orizuru group, to petition for the preservation of the A-bomb Dome, and take part in volunteer activities such as creating flower beds at the A-bomb Hospital or visiting bereaved hibakusha families that lost their loved ones.

My mother had been admitted in the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital since April. My aunt and I attended her at bedside in rotation. On November 28, she died of a uterine cancer. She had not been directly exposed to radiation, but affected on entering the city after the bombing. However, in 1960, people like my mother who were exposed

to A-bomb radiation after entering Hiroshima City were given the hibakusha health handbook that only entitled them to free health check-up, not free medical care. A new system on medical care for hibakusha was established in August 1960, which made those who were affected by the bomb within a two-kilometer radius of the hypocenter get free medical care, but my mother was in critical condition and not able to go to city hall to apply for a free medical care.

I was aware I was an A bomb orphan.( Actually, I became an orphan at age 15.) but I was not aware of myself being radiation victim because my mother died without applying for the hibakusha health handbook.

After studying social welfare at college, I began working as a social worker at Fukushima Seikyo Hospital. My job was to help hibakusha apply for a hibakusha health handbook, for the recognition of them being A-bomb victims, the recognition of their sicknesses as A-bomb diseases and for a nursing care allowance. In 1977, I worked as staff member for an International Symposium on the Damage and After-Effects of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and participated in historical research on hibakusha's lives.

On the government attitude towards the report of KIHONKON, "Forum on basic demands of the Hibakusha" issued on 11 December 1980, I joined a group of 20 hibakusha and social workers and sent a protest letter to Health Minister SONODA Sunao. After holding a meetings with hibakusha at Hiroshima YMCA, we declared the launch of an association to consult with A-bomb survivors for solving their most basic problems..

After that, I was engaged in MATSUYA Hideko's A-bomb lawsuit, friendship activities with victims of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, efforts to support hibakusha living abroad in their lawsuits and class action lawsuit for official recognition of A-bomb diseases, and support activity for Fukushima Nuclear Power plant accident victims and MSW. Every year on August 6, we have held a gathering to share hibakusha's testimonies. We have also organized a symposium or lecture meeting focusing on the Kihonkon.

In 1997 I began to work at Hiroshima Kyoritsu Hospital. I helped hibakusha living outside Japan such as in South Korea and Brazil to travel to Japan for medical treatment. I assisted hibakusha for applying for hibakusha certificate while carrying out work for the secretariat of the association of hibakusha who are health and welfare cooperative members. Through these activities I have become more and more aware that I am also a "hibakusha." It was when I wrote an article titled "About my friend 'M'" for the last issue of the association's magazine "Burnt by the A-Bomb (Pica)" published in July 2005. With this, I could stop feeling uneasiness from being a

hibakusha that had haunted me.

Eight years later, in March 2013, thanks to my brother who at long last discovered a witness for me, I was able to get a hibakusha health handbook. I immediately went to the atomic bomb-related investigation division at the city office to submit a request to register my mother MIMURA Chiyoko to the A-bomb victims.

On August 6 that year, the daily Mainichi Shimbun newspaper carried an article about “a 67-year-old woman obtaining hibakusha health handbook.” I was contacted by one of my elementary school classmates living in Kagawa Prefecture. It led me to the formation of an organization of A-bomb survivors in utero. On August 5, 2014, 22 people from five prefectures—Hiroshima, Tokyo, Nara, Kagawa, and Ehime—met in Hiroshima city to launch the National Liaison Council of A-bomb survivors in utero.

Participants in the formation of the association discussed the A-bomb experiences of their mothers and families. They also expressed their wish as A-bomb survivors in utero and their expectations for the Council.

Let me speak about what “Ms T” told us. Her mother was 26 years old and five month pregnant. On August 6, she left her home in the city to get food. She was near Hiroshima Station at the time of the bombing. Pieces of broken glass in the blast stuck into her both eyes and she lost her sight. Ms.T was born in January the following year. Her mother struggled so hard to become a masseuse and bring up her five children. When Ms.T got married in 1969, her mother gently laid her hand on the bride’s headdress to ascertain her daughter’s wedding outfit. Ms.T said she wished her mother could have seen her in bride dress. Her mother said she was sorry for all the trouble her loss of sight might have caused to her daughter. Ms.T said these words still linger in her ears. She also said that her mother experienced a lot of hardships due to the atomic bombing. She therefore was determined to pass on to younger generations the story of her mother so as to keep her memory alive as the proof of her life on the earth.

The association has now a membership of 82 from 19 prefectures. In August every year, it organizes a meeting of A-bomb survivors in utero. This year we hold its 12th meeting. We not only share experiences among the members but also organize fieldwork at historic A-bomb remains, give testimonies, and collect signatures in support of the elimination of nuclear weapons.

In August 2015, to mark the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings, we published a book entitled “Thoughts on the 70th Anniversary of the A-bombings” compiling the

stories of 18 Hibakusha to pass on their experiences onto younger generations. We also published the English translation of the book in August 2017. Five years later, in 2020, we published a book entitled "Hibakusha since we were born" compiling the stories of 47 A-bomb survivors in utero, including 5 people with microcephaly. In 2024, its English translation was published with the help from the student organization AOGIRI. Their 4 digital books are made free and open to public.

I definitely want to take this opportunity to tell you about A-bomb classes of Shiroyama Elementary school near the Ground Zero in Nagasaki.

In this elementary school, there were five classes for each grade. One of these classes was made up of 20 children who were exposed to A-bomb in utero and another 20 non-exposed children. Another class was composed of 20 exposed when babies and 20 others who had no relation with atomic bomb. The composition of these two classes remained unchanged for six years. The children of these two classes were regularly taken to the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission, or ABCC, which is now called the Radiation Effects Research Institute. The ABCC carried out comparative studies on exposed children and those non-exposed through measuring height and weight, examining blood, eyeballs, fatigue levels, physical ability, academic achievement, and mental faculties. These examinations were conducted without the consent of their parents. It was actually part of research for military purposes. What is more, an article written by the ninth principal of the school to mark the 40th year since the atomic bombing said the findings of the research on the school children showed that mental faculties and physical strength of the exposed children were inferior to non-exposed children. It was a statement that violated human rights and is unacceptable today. While many of the classmates keep silent about what had happened, a woman called "Ms.N" pointed out the absurdity of such research when she attended a meeting of A-bomb survivors in utero. She condemned it in her story carried in the book "Hibakusha since we were born".

In concluding, I want to say that we did not experience atomic bombing directly, but we are hibakusha since we were born. However, some of us who have heard about our mothers' A-bomb experience, about how our fathers, sisters and brothers died in the bombing and how our relatives were exposed to atomic bomb radiation, we can tell these stories as our own so that they are passed on to the next generations. We can tell how we have lived as A-bomb survivors in utero to this day and how we wish to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons. We can also participate in signature collection and rallies. In this way, we will keep making progress in solidarity with you. Thank you for your attention.

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