Hibakusha Shizuko Abe Speaks

Through Sorrow, Through Suffering, I'm Glad I Lived

By Shizuko Abe and the Hiroshima Letters Research Group

Prologue

I am deeply grateful that you have written this book about me. At the age of 97, you have awakened memories that were beginning to fade and brought them to life in print. I am truly indebted to you for your extraordinary care and support.

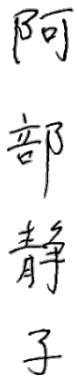
Looking back, I was exposed to the atomic bomb at a young age. It left scars on my precious face, and I suffered quietly as a woman. The atomic bomb inflicted hardship on each person in their own way. Even a relatively primitive bomb brought about immense sorrow. I witnessed a hell so unimaginable that I wondered if such a thing could truly happen in this world.

If a modern, powerful nuclear weapon were ever used, the devastation would far surpass that of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. According to a simulation by a foreign researcher, a single nuclear bomb dropped on central Tokyo would result in an estimated death toll of over 11 million. In Hiroshima, it is said that approximately 140,000 people died between August 6, 1945 and the end of the year. Even that level of destruction, unimaginable in our world, left people with lifelong wounds and forced entire families to live out their lives in sorrow.

No one wants to hear about others' suffering and sadness—it pains the heart. But the fear that our experiences may soon be repeated is growing. As someone who has wept because of the atomic bomb, I raise my voice and ask the world to listen.

Nuclear weapons must never, under any circumstances, be used in today's world. Simply possessing them does not ensure peace or security. If they are ever used, humanity faces extinction. If they must never be used, then they must be abolished. This is the heartfelt wish of those who have suffered lifelong pain from the atomic bomb.

Shizuko Abe



Notes

- Shizuko Abe's testimony was recorded a total of 13 times between May 1 and October 2, 2024, in her room at Hiroshima Hakkei-en (a nursing home in Minami Ward, Hiroshima City) where she lives. Additional interviews were conducted on October 17.
- Quotations from Abe's diary and letters regarding her time on the Hiroshima-Nagasaki World Peace Pilgrimage are reproduced as originally written, with punctuation added as appropriate. "/" indicates an omission in the quotation.
- Editor's notes have been inserted into the text, enclosed in parentheses. Explanations of people and events related to the testimony are provided in separate paragraphs, and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum is referred to in the text as the "Atomic Bomb Museum," which is the term commonly used.
- Photographs without credit were provided by Ms. Abe or her family.
- "An Abbreviated Chronology of Shizuko Abe's Life," has been appended, highlighting key events introduced in this text. The dates of death for family members were confirmed through available records or tombstone inscriptions, and ages at death are listed in full years.
- An "Afterword" has also been included, describing the circumstances that lead to the creation of this book.

Cover photograph of Shizuko Abe taken August 6, 2024 by Manabu Hamaoka.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Shizuko Abe helped lay the foundation for the appeals and activism that continue among atomic bomb survivors today.

On August 6, 1945, she was exposed to the world's first atomic bomb. In 1952, following the end of the U.S.-led occupation of Japan, she joined a group of atomic bomb survivors who were struggling through difficult times and shared her own experiences. In 1956, she helped deliver the first petition to the National Diet by atomic bomb survivors and took part in the founding conferences of both the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organizations and the subsequent Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations.

In 1964, during the Cold War, she traveled across the United States as part of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki World Peace Pilgrimage, sharing her experiences and thoughts, and visited Europe as well as the former Soviet Union. From the 1980s onward, she remained active in testimony work, appealing for the abolition of nuclear weapons and a world without war to audiences ranging from school students to world leaders and disarmament officials.

Shizuko Abe has lived through the very history of Hiroshima, where an atomic bomb exploded above human heads. As the 80th anniversary of the bombing approaches, we take a close look at Ms. Abe’s life and hear her story in detail. She will turn 98 on February 22, 2025.

Around December 1943, wedding photo of Saburo Abe and Shizuko. The groom was 25 years old and the bride was 16 years old. Due to her husband's return to military duty, their honeymoon lasted only about a week, and they were reunited at the end of 1945.

1. The Atomic Bombing

She was 18 years old. When the U.S. military dropped the first atomic bomb in history on the city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, Shizuko Abe was about 1.5 kilometers southeast of the hypocenter, just below the explosion. She was in the city center that day in response to a request received on Sunday evening, the previous day.

At the time of the bombing, I was living in a rented house in Sunabashiri, an area of Nakano Village in Aki District *(now, Aki Ward, Hiroshima City)* together with my husband's mother. The house stood near the village border with Sunabashiri in Oku-Kaita Village *(now, Kaita Town, Aki District)*, where my parents lived. The house was an outbuilding of a general store that sold rice, miso, and other daily goods.

I had an arranged marriage with Saburo Abe around the end of 1943. One week later, he returned to his unit *(9th Company, 8th Artillery Regiment, 8th Division)* stationed in Mudanjiang Province, Manchuria *(now, Heilongjiang Province, China)*. He was nine years older than me. The plan was for his mother *(Naye, born in 1891)* and me to join him in Manchuria in the spring, but the worsening war situation made that impossible. My mother-in-law was originally from Tenno Town *(now, Kure City)*, but she had lived in Osaka for many years and had taught flower arrangement. As it was wartime, there was no room for leisure. I went to work at a naval factory *(11th Naval Aviation Arsenal)* located where Kaita Junior High School now stands. The plant manager was a relative on the Dairiki side of my family. I did secretarial work, and when air raid warnings were issued, I would use a megaphone to relay the warning throughout the factory.

I ended up participating in building demolition work in Hiroshima because of my involvement with, what was then known as a *tonarigumi*. *(In 1940, the Ministry of Home Affairs organized these associations as the smallest unit of neighborhood associations. They were used to distribute ration coupons for food and other goods, and to promote mutual surveillance among members.)*

On the evening August 5, a regular assembly of the tonarigumi was held. The group leader conveyed an order from the Nakano village office: “Send some people from Sunabashiri for building demolition work.” Since our household consisted only of my mother-in-law and me, we hadn’t been able to carry out previous orders, such as producing a certain amount of pine root oil *(by digging up old pine stumps and distilling them in a charcoal kiln due to the gasoline shortage)*, or providing dried grass for horse feed. Our neighbors had been covering our share

and helping us fulfil our duties to the tonarigumi. I lived with a sense of shame and kept a low profile. So, when the call came for demolition work in Hiroshima, I immediately raised my hand, thinking that if I could be of service, I should go.

When I got home and told my mother-in-law what had been said at the meeting, she firmly objected. “We’ve already given Saburo to the nation,” she said. “There’s no need for you to go as well.” But as I mentioned earlier, I had long been burdened by a sense of guilt, so I went with her reluctant approval. Since I made the decision so suddenly the night before, I had no way to contact the munitions factory where I worked, and I ended up being absent without permission.

The next day was August 6, and we gathered early in the morning at Aki-Nakano Station on the Sanyo Main Line. Including me—the youngest member of the group—there were five or six people from our neighborhood, though the total number with us was higher. I wore a short-sleeved blouse, navy blue overalls, and a hat I had sewn myself. I brought a lunch box, but forgot my water bottle. *(According to* The History of Senogawa Town, *published in 1980 after the post-war merger of Nakano Village and other areas, 75 people from the village took part).*

Trains back then moved very slowly. I believe we boarded at Aki-Nakano Station a little before 7 a.m. *(According to the January 1945 revision of the timetable held by the National Diet Library, a trip to Hiroshima Station took 23 minutes when there were no delays.)*

After getting off at Hiroshima Station, we were led south on foot by someone from the village office. We simply followed directions as we were given, and arrived in Hiratsuka-cho *(now, an area of Naka Ward including Higashi-Hiratsuka-cho, Nishi-Hiratsuka-cho, and Tsurumi-cho)*. Back when I attended girls’ school *(Yasuda Girls’ High School in Nishi-Hakushima-cho)*, I used to commute by train from Aki-Nakano Station to Hiroshima, but I rarely ventured into the city center, except occasionally to visit Fukuya Department Store. I had never been to Hiratsuka before and I didn’t know the area at all. I believe our work site was on the west bank of the Kyobashi-gawa River, near the western end of the Tsurumi-bashi Bridge.

In the garden of the house we were demolishing, there was some shade beneath a tree. We left our bags containing our lunch boxes and air raid hoods there and began work, while an elderly person who had come with us watched.

Because I was young, I was ordered to climb up onto the roof, and I did. It was a time when you didn’t question orders. There were many junior high school boys and girls in the area, but we didn’t mix with them. We worked with the people from Nakano Villege, stacking roof tiles two at a time and passing them down. It was wartime, and even the roof tiles were a valuable resource.

> *The demolition of buildings in Hiroshima City was ordered by the government in November of the previous year, and it began in earnest in 1945. During the sixth phase of the clearance project, “evacuation spaces and roads” were to be created in areas such as Tsurumi-cho along the Kyobashi River, Zakoba-cho east of City Hall, and Nakajima-cho along the Hon-kawa River, in preparation for air raids by the U.S. military. Starting on August 3, a large-scale mobilization of Volunteer Citizen Corps and Student Corps members from across the prefecture was launched. Approximately*

30,000 members of the Volunteer Citizen Corps and 15,000 Student Corps members were deployed (according to the Chronicle of War Damage in Hiroshima Prefecture*, published in 1988, and other sources).*

At 8:15 on the morning of August 6, near Tsurumi Bridge, there were Volunteer Citizen Corps members from neighborhoods such as Onaga-machi and Kojin-machi in Hiroshima City, as well as from Nakano Village and Saka Village in Aki District. Also present were Student Corps members, including third-year students from First Hiroshima Prefectural Junior High School and first- and second-year students from Hiroshima Girls' Commercial School and Koryo Junior High School.

I was up on the roof of the single-story house, but I didn't notice the sound of the engines or see the approaching aircraft *(the B-29 Enola Gay, which dropped the atomic bomb, and the two accompanying planes)*.

I don't remember seeing the flash. When I came to, I had been blown off the roof and slammed onto the ground, my body covered in burns. Everything around me was dim, and there was a terrible smell—the smell of burning flesh. I don't know how many minutes had passed. I think I must have lost consciousness.

The burns were worst on the right side of my body. I think I had been facing the direction of the atomic bomb explosion *(above the hypocenter in Saiku-machi, now 1-chome, Otemachi, Naka Ward, at an altitude of about 600 meters)*. My palms were also burned because I had been holding roof tiles. The right side of my short-sleeved blouse had burned away and was in tatters. My navy-blue pants, which were nearly black, had lost the fabric over the legs, and the skin on my right thigh had been burned. They say black absorbs heat, but it was no use. Oh, the skin on my right arm was also hanging down.

I didn't have a watch. After what felt like a few minutes, the group leader who had come with me to the work site came looking for me. He was someone I had known since childhood. He was nine years older than me and had been in the same class as my third-oldest brother. He used to call me "Shi-chan" and was always kind to me. His name was Masashi Norisue. He found a piece of wood about a meter long and said, "You take one end, I'll take the other. Let's walk and get out of here." Mr. Norisue had burns too, but they were relatively light. I was the one who had gone out to work and suffered serious burns. I think, because we were neighbors, he felt a strong sense of responsibility.

I walked along, led by Mr. Norisue from the place where I had been blown down. I don't clearly remember whether we crossed Tsurumi-bashi Bridge or Hijiyama-bashi Bridge (on the south side). When the Kyobashi-gawa River came into view, I saw many people gathered there with burns and other injuries. I also saw people jumping into the river or clinging to the bridge railing, perhaps trying to avoid another bombing. I believe that those who entered the river to cool off ended up dying.

I just wanted to get home as quickly as possible. I think I was walking slowly, but I didn't stop to rest. It was not easy to walk in the heat of the day without a hat, with my body badly burned. I had worn shoes with rubber soles, made of canvas, which I had received as rations at the munitions factory. But I wasn't wearing them when I escaped with Mr. Norisue. They must

have come off when I was blown down. There was no time to search for them. Desperate to survive, I fled in just my socks and kept walking.

My face was swollen, and my vision was impaired. Along the way, I saw people trapped under the wreckage of their homes, their arms and legs pinned by beams and pillars, unable to move. I heard their voices crying, “Help! Help...” but there was nothing I could do. I was overwhelmed just trying to survive myself.

I don't remember where we went or what route we took. I just walked blindly along an unpaved road. Even though I had no shoes, I didn't feel the heat of the ground, and I was so desperate to escape that I hardly felt the pain of my injuries. Looking back now, I know I was only able to walk that far thanks to Mr. Norisue, who pulled me along with the piece of wood.

With the skin hanging from my body, I shuffled forward like a ghost. After a while, I heard a voice shouting through a megaphone: “We are providing medical treatment.” It was someone from Japan Steel Works *(located approximately 6.2 kilometers from the hypocenter, in Funakoshi-cho, Aki District, now Funakoshi-minami, Aki Ward)*.

As we got closer, we saw that the treatment involved nothing more than pouring oil into a bucket and brushing it onto the burned areas. There were no bandages or gauze to cover the wounds. Even so, I was deeply grateful. Normally, civilians were not allowed inside munitions factories. I believe the factory workers were doing this on their own initiative. They applied oil to my burns, and once I sat down, I couldn’t get back up.

> *According to* Chronicle of A-Bomb Damage in Hiroshima City, Vol.3*, published by Hiroshima City in 1971, the Hiroshima plant of Japan Steel Works, which manufactured anti-aircraft guns and ammunition, was closed that day due to a scheduled power outage. As a result, most of its employees were mobilized for building demolition work. The damage to the factory buildings was minor. The company opened its affiliated hospital to treat the many injured who arrived.*

The factory had a wide eave that provided shade, and by the time I arrived, the area was already full of people. Those with burns were lying down, and I found a small space where I could rest and lay down. I hadn’t had any water along the way. I had heard a rumor that people with burns would die if they drank water. Mr. Norisue also had oil applied to his burns, but we became separated there. After the war, we stayed in touch. He remained in good health even as his children grew up.

Even as I lay on my side with my eyes closed, I could hear a student murmuring deliriously: “Father... Mother...” His voice grew fainter and fainter. I could tell death was drawing near. I, too, had parents, and as I lay there, I couldn't help feeling a resentful thought: “Why hadn’t they come for me?”

I don’t remember the exact date, but my family says it was three days after the atomic bomb was dropped.

“Shizuko, Shizuko!” I heard someone calling my name. It was my father, Mankichi Dairiki *(born in 1880, 65 years old at the time)*. When I crawled slightly toward the direction of his voice, he kept asking me over and over, “Are you really Shizuko?” My face was so swollen from severe

burns that it looked like a pumpkin, and he couldn't believe I was his daughter. My father later told me that he had searched places like Hijiyama Hill, where many of the injured had gathered, but couldn't find me. He had also stopped by the Japan Steel Works because there were many people there as well.

During that time, rice balls were distributed, but I couldn't eat them because my mouth was burned. After my father found me, he borrowed a handcart from the rice mill in Oku-Kaita Village. It was about one meter square, and I remember it being shaped like a wide "V" to keep my body from falling out. I clearly remember how the cart rattled and shook as it moved, and how the pain was so intense I cried.

At that time, my two older sisters—who were married—had returned home with their children after the air raid on Kure. My eldest sister, Sadayo, stayed in the living room with her two children and her mother-in-law, while my second sister, Misako—who was pregnant with her fourth child—stayed on the second floor of the outbuilding with her children. Since there was no place for me to rest there, my parents had no choice but to take me to the rented house in Nakano Village where my mother-in-law was living. My mother, Tsune *(born in 1882, then 62 years old)*, and my sisters came to treat me. However, the treatment was based on the belief that pureeing potatoes and applying them was good for burns. There was no doctor. It was also difficult to obtain even half a liter of cooking oil or gauze.

When the potato applied to my burns dried out and it was time to remove the gauze, I cried, "It hurts, it hurts!" My father reportedly said, "If it hurts her this much, she won't make it." But my sisters continued the treatment, saying, "She's alive, so we can't stop now." I later heard that while I was bedridden, I unconsciously sang "Umi Yukaba" in a loud voice. *("If I Go to Sea" was composed by Nobutoki Kiyoshi, and was widely known to the public as it was played at the beginning of radio broadcasts announcing Imperial Headquarters reports.)* About ten days after I returned home, the man who lived next door to the house I had rented in Hiroshima had died, but my family kept it from me. He had also gone into the city. I don't even remember whether I heard the Emperor's radio broadcast on August 15.

I was finally able to get up around the time of the Makurazaki Typhoon *(which struck on September 17)*. The rain and wind were so severe that the tatami mats on the first floor began to float, so my mother-in-law and I crawled up to the second floor. Mr. Norisue's younger brother, who had fled Hiroshima with us, lived across the street. He carried me on his back and let me stay on the second floor of his family's storehouse. We had planted rice together before. My parents' house was also flooded. It was a devastating typhoon. (There were 2,012 deaths mainly along the coastal areas of Hiroshima Prefecture.)

In late autumn, I crawled in front of the mirror and looked at my face. My whole face was red, my mouth was twisted, and my eyes were tight and distorted. Is this really me... The sight was so ugly that I thought it might have been better if I had just died then. Why hadn't I died? I cried. My mother-in-law had been washing my pus-stained yukata in the Seno-gawa River, but she blamed me, saying, "It's because you went to Hiroshima, even though I told you not to." Perhaps because she had lived in a big city for a long time, she wasn't the type of person who paid attention to relationships with neighbors.

My husband, who had been out of touch until then, returned to my parents' house on December 30th of that year. It was a major event for me, so I remember the date clearly. When I heard the news, my mother-in-law and I rushed to my parents' house. He had been demobilized after being sent from Manchuria to a distant island in the South Pacific *(Poluwat Atoll)*.

Before I arrived, still wrapped in bandages from my severe burns, my father and mother knelt down and made this request to my husband: “You took our daughter as your wife, but now she has been disfigured by the atomic bomb. Please, break it off with her now.” However, my husband spoke clearly in front of everyone: “Even if I had lost my arms and legs on the battlefield and returned alive, I would have counted on my wife to care for me. That thought gave me strength. I cannot divorce her just because she has been hurt.”

When the discussion came to an end, my mother-in-law said, “Shizuko, you should stay here.” But my husband said, “No, that won’t do. Come home,” and we went back together. I was so happy. Thanks to him, I was able to remain his wife until he passed away. *(Saburo Abe passed away in 1992 at the age of 73.)*

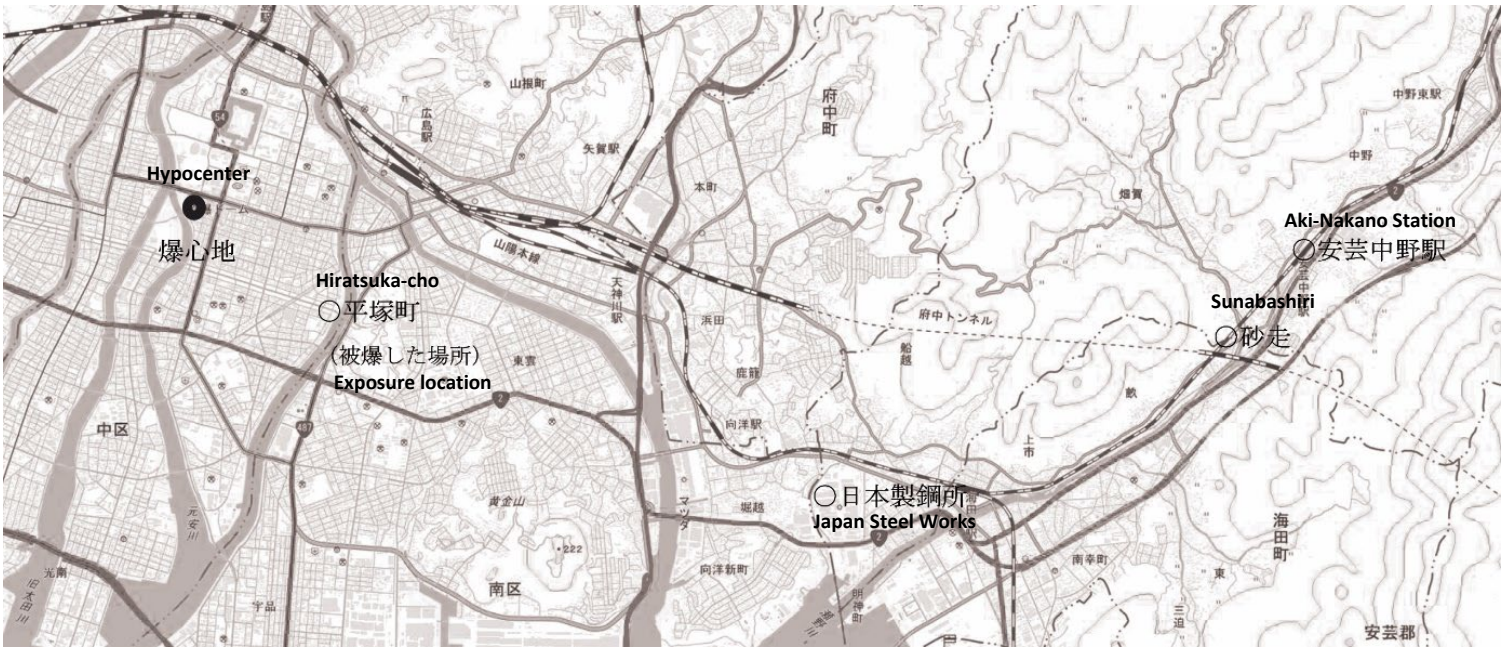
By that time, keloids had formed over my burn scars. I could no longer move the fingers on my right hand freely, and because of the keloids around my mouth, food would spill whenever I ate. I had no way of knowing what other effects the atomic bomb might bring. When I went outside, heartless people would casually say, “There goes the red ogre.” Even at home, my mother-in-law would try to send me back to my parents’ house whenever she had the chance. I felt sorry for my husband, but I spent each day with my head down, avoiding people, hiding myself so no one would see my injuries.

View of the center of the Hiroshima Delta, reduced to ruins by the atomic bomb, looking southeast. In the background, the Tsurumi-bashi Bridge spans the Kyobashi-gawa River on the left. In the foreground is the former Hiratsuka-cho district, where Abe was exposed to the atomic bomb while clearing debris as part of building demolition work.

(Photographed by H.J. Peterson, member of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey Photography Team, November 1945. Courtesy of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.)

Ruins of the Hiroshima Delta viewed from above Hijiyama Hill, looking west. On the right is Tsurumi-bashi Bridge, and on the left is Hijiyama-bashi Bridge, both spanning the Kyobashi-gawa River.

(Photographed by H.J. Peterson, November 1945. Courtesy of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.)



Map 1: Locations in Hiroshima in Shizuko Abe's Account
(Place names and landmarks have been added to a modern-day map.)

2 For Sorrow, For Suffering

August 10, 1956, in front of the Nagasaki International Culture Hall, the venue for the founding convention of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations.
Front row, from left: Seiko Ikeda, Shizuko Abe, and Yoshiko Murato.
Back row, center: Kiyoshi Kikkawa; to his right: Ken Kawate.
(From Kiyoshi Kikkawa's materials provided by Ikimi Kikkawa)

Interviewer: *Your husband, Saburo Abe, returned from the war in December 1945 and accepted you, despite the deep physical and mental scars you bore from the atomic bombing. Could you tell us again how you and your husband came to be together?*

Ms. Abe: My husband, Saburo Abe, was born in Yamagata Prefecture in 1918 and grew up in Osaka. He graduated from Tennoji Junior High School *(now Tennoji High School)*, and went on to study at an university of foreign languages *(then, Osaka School of Foreign Languages; now, Osaka University)*, but was drafted before he could graduate. After training at the Army Reserve Officers' Cadet School, he held the rank of second lieutenant when we were introduced for a potential marriage. At the time, he was stationed in Manchuria *(northeastern China)*, but returned to Japan temporarily to take a wife. He had relatives in Yano-cho *(now part of Aki Ward, Hiroshima City)*, so he visited them to pay his respects. A neighbor living next door to my family home in Sunabashiri, Oku-Kaita Village *(now Kaita-cho, Aki District)*, heard about his visit and arranged the match. I believe it was toward the end of 1943. My second eldest sister, who was living in Kure City, kindly lent me her wedding kimono, and we had our wedding photo taken at a studio in Yano-cho. We even performed the *san-san-kudo* ceremony *(a traditional ritual in which the bride and groom take three sips each from three sake cups)*, using rationed sake.

Interviewer: *At that time, you were 16 years old. Were you already working?*

Ms. Abe: That year, after graduating from a girls' school *(now, Yasuda Girls' High School)*, I attended the Doida Dressmaking School for Girls *(which was located in Kokutaiji-machi, Hiroshima City)*. My maiden name was Dairiki. I was the youngest of eight siblings—three older brothers and four older sisters. One of my sisters, the fourth daughter, passed away in childhood.

My husband apparently took a liking to me after secretly observing me helping my eldest brother, Kaname, unload firewood. Ever since my days at the girls' school, I had vaguely

admired military officers. We went to a movie theater together in Hiroshima City, but I don't remember the title of the film or the name of the theater. I was still young, after all. More than anything, my father, Mankichi *(born in 1880)*, was completely smitten with my husband. He gave his blessing right away, and we were married immediately.

About a week later, I saw him off at Hiroshima Station as he returned to his unit *(9th Company, 8th Artillery Regiment, 8th Division)*. The plan had been for me to move to Manchuria with my mother-in-law *(Saburo's mother, Naye, born in 1891)* once the harsh winter there had passed, but as the war intensified, we had to abandon that idea. It seems my husband tried to let us know where he was by sending a postcard *(via military mail)* using kana-based code, but we couldn't decipher it. We only learned that he had been sent to a place called Enderby Island *(Poluwat Atoll)*, far south of Mudanjiang Province in Manchuria *(now, Heilongjiang Province, China)*, after he returned to Japan. My husband had no idea what had happened to me during the atomic bombing, either.

> *According to With Fighting Spirit: History of the 102nd Unit, 9th Company (published in 1981), when Saburo Abe was company commander, he received orders in January 1944 for deployment to the South. After passing through Saipan Island in the western Pacific, the company landed on Enderby Island (Poluwat Atoll) in the Caroline Islands in March. When U.S. forces occupied Saipan, food supplies were cut off, and "even rats and lizards were eaten until none remained." On December 26, 1945, the unit returned to Yokosuka Port in Kanagawa Prefecture aboard a U.S. tank landing ship from Truk (Chuuk) Island.*

Interviewer: *After the atomic bombing, you began living with Saburo and his mother, Naye. What was daily life like for the three of you?*

Ms. Abe: Because my husband had been an officer *(he held the rank of captain when he was discharged)*, he was subject to the ban from public office *(following a directive issued to the Japanese government from General Headquarters of the Allied Forces GHQ in January 1946)*. A relative on the Dairiki side of my family had a lumber business in Hiroshima, and they let my husband help out there. Thanks to that, we were just barely able to make a living. My mother-in-law wanted me to return to my parents' home so she could go back to the familiar surroundings of Osaka with her only son. My husband had actually been taken in and raised by his mother when he was a child, and he felt deeply indebted to her. But he never once considered divorcing me. He was in a painful position, caught between loyalties and unable to take either side.

He must have had extraordinary patience to spend his life with a wife who had disfiguring keloid scars on her face and hands from the atomic bomb and disabilities. He never spoke of it in detail, but my husband had suffered terribly on the island, enduring things like dysentery and malnutrition. Whenever he spoke to me, he always called me "Shizuko-san." He never once dropped the "-san," not even at the very end.

Interviewer: *Did you receive treatment for your keloids?*

Ms. Abe: Yes, because I was pregnant. Washing diapers and baby clothes was a lot of work. At the time, we washed everything by hand in a tub and wrung it out by ourselves. My parents

arranged for me to undergo treatment so I could move the fingers on my right hand—even just a little. I was hospitalized for six months at the prefectural hospital in Ujina-machi *(Minami Ward)*, which was then called the Ujina Hospital of the Japan Medical Relief Corps. They grafted skin from my abdomen onto the back of my hand so that I could bend my fingers forward, and I eventually managed to use them. There were shortages of anesthetics and medications at the time, so the surgery was incredibly painful. The doctors were all former military physicians, but since the results weren't what they had hoped, the treatment was discontinued.

At the time, there was a bank deposit freeze *(in February 1946, the government, in an effort to curb hyperinflation, forced people to deposit five yen or more into financial institutions, freezing those deposits along with existing savings)*, so my father, Mankichi, and mother, Tsune, who were paying for my treatment, were under great strain. While I was in the hospital, I once quietly asked the obstetrician whether I should go through with the birth, without telling my husband. It was a nightmare. I even thought about how much easier things would be if my husband would just divorce me.

Interviewer: *~~Did~~ your husband, Saburo, ever say that he wanted a divorce?*

Ms. Abe: No. My parents asked him many times to leave me, but each time, he said, "I can't do that," and remained firm. He was a determined person. I also still had some feelings for him, so I think we just ended up living together without really making a decision.

Interviewer: *I'm sorry for asking such deeply personal questions.*

Ms. Abe: Please don't hesitate to ask. I believe I have been allowed to live this long so that young people can understand the horror and misery of the atomic bomb, as well as the preciousness of peace, through the experiences of people like me.

Interviewer: *What happened to push you to the point of feeling like you were living in a nightmare?*

Ms. Abe: My mother-in-law said that someone who had been exposed to the atomic bomb was "not suitable to be my daughter-in-law, so you should go back home," and tried to send me away. Even after my husband returned from the war, she opposed the registration of our marriage. There was also a rumor going around that people exposed to the atomic bomb would have short lifespans. Thanks to my husband's firm resolve, we were able to stay together, but we didn't officially register our marriage until our eldest son was born. However, she expressly told me, "I will raise this child, so please go back home." She said it repeatedly, even in front of my husband. When he said, "You can't do that," she lashed out, saying, "Saburo, you came back from the war and lost your mind. How can you keep such a woman as your wife?" My parents also said similar things: "Come back. If you do, the wind will blow in your favor." My husband stood by me, but life with my mother-in-law was filled with hardships. Even as my due date approached, she did not prepare a single diaper or baby garment.

Interviewer: *Was it not possible for you and your husband to live on your own without your mother-in-law?*

Ms. Abe: Back then, it was normal for children to care for their parents, and we didn't have the financial means to think otherwise. When I gave birth to my eldest son, we were living in a house rented from a friend of my eldest brother, Kaname. I believe it was near what is now the Self-Defense Forces Camp Kaitaichi *(Kaita-machi)*. There were leftover pieces of lumber from Japanese military warehouses and other buildings dismantled by the occupying forces, and Kaname—who worked as an interpreter—managed to secure some for me. Kaname had immigrated to the United States and had returned to Japan to show his eldest son—born there—to our parents. However, the war between Japan and the United States broke out, and he was unable to return. When he heard about the Pearl Harbor attack on the radio, he said, "Japan won't win." He had personally seen the prosperous life in the United States.

When my eldest son turned one, we rented a slightly elevated plot of land in Oku-Kaita Village and built a house there from the lumber scraps. We had learned our lesson from the flood *(caused by the Makurazaki Typhoon in September 1945)*. My husband worked at the lumberyard and did physical labor to support our family. Our second son was born *(in 1949)*. Saburo had injured his back lifting heavy loads and was almost unable to work, but with the lifting of the ban on holding public office following the enactment of the peace treaty *(in 1952)*, he was able to take the prefectural civil service exam and, fortunately, passed.

Interviewer: *It was around that time you wrote a personal account at the request of Tomoe Yamashiro, wasn't it? I will now read an excerpt from your account, titled "Letter from a Friend," which was included anonymously in the book* Surviving the A-bombing *(published in 1953).*

> "Lately, I've been going to the mountains every day. Living in the countryside, I have to gather firewood for the whole year during this cold season. It's the hardest work there is. My right hand is disabled, so I can't put much strength into cutting wood. And when I carry it, the poor circulation makes the keloid on my hand ache and itch terribly. But working is the only thing I have going for me, so I throw myself into it as best I can.
>
> If you would kindly let me know a time and place that suits you, I don't have much free time, but I'll do whatever I can to come.
>
> Please take very good care of yourself.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Eriko."

Interviewer: *This "Eriko" is you, isn't it?*

Ms. Abe: Yes, that's right. I wanted someone to hear what I was feeling, so I wrote it at Ms. Yamashiro's urging. But when the book arrived in the mail, I burned it right away in the firebox for heating bathwater. I didn't want my mother-in-law to see it. That's why I didn't show it to my husband, either. Whenever Ms. Yamashiro came to visit, I was usually out of the house, working in the mountains or the fields. Since my mother-in-law would answer the door, Ms. Yamashiro didn't feel comfortable dropping by, so we ended up exchanging letters, and that's how the piece came to be. The name "Eriko" was something Ms. Yamashiro thoughtfully chose for me. Because it was published anonymously, no one around me realized it was mine. Yes,

there's no doubt—it's my writing. I reread it again this summer for the first time in a long while, and I saw that nothing had been embellished (*during the compilation process*).

> *"Surviving the A-bombing" was compiled by five individuals, including the writer Tomoe Yamashiro and Ken Kawate, who served as secretary-general of the Atomic Bomb Survivors Association, formed on August 10, 1952. According to Yamashiro's preface, the following day they discussed "visiting the homes of victims directly to request their participation." As a result, 27 personal accounts were gathered. At the time, now often referred to as the "blank decade," there was no government assistance for victims whose bodies and minds had been scarred by the atomic bomb, and little public concern for their suffering. The unfiltered voices of atomic bomb survivors from this neglected era are recorded in the volume. Contributors include figures such as Shojiro Shimamoto, Michiyoshi Nukushina, and Shinobu Hizume, who later helped establish the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organizations established in 1956.*
>
> *The second half of Shizuko Abe's account, written under the name "Eriko," is reproduced here exactly as it appeared in the original.*

That autumn, my eldest son was born into our unsettled household. My mother-in-law would constantly make cutting remarks at my bedside. As a first-time mother with a disability, I was especially weak and could barely manage to get up for the 33-day shrine visit. My eldest son was frail from birth and was frequently taken to see a doctor. My mother-in-law would say things like, "He's just like his mother," or "The baby born around the same time in the neighborhood is healthy and hasn't once needed a doctor," directing these remarks at me. She would even discuss my son's frailty openly in front of the neighbors, making sure I could hear her.

My eldest son's frailty was not caused by the atomic bomb. Even if I had been a healthy mother, something like this could have happened by chance. But my mother-in-law immediately linked it to my exposure and made a fuss about it, lamenting it as a lifelong misfortune. When she did that, I felt like digging a hole and hiding in it.

I was told that the shrine visit should take place in my pearents' home, so I waited anxiously for the 30th day to arrive, then set off for my pearents' home with my son on my back. Along the way, three young men who looked like gangsters saw me and said loudly, "Hey, even a woman like her has had a child," and laughed heartily. Please try to imagine how I felt at that moment. I had chosen a quiet path with few people and set out to avoid being seen. I walked with a heavy heart, already saddened by the thought of simply being looked at by others. And yet, as I walked along the embankment, tears welled up and spilled down my face. When I saw children of the villege, they would say, "A beggar is passing by." Thinking about the future of my eldest son, growing up with a mother like me, I felt deeply discouraged.

Although my appearance had worsened, it wasn't as if anything inside me had changed. And yet, people judge everything about me based solely on how I look. How shallow that is! Most people take one look at me and see someone two or three ranks beneath them. Day by day, I lose confidence in myself and have gradually become someone who keeps quiet and casts her eyes downward.

The world is gradually becoming more peaceful, more prosperous, and more beautiful, but I am filled with loneliness, as if I've been left behind by everyone else. I dwell on the injuries that will never heal. Whenever I see husbands and wives together playing with their children, I feel my own loneliness even more deeply. And I find myself thinking how precious those children are who have never known the joy of going out with both their parents. I often find myself staring at my reflection in the mirror, feeling as though I am trapped in a nightmare, unable to believe that I must accept my role as a perpetual outsider. After all, I am indeed physically impaired, and I must live with this sorrow for the rest of my life. It feels as though this sorrow grows heavier with each passing year.

I hadn't even been to Hiroshima once in the past three months, because I had just been mobilized for labor work and because I was too honest and patriotic, I ended up with this fate.

I now lament my own powerlessness. Still, I wish to do all I can to help. And to those who feel moved by this truthful appeal, I ask for your support for the victims of the atomic bomb.

Interviewer: *How did Ms. Yamashiro come to know about you in the first place?*

With the establishment of the Atomic Bomb Victims Association in 1952, Abe also began visiting the Atomic Bomb Victim No. 1 Shop. After being discharged from Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital in 1951, Kiyoshi Kikkawa opened a souvenir shop in a makeshift shack near the Atomic Bomb Dome, where he also set up the association's office. *(From Kiyoshi Kikkawa's materials provided by Ikimi Kikkawa)*

Ms. Abe: I remember meeting her at Mr. Kikkawa's house. Ms. Yamashiro was also there and asked everyone gathered to write their personal accounts. I refused several times—saying I couldn't write—but I still felt a strong desire for someone to hear my story.

Interviewer: *Mr. Kiyoshi Kikkawa, who called for the establishment of the Atomic Bomb Survivors Association, also served as its executive director, correct? Incidentally, in his book,* I was called 'Atomic Bomb Victim No. 1' *(published in 1981), Mr. Kikkawa writes that he had maintained a close relationship with you since 1952. How did you two first meet?*

Ms. Abe: I don't remember the exact date, but I think it was during the summer of that year. My mother, my eldest son, and I went to Hiroshima City and watched the fireworks display from Aioi-bashi Bridge, if I recall correctly. *(On August 9 and 10, 1952, the Hiroshima River Festival was held along the banks of the Motoyasu-gawa River near the Atomic Bomb Dome.)* On the way back, we noticed a piece of paper hanging outside a souvenir shop near the dome. *(The storefront sign read "Atomic Bomb Victim No. 1 Shop")*. The paper said, "Please speak to me if you are an atomic bomb survivor," so we went inside and met Mr. Kikkawa and his wife, Ikimi, for the first time. I didn't know that Mr. Kikkawa was called "Atomic Bomb Victim No. 1" or about his activities. But when we spoke, I felt an unusual sense of closeness with him.

In its September 1, 1947 issue, the prominent American photo magazine Life *featured a special section on Hiroshima as a "Mecca for Peace," dedicating a full page to a*

photo of Kiyoshi Kikkawa, who was hospitalized at the Japanese Red Cross Hiroshima Hospital, showing his upper body covered in keloid scars. The way the photo was presented and the public reaction it received led to the nickname "Atomic Bomb Victim No. 1" spreading throughout Japan via newspapers and radio broadcasts. Kikkawa passed away in 1986 at the age of 74.

Ms. Abe: After meeting Mr. Kikkawa, I began visiting his shop *(which was also his home)* and talking with others who were suffering from the effects of the atomic bomb. I had nowhere else to turn, but whenever I went there, I found others like me, and it brought me peace of mind. One woman, who had burns on her back, was made to feel unwelcome at the public bathhouse. Other customers were disturbed by her appearance, and the person at the front desk told her not to come anymore. When Mr. Kikkawa saw her, he would heat the bath attached to his shack and let her use it. He was always kind to her.

My mother-in-law was happy when I wasn't at home. My children were still young, so I always took at least one of them with me when I went out. When my youngest was a baby, I carried her on my back. Little by little, the wounds in my heart began to heal. Sometimes, when I missed the last train on the Sanyo Main Line, I would take the final train on the Kure Line and walk home from Kaitaichi Station. When I attended meetings *(such as the "Atomic Bomb Survivors Association" or the "Friends of August 6" established in 1955)*, I didn't realize it at the time, but I would come home feeling a little more energized. Looking back, I think my heart felt lighter. I believe my mother-in-law tacitly approved. The Kikkawa couple—who had no children of their own—were very fond of my three children, so my husband also became close to them. When my second son got married *(in 1976)*, the couple served as matchmakers.

In 1952, the Allied occupation came to an end. That same year, the August 6 issue of the photo magazine Asahi Graph*, which claimed to offer "the first public disclosure of the atomic bomb damage," sold 700,000 copies. Director Kaneto Shindo's film* Children of Hiroshima*, the first film to shoot on location in Hiroshima, was also released, further fueling public interest in the atomic bombing.*

Kikkawa and others formed the "Atomic Bomb Survivors Association," which called for measures such as free medical examinations at Hiroshima Citizens Hospital. The group advocated for "hibakusha to unite and organize a peace movement" toward the abolition of atomic bombs (from "Half a Year's Footsteps" by Ken Kawate, included in Surviving the A-Bombing*). Abe wrote anonymously, "I spoke with four or five injured people in my village and encouraged them to join the survivors' association."*

Interviewer: When you attended meetings of the Atomic Bomb Survivors Association and encouraged others to join, did you ever worry that your neighbors might see you as a communist? Did your husband, Saburo, say something to you about it?

Ms. Abe: It was a small movement at the time, the atomic bomb movement. I lived with my head down so that my scars wouldn't be seen. I didn't do anything that would draw attention from others. It was a gathering where my friends comforted me and encouraged me. My husband was glad to see me brighten up and regain my energy. He never told me not to go.

Interviewer: At a time when it was rare for women of your generation to be active outside the home, what motivated a housewife—living with her mother-in-law—to join a group of atomic bomb survivors and travel to Tokyo in March 1956 to submit the first petition to the Diet?

Ms. Abe: I couldn't take it anymore. I wanted someone to comfort me, but instead, even people I didn't know would bully me—saying things like, "Look, the red ogre is out walking around." It was unbearable. I felt like I was going to explode. So, I thought if there's a chance to speak out, I want to take it. I want to go, and I want to go with courage. Mr. Higaki—who lived nearby—came to my house many times, earnestly asking me to go with him to submit that first petition to the Diet. My mother-in-law, Naye, overheard him and said, "If Mr. Higaki is the one asking, then you should go." It felt like little by little, she was starting to come around. I suppose there was no other choice. My husband was strong-willed, and I'm tenacious. I guess what really helped was that whenever I came back from spending time with people like Mr. Kikkawa and Mr. Higaki, I always felt energized.

> *Masuto Higaki was exposed to radiation on August 6, 1945, in the underground passageway of Hiroshima Station while on his way to work at the Kaita Regional Office of Hiroshima Prefecture. At the time, his home was in Otemachi (Naka Ward), and his wife and fifth daughters all died in the bombing. He played a central role in organizing the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organizations. He also served as chairman of the Aki District Confederation of A-Bomb Suffers Organizations and the Kaita Town A-Bomb Sufferers Association, which he helped establish in July 1956. From 1961, he served as secretary-general of the confederation for 23 years. He died in 1990 at the age of 94.*

Interviewer: *On the day before traveling to Tokyo to submit a petition to the Diet, the Conference of A-Bomb Sufferers in Hiroshima Prefecture was held on March 18, 1956, at the Senda Elementary School auditorium (Naka Ward), with about 300 people in attendance. The conference issued a declaration stating that "the first priority must be to establish treatment methods for atomic bomb sickness, rather than conducting atomic bomb and hydrogen bomb tests," and voiced support for the delegation submitting the petition. (Chugoku Shimbun, March 19, 1956)*

On August 6, 1955, Abe attended the first World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs held at Hiroshima City Auditorium, which had just been completed in Peace Memorial Park, holding her eldest daughter *(front)* in her arms, along with Tokie Kawamoto *(far left)*. *(From Collection of Materials on the Movement to Ban Nuclear Weapons, Volume 2)*

Ms. Abe: I was invited to the conference, but I didn't speak. I joined the petition to the Diet because Mr. Higaki came to my house several times and persuaded my mother-in-law. However, since she said she couldn't manage all three children *(my eldest daughter was born in 1954)*, I decided to take my second son *(who was six at the time)* with me. I put on the kimono I had brought with me when I married and boarded the express train *Aki* bound for Tokyo. *(It left Hiroshima Station at 2:30 PM on the 19th and arrived at Tokyo Station at 9:05 AM on the 20th.)*

Following the Bikini Atoll incident in which 23 crew members of the tuna fishing boat Daigo Fukuryu Maru (Lucky Dragon No. 5) were exposed to "ashes of death" during a U.S. hydrogen bomb test in the central Pacific Ocean in 1954, the first World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs was held in Hiroshima on August 6, 1955, and the Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs was established in September of the same year.

Members of the 1956 delegation of Hiroshima atomic bomb survivors petitioning the Diet. Heiichi Fujii *(center)* would become the first secretary-general of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations. In the front row, third from the left, is Shojiro Shimamoto, who later became a director of the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organizations. To the right of Shimamoto is Abe's second son, and she is on his right. At the far left of the back row is Ichiro Kawamoto, who later called for the construction of the Children's Peace Monument *(unveiled in 1958)*.

The first petition to the Diet by atomic bomb survivors, on March 20, 1956, was initiated by the Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs*. According to Issue 6 of* A- & H-bomb Abolition News *(published on April 1, 1956), the petition group of atomic bomb survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki consisted of 41 people (including 17 women). Along with about 10 representatives from Aomori, Nagano, and other regions, they divided into groups to meet with the speakers of both houses of the Diet, calling for a ban on hydrogen bomb testing in the Pacific and for state funding of medical treatment for atomic bomb survivors.*

Interviewer: *Looking at the news footage and photographs taken at Tokyo Station, the camera captures people with keloid scars, especially young women, wearing sashes reading "Atomic Bomb Survivor." You were 29 years old at the time.*

Ms. Abe: As a representative from Hiroshima, I knew it was inevitable that I would be photographed, but I didn't feel good about it. The scars from the burns on my face were bright red. I suppose I just endured it. It couldn't be helped. Even now, when light hits my face, the deformities stand out even more. When I see photos in the newspapers and videos on TV, I feel like crying. However, the experience gave me the courage to live the rest of my life as a scarred witness to the atomic bomb. I believe this courage was born out of pain and sadness, but also through taking action with everyone else.

Interviewer: *On the following day, March 21, an article reported that twenty people visited Mrs. Kaoru Hatoyama at the residence of Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama (Otowa, Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo). The headline read "Tears and Pleas to Mrs. Hatoyama by Representatives of Atomic Bomb Survivors' Women," and the article states that you spoke on behalf of the group (Chugoku Shimbun, March 22, 1956)*.

On March 21, 1956, Abe (third from right) visited Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama's private residence and greeted Mrs. Hatoyama (front left) on behalf of the women from Hiroshima. She went to Tokyo with her second son. Next to him on the right is Yoshiko Murato.

Ms. Abe: Mrs. Hatoyama said she would convey our message to her husband. The article mentions, “holding the hand of the only child,” but the child I brought with me was my second son. Mrs. Hatoyama was kind, and there is a photo of her offering castella to him.

Before going to the Hatoyama residence, I visited Hayato Ikeda *(born in Takehara City, former Minister of Finance, and Prime Minister from 1960 to 1964)* at his home *(located in Shinano-cho, Shinjuku Ward)*. Mr. Ikeda listened to our stories of hardship and was moved to tears. At the end, he murmured, “Japan is weak against America, you know.” I felt that we had endured ten years of suffering because we were unable to stand up to America. Atomic bomb survivors are physically weak, easily catch colds, face discrimination, feel ashamed, and have family troubles. It was truly a harsh time. Hearing Mr. Ikeda’s words, I was filled with a sense of helplessness and the many difficulties ahead for the movement.

Interviewer: *Even now, would you say that what remains strongest in your memory is the feeling of disappointment—even though you had taken a stand?*

Ms. Abe: I felt I couldn't just sit back and be ignored. Even though we went to the Diet to submit our petition, we didn't receive any encouraging response. On the train ride home *(departing Tokyo Station at 9:30 p.m. after submitting the petition and finishing the visits)*, I wrote the poem “For Sorrow, For Suffering” to express what I was feeling in my heart.

For sorrow, for suffering,
For hibakusha who have long forgotten how to laugh,
Extend a warm helping hand
Like the rays of sun at 10 a.m.
So that they may go on feeling
that it is good to be alive.

I hadn’t studied poetry at all back in girls' school. The words just came to me all of a sudden. I wrote down the cries of my heart on a scrap of paper and showed it first to Mr. Fujii, who was sitting across from me, saying, “This is how I’m feeling right now.” After returning to Hiroshima, Mr. Fujii apparently shared it with some people at a newspaper company, and from there it began to spread. Someone even put music to it. Submitting that petition to the Diet was the first time I had the chance to meet Mr. Fujii up close. Showing him that poem became the starting point of our relationship, and from then on, he looked out for me and took an interest in how my children were growing up. My second son later went on to Waseda University, just like Mr. Fujii. When Mr. Fujii attended the Tomonkai Alumni Association's commemorative

conference as the Hiroshima branch representative, he invited my second son, who was already working by then, to come along.

Heiichi Fujii lost his father and younger sister in the atomic bombing. He ran his family's specialty lumber shop and, through his work as a Hiroshima City welfare commissioner, became deeply aware of the suffering of atomic bomb survivors. He was among the first to advocate for national compensation for atomic bomb survivors, saying, "Give us proper support!" On May 27, 1956, following the petition to the Diet, he helped establish the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organizations and became one of its representative committee members. On August 10, with the formation of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations (Nihon Hidankyo), he also served as its first secretary-general. Together with Ichiro Moritaki (then a professor at Hiroshima University), a fellow representative committee member, he helped lay the foundation for and lead the atomic bomb survivor movement. He died in 1996 at the age of 80.

On May 27, 1956, the founding general meeting of the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organizations was held at the YMCA Auditorium in Motomachi, Hiroshima. Standing and giving a speech is Heiichi Fujii, who was appointed as a representative committee member. (Photo taken and provided by Chugoku Shimbun)

Interviewer: *About two months after the first petition to the Diet, the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organizations was formed. This was followed by the founding of the Aki District Confedaration of A-Bomb Sufferers Orgaizations on July 18 and the Kaita Town A-Bomb Sufferers Association on July 24. According to records, membership in the Aki District group surpassed 4,600, and Kaita Town had 234 members. Mr. Higaki served as chairperson of both organizations.*

Ms. Abe: Mr. Ikeda also told me, "For next time, you should establish an organization." So, I helped Mr. Higaki go around the village night after night to compile a list of names and set up an association. Mr. Higaki's wife and fifth and youngest daughter were burned to death while they were trapped under the rubble of their house. He carried his grief and fury at the atomic bomb in his whole body, and he moved like a ball of fire. When a marriage was being arranged for his eldest daughter, I heard that during the background inquiries that were common at the time, people at the town office were spreading the claim that "Higaki is a communist." Even while labeled and discriminated against, he continued to care for fellow atomic bomb survivors. He traveled to Tokyo many times to submit petitions to the government and the Diet—hundreds of times in total *(by the time he stepped down as director of the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organizations in 1984, he had spent a total of 489 days in Tokyo)*. He went through an extraordinary amount of hardship. I truly believe he suffered greatly.

I was truly happy that a place of refuge for atomic bomb survivors had been established. Until then, I had been mocked as a "red ogre" by strangers I merely passed on the street, and even at home, my mother-in-law pressured me to get divorced, which caused me great sadness. The words and gentle eyes of the people at the World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen

Bombs gave me strength. They accepted me as someone working to eliminate discrimination, and treated me as a fellow human being.

Interviewer: *After the formation of the Prefectural Confederation of Atomic Bomb Sufferers' Organizations, the Hiroshima Prefecture Atomic Bomb Victims' Convention was held on August 7, 1956, at the Hiroshima City Auditorium, which had been completed the previous year in Peace Memorial Park, with about 500 people in attendance. Representing the National Diet Petition Group, Ms. Abe proposed the following: (1) full government coverage of medical expenses; (2) government implementation of health management; (3) establishment of institutions for investigating, researching, and treatment of victims; (4) creation of a condolence payment and disability pension system for atomic bomb victims (Source: "Hiroshima Conference Proceedings", included in* Collection of Materials on the Movement to Ban Nuclear Weapons, Volume 3*, published in 1995).*

Ms. Abe: My memory is hazy. I wasn't the type to appear in public, and I lived with my head down, so I suppose there must have been someone who encouraged me to do it. Looking at this, I can see that I am indeed reading the proposal. There's no doubt it was my own thoughts and cries.

"It will not be easy to achieve these demands. As one of the victims, I want to fight alongside others who suffer from the same illness. In a single moment, we were exposed to heat as high as 5,000 degrees Celsius, and we have endured countless painful experiences to survive to this day. Our hearts are filled with the desire to live—even if only one day longer. To everyone who survived: let us take each other's hands, support one another, and keep living with strength."

Interviewer: *At the end of the conference, the participants sang "For Sorrow, For Suffering" and "We Must Never Allow Another Atomic Bomb" (released in 1954).*

Ms. Abe: After that, on the train to Nagasaki, where the founding convention of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations was held, Yoshiho Muranaka, who had composed the music for the song, gave choir instruction to the participants from Hiroshima. Mr. Muranaka was the conductor of the Hiroshima Choir. When I arrived at the venue, a large sheet with the lyrics to my song "For Sorrow, For Suffering" was posted in front of the table on the stage, and I believe I was introduced and gave a greeting.

> *The Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations was established on August 10, 1956—the second day of the Second World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs—with approximately 800 people gathered at the same venue, the Nagasaki International Culture Hall. The organization issued the following declaration.*
>
> *"Thus, we have pledged to save ourselves and, through our experiences, to save humanity from crisis. Today, here, we raise our voices together and proclaim loudly to the entire world: Humanity must never repeat our sacrifices and sufferings." " If our suffering and resurrection can serve as a bastion protecting the lives and happiness of humanity in the new atomic age, then we will be able to sincerely rejoice, saying 'I am glad to be alive.'"*

According to Thirty Years of Experience as Atomic Bomb Survivors *(published in 1975) by the Kaita Town A-bomb Sufferers Association, the association dispatched three individuals: Higaki, Abe, and the chairwoman of the Higashi-Kaita Town (Kaita Town) Women's Association.*

Interviewer: *A photograph remains of Ms. Seiko Ikeda (later Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organizations), Ms. Yoshiko Murato (who traveled around Europe in 1958 on behalf of the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs to call for the abolition of nuclear weapons), and Mr. Kikkawa—three people who participated in Hiroshima's first "A-bomb Victims' Petition to the Diet"—standing in front of the Nagasaki International Culture Hall (rebuilt in 1996 as the present-day Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum). A rare photograph shows you at the same venue, with the lyrics of "For Sorrow, For Suffering" displayed.*

On August 10, 1956, the founding convention of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations was held at the Nagasaki International Culture Hall. Abe delivers a speech on a stage decorated with her poem, "For Sorrow, For Suffering."

Ms. Abe: This photo shows me giving a speech in Nagasaki, with my head bent and looking down. I was probably reading from a speech I had written. I think I said something like, "Let us, as A-bomb survivors, unite and seek peace." I was invited onto the stage because I had composed a song. I clearly remember singing it together with the other participants. Me? I like singing, but I'm not very good at it. *(At the end of the Fourth Subcommittee Meeting of the World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, where the Atomic Bomb Victims Relief Law was discussed, all participants joined in chorus. The founding meeting of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations was held in the same venue starting at 7 p.m.)*

Interviewer: *Later that year, in November 1956, the Hiroshima Utagoe singing contest was held at the Children's Culture Hall in Motomachi (Naka Ward), co-hosted by the Hiroshima Prefectural Confederation of A-bomb Sufferers Organizations and the Hiroshima Choir. "For Sorrow, For Suffering" was performed there as well.*

Ms. Abe: It made me truly happy to see a song like mine—just a quiet murmur from someone nameless, marginalized, and simply enduring life—spread so widely. There was a singing contest at the Hiroshima Kirin Brewery (located in Fuchu-cho, Aki District), where my third older brother Ryozo worked, and "For Sorrow, For Suffering" was performed there, too. When my brother told the choir leader, "My younger sister wrote the lyrics," the leader joked, "Really? Are you sure you're related?" He proudly shared this story with our mother. My husband was happy that I took part in activities for A-bomb survivors and came home energized. He was working at the prefectural office at the time (becoming a prefectural employee in 1955), and he gladly allowed me to attend the World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs.

Mr. Sakai *(Tadayoshi)*, who came across my song "For Sorrow, For Suffering" in Nagasaki, went out of his way to track down my home in Sunabashiri, Kaita Town, and came to visit me. He was the child of a father who had been killed in a naval bombardment. He had a deep compassion for those who had suffered misfortune in the war, and he showed great kindness to me as well. He later became mayor of Hashima City in Gifu Prefecture *(from 1980 for two terms*), and he invited me to share my testimony there. I still keep in touch with the person who was his secretary. They always send me a birthday card, and just recently, Mr. Sakai and his wife came together to visit me here at Hakkei-en (an elderly care facility in Minami Ward) where I now live. Their thoughtfulness means so much to me.

> *"In consideration of the special health conditions that atomic bomb survivors continue to face, the government shall provide health examinations and medical care to survivors." Pushed to the margins of society, the survivors raised their voices and united, prompting action from local governments, physicians, and elected members of the Diet. On April 1, 1957, the A-bomb Survivors Medical Treatment Law went into effect. However, it fell far short of meeting the needs of survivors whose physical and mental health, as well as their livelihoods, had been utterly destroyed—especially as provisions such as medical allowances included in the original draft were removed. The Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations (Nihon Hidankyo) continues to advocate for the enactment of a support law for atomic bomb survivors based on national compensation.*
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> *Shizuko Abe, a resident of Kaita Town, Aki District, received her A-Bomb Survivor Health Handbook from Hiroshima Prefecture on September 28, 1960.*

Interviewer: *Assistance for atomic bomb survivors and the abolition of nuclear weapons were the twin pillars of the atomic bomb survivors' movement. On March 25, 1957, four people held the first sit-in protest in front of the Cenotaph for the A-bomb Victims, calling for an end to British hydrogen bomb tests on Christmas Island in the South Pacific. The participants included Kiyoshi Kikkawa and Ichiro Kawamoto, who had also been part of "Friends of August 6." (In 1960, Mr. Kawamoto called for the preservation of the Atomic Bomb Dome.) Since 1973, sit-ins have been held the day after any nuclear test is reported, forming an ongoing protest movement from Hiroshima, the city that experienced the atomic bombing. Have you participated in these continuing protests?*

Ms. Abe: I was invited once or twice, though I don't remember exactly when. Someone handed me a protest statement to read, but I couldn't bring myself to keep going. I remember thinking that I still lacked the passion for such things. I heard Mr. Moritaki (Ichiro) say this many times: "A little girl whispered in front of me, 'If you sit down, you won't be able to stop,' and it pierced my heart." *(From the girl's words, Moritaki came to realize that he was sitting not for himself, but for something beyond himself. Through the sit-in, he felt that "a chain reaction of spiritual atoms must respond to the chain reaction of material atoms." This reflection appears in "The Prehistory and Ideology of 'Ten Years of Sit-Ins,'" included in the 1984 publication* Ten Years of Sit-Ins: A Record of Hiroshima.*)*

I always felt in my heart that unless I took action myself, nothing would move forward. While I was active in the rural town of Kaita, I had to endure gossip at the town hall, which I deeply

resented. *(She had been serving as a committee member of the Kaita Town A-bomb Sufferers Association since 1959.)*

> *Moritaki Ichiro, a professor at Hiroshima Higher Normal School, was exposed to the atomic bomb on August 6, 1945, while in the instructors' office for mobilized students at the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Hiroshima Shipyard in Eba-machi (Naka Ward). He lost sight in his right eye. He went on to lead efforts such as the "Spiritual Adoption Movement" to support atomic bomb orphans, and the "University Faculty Association for Peace and Scholarship." He became a representative committee member of both the Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs (founded in 1955) and the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations (established in 1956). Even after the anti-nuclear movement split, he remained a central figure in the hibakusha movement, continuing to speak out, both in Japan and abroad, against nuclear weapons, insisting that "humanity must survive" and "nuclear weapons and humanity cannot coexist." He died in 1994 at the age of 92.*

Interviewer: *In 1997, a memorial collection titled Human Masterpieces was published in honor of Heiichi Fujii, who passed away in 1996. You contributed an essay titled "The Savior of Fireballs."*

"For ten years after the bombing, the Japanese government did not offer any assistance or even acknowledge our existence. /We lived in despair, wondering if there was no God or Buddha in this world. At that time, Mr. Fujii stood up as a self-sacrificing savior. /He lit a flame in our dark hearts."

Many of the pioneers have now passed away, and you are one of the few remaining who experienced the earliest days of the atomic bomb survivor movement. As you reflect on that time now, what comes to mind?

Ms. Abe: I have known the passion and actions of the people I encountered—those still with us and those who have passed away—and that is why I took it upon myself to support the movement by sharing my testimony. Along the way, I have faced my own limitations many times, but I believe I have kept going without giving in. If you don't throw a stone, the water won't ripple. I still feel that way, though my body no longer moves the way I want it to. I consider this to be my "final testament" in this world, and I hope to respond to your questions as sincerely as I can.

Hibakusha Shizuko Abe Speaks
Through Sorrow, Through Suffering,
I’m Glad I Lived

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