

A Family Reunited 家族との再会

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I lived in Shimosuketo-cho with my four siblings and my parents when it happened.

Dad was out at work.

My legs felt paralysed as the horrific scene unfolded before me. I heard the massive explosions and saw the houses around us burning.

Mom rallied us and shouted “If we don’t leave now we are dead!” as we quickly put our air raid scarves on to protect our heads. Mom carried my baby brother on her back. He was only ten months old. I took hold of my brother. He was just three and I was eleven. We all joined the crowds of people running and trying to escape. Without even knowing where we were going, we ran through the back streets behind Hachiman Shrine. We ran for a while as the heat and the sparks from the houses burning on both sides of the street rained down on us. I was terrified that my brothers would be trampled in the swell of people. I thought that my brother would slip and fall from my grasp but I felt his little hands digging in to my back. He was not letting go.

Before I knew it, I had lost sight of my mom and brothers. I felt so hopeless but there was just no way that I could find them.

There were stores of water on the side of the road to fight fires. There were people soaking their scarves in the water. I copied them and soaked my brother's scarf too. He was still hanging on to me.

We kept running as the street was filled with the sounds of explosions and the heat of the flames. Eventually I realised we were heading towards Kamisuketo-cho.

When we finally got to Furukawa Bridge, we went down the bank and I held my brother tight as we got into the river. We were up to our shoulders in the water. It was truly like hell on earth with so many dead bodies before my eyes and the bombs falling all around us. I grabbed a futon which was floating in the river and hid our heads under it. Without even crying, my brother was still clinging to me and trembling. I held him tight and kept praying that the bullets would miss us. My only concern through that long and nightmarish time was to protect my brother.

At dawn, the explosions ceased and we climbed up the riverbank. I couldn't understand where we were because all I could see was scorched earth everywhere. I had no idea where to go next and my brother and I stood together holding hands in a trance. Then I heard someone call out to me. My mom and brothers came running towards us crying. We were overjoyed that everyone was safe. "Thank goodness," we said as we all hugged each other.

We went back to what was left of our house. Dad was digging through the rubble with a piece of wood near a bomb shelter, wiping the tears from his eyes. We all embraced and cried tears of joy.

“While I was in that shelter, I thought you were all dead,” Dad said while crying. He smiled. He held my hand so tightly that it hurt.

It was a kind of unique solace that all seven of us had made it through this hell uninjured. And now, we were reunited.