

Experiences of the Great Tokushima Air Raid

徳島大空襲の体験

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In November of 1945, when the days got steadily colder, the people who had been burned out of their houses in the Great Tokushima Air Raid went to the shrines and temples that survived the bombs. My family that was living in Tokushima-shi had, of course, also lost their house and we had no choice but to go to live in a temple. Inside the temple hall the young and the old, women and men everybody slept together in one big room like sardines. Because it was so cold inside we had to do everything possible to protect ourselves from the cold, so we even put our straw mats (*mushiro*) against the windows.

As days passed, even the food supplies that troops brought back after the end of the war dwindled and we had to ration food more strictly. Even if you had money it didn't help. But I was determined to help my family, so in order to find something to eat I went out into the potato fields at night... I felt bad for the owners of the fields but I had to do it for the sake of my family's health.

Because there was no food people suffered from malnutrition, so their faces swelled

up to three times of the original size, and one by one they died. One morning a little girl came and told her brother in tears that their mum had died. I wrapped the corpse in mats and my dad who was a carpenter built a casket. We then carried it in a two-wheeled wagon to a close by crematory. I cannot recall how many more times we had to take that tour after that day.

One day when my body and soul had completely cooled out, I unintentionally looked at the back of my daughter's neck and from all the dirt it looked like she had fish scales on her neck. I felt so sorry for her when I saw that, so I talked to my dad and we decided to build a bathtub.

Even though the building itself was still standing, the inside of the Prefectural Government building, which my dad and I had done several jobs at before the war, was completely burned out. That's when I had the thought of using the door of the remaining telephone switchboard. It was just the right size to use it as the floor of the tub. The holes in three centimetre intervals were perfect to nail the board down, too. But because we used scrap materials for the boxy bathtub, the water that we put so much effort in getting eventually leaked from multiple little crevices. After racking our brains about the leakage, my dad went and took muddy water that had accumulated in the ditch and flushed it through the tub. The mud went into the cracks and worked as blockage against

the leaks.

We weren't all lost because we could use the water from the shrine well and for firewood we used the remaining wooden pillars of houses that had burned down. For my young daughters we built a screen so they wouldn't be watched. When we were done with everything we rejoiced and shouted in excitement. It didn't even earn us a single *sen* (one hundredth of a *yen*) but the smiles and gratefulness of everyone was something that money could have never bought. The thought that "Whatever happens we have to survive!" was what kept us alive back then, when we had lost everything.