

**Run to the Shelter 壕に逃れて****Furukawa Yoshiyuki 古川 祥介-****Tenri-shi, Nara-ken 奈良県天理市**

I was a fifth grade student at Uchimachi Elementary School at the time. My house stood in front of the school (today the Amico Building). Teacher “A”'s house stood nearby, and the street in front was nicknamed Nezu Alley (*nezu no kouji*). It was a quiet place where you heard nothing but children's voices.

It was the third of July. I was thirsty and had gone to the kitchen for water, when suddenly ominous booms (“*za*”) and crashes (“*go*”) sounded, and all four corners of the sky were suddenly illuminated. I rushed to the air shelter in a panic. Shortly after both of my parents, my grandmother, three younger brothers, my nine month old baby sister, as well as our maid all came running in, making nine people in all.

My father got out to see what was going on, but came right back in yelling “Quick, run! If we don't hurry there'll be no way out.” Then my grandmother, sitting in the middle of the shelter holding the baby, yelled back “Running's no good. If we run, it will be chaos, and someone will die. If someone's going to die, we might as well all die together.” At her unusually sharp tone, everyone who had stood up sat down at once in the water on the floor.

This shelter was built from the remains of a large pre-war greenhouse that had been used to grow orchids. Dug to a depth that allowed a person to stand while walking, and with enough space to accommodate many people, it was a stout construction with dirt heaped up on top. However, we had only been able to make two doors for exits.

There had been a lot of rain that June, and the ground water had been rising too. We had pumped out the water many times. Even so, on that day the floor boards were floating around knee level. When I think about it now, it was thanks to that water that we made it.

I had no idea what was going on outside the shelter, but I feel like the air strikes were getting more intense. Hot smoke was leaking inside little by little. At the two entrances, rather than doors we pressed *mushiro* (woven mats) and futons soaked in water desperately against the frame, my father and my little brother (who was in the third grade of elementary school) on one side, me and the maid on the other.

Even though we were in the central part of the city, we didn't know about the “rain of fire” or “ocean of flames”. We were only concerned with our struggle to keep the smoke out. My mother desperately threw water with a bucket against our backs, alternating from one to the other and back again. I remember my grandmother clutching my nine month old sister and encouraging all of us, yelling “She's still alive! She's still

breathing!” Still, the smoke poured in. It seemed inevitable. We spent a long time like this.

Randomly, I noticed signs of people outside. Hearing a voice say “It seems like there are people inside”, my father left the shelter and we finally knew that the air raid was over. People from the Civil Defence Unit (*keibodan*) were there. When I got out, I was dizzy for a moment. Before my eyes, I saw the blackened school building, and our smouldering neighbourhood. Both our home and storehouse were gone, transformed into a pile of darkened and charred wood. The big camphor tree out back was gone too, and I could faintly see the concrete storehouse and mud and tile walls (*nenrihei*).

My exhaustion caught up with me, and I slept there. Shortly after I was woken up, and we walked to Okinohama to ask our relatives there for help. That night I slept in a room crowded with many people, and the next morning we headed for Wakimachi, my mother's village. The trains weren't running where we were, so we walked as far as Sako Station, but every car was full and we couldn't get on. It was getting late so we had no choice but to ask my father's colleague to help us, and we were able to spend a night at his house. It was really tough on my parents, carrying my three year old little brother and my baby sister with us.

The next day, we finally managed to get on a train somehow, and went to Anabuki

Station. I remember the steamed potatoes given to us by the Women's Association  
(*fujinkai*) were really delicious. I'll never be able to forget those days.