

Surviving the Horrors of War 戦火をくぐりて**Matsubara Kiichiro 松原 喜一郎****Oasa-cho, Naruto-shi 鳴門市大麻町**

In April, 1945, I entered middle school (of the old school system). However, that happiness only lasted a brief moment for all students were mobilised and I had to carry pines up to Mt. Oasa every day. On May 18th of the same year, we suffered an accident and two students died on the spot. I suffered serious injuries and was on the verge of death. While still being unconscious my duty was suspended and I was hospitalised close to Tokushima Station.

In the early morning of July 4th, a sharp whistling sound woke me up in my hospital bed. The entire window of my hospital room was filled with bright red blazing flames. I woke my older sister in the bed next to me and slipped out of mine but my arms and legs had just had their casts removed and I couldn't bend them properly. I had no strength either. My sister dragged me by my hand and we eventually made it to the exit. From there she carried me on her back and we went out in the street. Outside there were sparks everywhere and it was as bright as if it had been daytime. There were already a lot of people fleeing in the same direction. We too followed those people. Multiple times incendiary bombs dropped in front of us on our way. Each time we went to the fence at

the side of the street and took cover. At that time my sister was in the third year of girl's school. She wasn't particularly strong and had a small stature, so I was quite a burden on her. I was so heavy on her back, that even when she used hands and knees to push herself off the ground she couldn't get up easily. But she wouldn't stop running giving her all. When eventually she couldn't keep going, we found a fire protection water tank beneath a large house. There were already several people in the water. My sister thought about getting in too. But I stopped her because the building towering next to it seemed eerily dangerous to me.

We rested a little, then my sister piggy-backed me again and we kept following in the direction that everybody else was fleeing. We passed through the falling incendiary bombs and finally reached temple grounds. On the mountain ridge of that temple was a little pond, in which already about ten people had found shelter. Me and my sister also went in and recited a sutra with the monk. It was right at that moment when an incendiary bomb directly hit the temple. All the people in the pond hid behind a green rock. Shortly after, they raised their heads and I was relieved that no one got hurt. We took a little rest and the monk started the sutra again. This time all the people in the pond joined in and we were like a large choir. My sister, who was ready to give up, said "You should get ready to die" but I responded: "I don't want to die here. Whatever it

takes I want to go back home. I want to meet my mum again. If I die, then I will die with my family!" Between life and death I was in a daze and chanted my wishes in a sutra. After a short while a bomb dropped right in front of our eyes. The people in the pond were scared to death. The middle-aged man who went in last fell victim to that attack.

I don't know how much time passed but the noise all around died down and the people came out of the pond one after another and undressed to dry their wet clothes at the fire of the burning temple. The water in the pond immediately started to feel colder. In the end it was only me and the dead corpse of the man who died earlier left in the pond. I wanted to get out of the pond as quickly as possible, too. My sister repeatedly tried to pull me out with all her strength but my body was stuck to the rock and I couldn't get up. The people who got out of the pond dried their clothes right in front of my eyes. My sister asked for help, but no answer. Shortly after, the monk from earlier appeared from somewhere and helped me out. Me and my sister hurried and dried our pyjamas. Sometimes we heard people shouting their relatives' names in search for them and sometimes the red sun shone through the clouds like the moon.

Then we heard the voice of our father where we were drying our pyjamas. When our dad and the two of us saw each other we were so happy. According to the story of our dad a nurse at the hospital we were in informed him about our whereabouts. This time dad

put me on his back and carried me. We left the temple and went the same way back that we had come fleeing earlier. We walked through the smoke and the burned ruins. On our way I suddenly saw the fire protection water tank from earlier on the side of the road. Everyone inside was floating on the surface. We kept walking along the train tracks to Sako Station and took a train to Ikenotani Station. The three of us sat down in the waiting room of the station and took a rest.

We arrived at the station in the morning hours when everybody went to work or to school. There were several children from my class that stopped and looked at us in our dirty pyjamas. But they wouldn't say anything and just proceed to the platform. My dad carried me on his back the last two kilometres from the station to our house. When our mum saw us she came running towards us in excitement. She rejoiced when she saw that the two of us were safe. Yet again, the moment of joy was spoiled because our dad who walked all the way to find us and then carried me for a long distance had hurt his legs badly and had to get long term treatment. On top of that, there was me, who couldn't move and my weak little mother. Our family who had lost its working power, with my older brother fallen in the war, had to endure sorrow and hardships for much longer even after that. I wrote this account with the hope for eternal peace on earth.