

The Air Raid and My Mother 大空襲と母**Okada Yukie 岡田 ゆきえ****Kito, Naka-cho 那賀町木頭**

At the age of seventy-seven, I now live in Naka-cho. At the time of the Tokushima Air Raid, however, I lived in Shinkura-cho 1-chome as a first year student at what is now Joto High School. On the night of the 3rd, I had homework for Home Economics, but then a warning alarm went off around 11 o'clock. Even though I had just a little bit more to do, I covered the lamps with black sheets. As always, when the alarms went off, I secured the belt on the carrier for my little brother and my mother secured the one for my bedridden grandmother. My second-year elementary school brother hung the bag which contained our bank books, government bonds, seals, etc. and his school supplies on his shoulders and we made our way to the bomb shelter.

As we entered the shelter outside that my father built, a huge, earth-shattering, thunderous explosion went off and a shining ball fell with a sound like heavy snow. The nearby Ward Regiment Headquarters caught fire and before my very eyes, the whole neighbourhood began to burn. Not only due to the fires breaking out that night, but also since my father was drafted into the Wadashima Kawanishi Flying Corps and my older brother went into the Imperial Japanese Naval Academy, I remember feeling a little

hopeless.

In front of our house on the border of Nakazu-cho, a large pine tree used to stand at the embankment, but that tree too went up in flames like fireworks. When I looked at the house, there were also flames billowing out from the second floor and as I watched the pillars burn, my mother suddenly rushed toward the burning house, pulled out a futon and doused it with the bucket of water used to put out fires. "It's dangerous here! Run to the river!" she said, and then we headed down to the riverbank while huddled underneath the wet futon (in the area by the current youth centre, where my little brother caught crabs with pickled radish). Behind me, I remember my little brother began to sing "Kachinuku Bokura Shou Kokumin" (勝ち抜く僕等少国民).

It seemed like my mother was splashing water on the futon from the river, but afterward I looked at her hands and perhaps embers had stuck to them, as there were burn marks here and there. I will never forget how that bizarrely coloured sun rose through the smoke as dawn came that day. We got under the futon again and stayed motionless, because someone said, "The machine guns will fire when it gets bright out," but there was no such sign of that. Many people were walking the path above the river and they looked like a kind of silhouette. After a while, my father came by bicycle from Wadashima with a large bottle of water and sheets in torn bandaging. He told us how

scary it was that a ship underneath Kachidoki Bridge had burnt and the flames had made it all the way up the bridge. "Water, water" said a voice, which came from "Ms. A" behind us. With her elegant looking grandmother and aunt, the three sat in *seiza* with burns on their bodies and with some hesitation, my father eventually allowed them to drink water.

Later on we heard that our friend's mother who lived right by us had been killed by a direct attack. I wonder too what had happened to Ms. A's group.

We went to the house of the mother of the Hata family, whose uncle's house on one side of the family was in Tokyo and their aunt's house of six in Saga were burned out of their homes and another uncle was injured after an attack on his shelter. From all five households combined, thirty-one people ended up living together. I will always be thankful that the grandparents and uncles of that family took good care of us. My brothers and I each said to each other, "With mother there with us, the air raid wasn't so scary." Since that time, we, with my thirty-five year old mother, who is now approaching one hundred years old have lived peacefully together with my older brothers.

Postscript: It seems she remembers nothing of her youngest brother.