

The Day I Can't Forget: The Pursuit of Memory

忘れられない日 記憶をたどって

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The very first time I felt fear, was when the bomb fell in Akita-machi. At the time I was going to work at the factory in my neighbourhood. With all the shaking and the loud sounds, I thought it must be an earthquake and I was surprised by the shattering glass windows.

When I went to look, there was an unbelievably large hole and the houses in the vicinity were destroyed beyond all recognition and injured people came out of them as well.

In the early hours of the morning on July 4th, the air raid sirens sounded and I went to the shelter in my back yard wearing an air raid hood. Since a little water tends to come up when digging in this area, not only did I make the shelter by digging a shallow ditch, but also by piling up the soil on the sides as well. My little sister didn't like the idea of entering the narrow, dark shelter, so I crawled out and pulled her in with me. Soon after, a loud sound of an explosion went off and planes were flying by. In that moment, a strange ear-splitting sound reverberated around us and eventually the northern sky

turned completely red. I believe it must have been the area around the central park by Gokoku Shrine. The ghastly pillars of fire that dyed the sky red and the smell of oil in the air was truly awful. During that time too, fire bombs began to fall like rain toward the south. Bombs fell on the houses out back as well and as the blaze rose up, one fell on the shed at my house and several places began to burn. Since my father was a part of the fire brigade, he wasn't guarding the elementary school.

My grandfather cut a fifty centimetre length of rope and fastened it to the end of a bamboo pole and with that was able to extinguish some of the flames (by slapping them), and then we escaped from the shelter.

My mother carried my little sister on her back and I my little brother. We held the hands of my hearing impaired grandmother and then we all made our way to the elementary school with my siblings. My siblings each held their beloved textbooks in their arms. At the front gate of the school a bomb suddenly fell, but as it barely missed us, we were able to escape unscathed.

At the back of the school, there was a wide rice field where planting had occurred. Since the fire bombs usually fell and then immediately disappeared, I thought it might be a good idea to get into the rice field, but since I wasn't able to walk in the bog, I exited toward the road covered in mud. The fire bombs continued to fall relentlessly in a

scattered fashion. My brother and sister shouted and ran away. There were people who had been injured and had collapsed across the footpaths throughout the rice field.

Then, the sky brightened, the air raid ceased, and I returned home with my family with barely a scratch. Even though I didn't feel alive at the time, I was at least happiest that my family was able to return home, but I also had the bad feeling that they might be affected by an unexploded bomb. Although the shed had burned up, it was good that my house was relatively fine.

When dawn came, the people who had escaped to Tsuda were returning home with haggard faces, but they didn't seem to worry whether or not their houses had burned or not. I was twenty years old then.