

**The Great Tokushima Air Raid 徳島大空襲****Suzuki Kinuko 鈴木 衣子****Kamojima-cho, Yoshinogawa-shi 吉野川市鴨島町**

Entering July, it seemed like the air raid sirens sounded every night. They sounded that night too, and donning our air raid hoods and putting on our shoes, my three sisters and I took refuge in the backyard shelter while my father, mother, sister-in-law, and nephew all hid in the one in the front. Happily the all clear sounded, and we returned to the house with a sigh of relief. The moment I crawled back into bed, a great “*do-do-n, do-don*” rang out, and flames rose in the area around the prison. Fires burst forth all over, and the area lit up like it was afternoon. We ran back to the shelter in a hurry, without even changing clothes, holding our breath, covering our ears, and shaking.

My father yelled out “It's no use. Let's flee to Bizan. Quickly come to the front of the house!” in a loud voice. Despite the circumstances, I still asked “Is it okay to wear shoes (*geta*) in the tatami room?”, “It's fine. Come quickly. Hurry! Hurry!” my father yelled, his voice full of tension as he ran to the front door. No one bothered to go get shoes or the air raid hoods, we ran to Tenjin Shrine. When I looked back from in front of the main building, I saw an unbroken sea of fire, flames billowing from the windows of the Marushin Department Store. The enemy planes were flying overhead, dropping

firebombs like hail (“*para~ para~*”) over the city. I ran up the stone steps without thinking. When the planes dropped bombs over the mountain, they were taken by the wind and fell over the downtown area. My nephew, merely three years old, scampered energetically up the mountain path, but my mother, being the weakest, said “Go ahead without me” and sat down. “If mother isn't going, I won't either!” my little sister cried. We couldn't very well let my mother stop the group, so pulling her by the hand and pushing her from behind, step by step we finally reached the top of the mountain. A crowd of people had gathered on the summit, worried about the well-being of their homes.

As it got lighter, we could still hear explosions. We hid ourselves from the “*chiri~ jiri~*” of machine gun fire by crawling into a field of bamboo grass. When we couldn't hear the explosions any more we crawled out, but besides not having any food, we didn't have a single drop of water. We started down toward Sako, which wasn't burning, together with the other people. My geta dangling from a broken strap, I trudged down the mountain trail. On the way we prayed beside the branch of a large tree, which had been placed over the remains of someone directly hit by a bomb. Then, we arrived at Suwa Shrine. There, we received rice balls (*onigiri*) being handed out by members of city hall. My father, sister-in-law, and I went to see what remained of the city. Charred

bodies were everywhere. People who had been suffocated by the smoke lay face down like wax dolls. The temple district (Tera-machi, Daiku-machi) was entirely destroyed. In a completely burned field, we finally arrived at our house. Not a single post stood. The air raid shelter was flattened, with nothing of the original shape remaining. The only thing left was a chicken we had raised, now perfectly grilled. We carried it back to the temple where our family were waiting. Inside the temple walls, the burnt remains of many people had been lined up. I'll never forget that scene, wordlessly bringing the grilled chicken and onigiri to my mouth, drinking warm tea. It is burned into my eyes.

Fortunately, all seven members of my family survived unscathed, but it was fortune amidst tragedy. Because my two older brothers who had died serving in New Guinea and Saipan had watched over us, I pray for their happiness in the next world every day. Now I've passed my eighty-eighth birthday. This may be a poorly written account, but I took up the pen to say that war is tragedy and cruelty, and to express my hope that we may never again repeat the worldwide turbulence of that age.