

## The Tokushima Air Raid and July 4<sup>th</sup>

徳島空襲 そして七月四日

Yagi Yoko 八木 洋子

**Tokushima-shi, Naka Maegawa-cho 徳島市中前川町**

At the time I was in my third year of citizen's school in Uchimachi. My family consisted of five people, my parents, my older sister, my older brother and me. We manufactured *geta* (traditional wooden sandals) in Minami Dekijima-honcho. My dad was in the hospital because of a gall bladder inflammation. My mum was looking after him so it was only my two older siblings and me in the house. That day I was left in the care of a family in the neighbourhood. On the night of July 3<sup>rd</sup> the air raid alarm rang so we evacuated to the bomb shelter. However, the alarm was quickly lifted and we went to bed. At around midnight grandma hit me in order to wake me up.

She said: "Escape quickly! Run to the embankment!" So I left the house just with what I was wearing. There were red flames and blue flickering in the sky as if it was fireworks. It also seemed like things were falling down. While all the people were trying to flee, incendiary bombs were dropping down over their heads. By a hair's breadth I was able to make the jump into our bomb shelter. I was so scared I could hardly move. After quite a while had passed, smoke started accumulating in the dugout and breathing

got difficult. I decided I couldn't stay, so I went out on the street and saw that nobody was there. My escape was too late. From Mitsuai Bridge (a three-way bridge) I went towards Tamiya and tried to reach the embankment, but I couldn't cross the street because there were flames everywhere. I retreated to Mitsuai Bridge and hid behind a peach tree. Not a single soul was around. I had no idea where my mum and dad or my siblings were, I just hoped they were safe. The sky was crimson red and enemy planes were circling low over my head, I thought this must be hell. It was the first time in my life I had been in an extreme situation like this. On top of that I was all alone and completely helpless. I gathered all my strength and prepared for the worst. On the other side of the river was a branch factory, a lumber mill and my dad's geta factory. Even though it escaped the flames until dawn, the wind direction must have changed and the raging flames from the fibre factory close by caused the factory to completely burn down. I couldn't help but to cry out loud. As the only living witness to see that flaming spectacle I swore that I would hold that memory in my heart and never forget it.

Amidst the world-destroying conflagration the black sun rose. I believed that surely someone would come and help me, so I waited by the side of Mitsuai Bridge. As if in a movie, suddenly my sister appeared on the bridge and I screamed her name running up to her. We took each other's hands and rejoiced that we were both safe. A friend who by

chance came by to check whether we were all right gave me a rice ball. I was so grateful.

Then my sister left me to go looking for our parents. After a little while my mum and dad came to me with a young man. Their *yukata* (summer kimono) were torn and maybe smoke got in their eyes because tears came streaming down their faces. They were healthy and we were able to meet in happiness. The bridge was the site of a memorable family reunion. This bridge would become the starting point of my new life after the war. I still live close to that bridge with the Y-shape.

**July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1994, 11:40PM**

My husband collapsed due to acute heart failure. He was taken away by an ambulance and got the best treatment possible but at 9 o'clock in morning of July 4<sup>th</sup> he passed away. He was healthy and full of vigour until that point when he suddenly collapsed. Even the time perfectly coincided with the air raid. In that divine providence I felt the gift of the gods and I should accept it as their blessing. This July 4<sup>th</sup> (2010) will be the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Tokushima Air Raid and the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my late husband's death.