

War is Sad and Unfortunate 戦争は悲しい**Haraguchi Mieko 原口 美枝子****Yoshino-cho, Awa-shi 阿波市吉野町**

Decades have passed since the Tokushima Air Raid. Now there is an annual reunion day held on July 4th and a journal titled “The Bond is Strong”. I was fifteen year old girl from the countryside when I came to the city to enroll on a normal school preparatory course at a teacher’s college from April 1st, 1945. Dormitory life was tough. There were food shortages, total discipline every day, air defense training and laborious work like pulling carts to the fields in Kuramoto to grow vegetables. On top of all that, there was the ominous sound of the air raid sirens that went off every night (when I recall those sirens I am frightened even now). As the siren went off on July 4th I did not think the black demons would be lurking.

It was extremely humid in the air raid shelter, we couldn’t sit down because of the pools of water. After much begging, a teacher finally allowed me to go outside for three minutes. Breathing the fresh air at that time was wonderful. “Your three minutes are over, come back inside!” I was ordered.

Right after I entered the shelter a flare made it brighter than day. Everyone’s face was clearly visible. All of the buildings caught fire. There were huge explosions from the incendiary bombs. “This isn’t good. Escape to the castle moat or the shelter by the pool in the playground” my teacher quickly decided/ We pulled up the hem of our work trousers (*monpe*) and ran. The flames were flickering over the grass, I wonder where my shoes went, I was so tense that I didn’t feel the heat. I suddenly noticed that the school

and neighbouring buildings had turned to ashes and only huge clouds of smoke remained. “This is no good. We will be killed by the smoke!” We put clothes and things on top of the bunker by the pool to stop the smoke from coming in. “Dive into the pool because the flames are too intense!” we were told. I couldn’t swim but we had no other option so somebody pushed me in the back. Strangely enough, my body floated naturally.

As the July sun rose early in the morning it looked dark and dusky, like an eclipse. As we headed back to the dormitory in Kuramoto we noticed bodies floating in the moat and looked away. “That’s a burnt corpse. Don’t step over it.” If I hadn’t heard my friend say it I wouldn’t have known it was a dead body. At that time I did not feel fear at all. “Disperse!” my teacher ordered. I decided I should walk west towards home along the train tracks. I ran barefoot in the searing sun. “Train coming” I heard as I approached Ishii Station.

Then, at Kamojima Station, I became aware of my disheveled appearance and realized I had no money, even now I remember feeling full of shame. But I was still better off than other people. Many people in the city were forced to stop their studies. When I was sixty years old, forty of us founded “The Bond is Strong” journal and arranged to have reunions each year. Among our current members my husband and I are the oldest couple to have experienced the war, I am almost eighty and my husband is eighty-seven. My husband was enlisted after graduating in Harbin, Manchuria, and fought against the Soviet Union. He was forced to be a prisoner of war in Siberia for three years or so. He had a much harder time than me. We have been married for fifty-seven years and I hope we will reach our golden wedding anniversary, god willing. I can still hear the sirens and the sounds of the planes to this day. It is a sign of trauma.

“War is Sad” is the title of two books. I hope that young people can live more strongly.