

## The Air Raid Experience of my Mother and Me

母と二人で体験した空襲

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In the middle of the night of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the air raid warning siren sounded. I thought the alarm would soon cease, as it had on previous nights, I commuted from our rented house in Sakae-machi to the junior high school, my mother and I went to what was an air raid shelter in name only.

But tonight was unlike the previous nights, we heard the “*pari~ pari~*” sound of gunfire. When I popped my head out to look I saw a Grumann fighter plane strafing repeatedly at an ultra-low altitude. Then the eastern sky was burning bright red. Before long we heard an increasing number of people shouting “Everyone escape!” My mother ran out with just a light summer futon over our heads.

The incendiary bombs were falling like string. We avoided them left and right until we came to the main street at the foot of Konpira Shrine. Then, perhaps it was the leader of the neighbourhood association, as the incendiary bombs fell one after the other, he was trying to put out the fire with wet ropes tied up in a bundle like a bamboo mop. I was going to try to climb the stone steps from Konpira Shrine to Inbe Shrine but

someone shouted “Don’t climb it, stop going that way!(“*akan*”), if you try and climb the mountain you will surely die!” so because of that we fled through Nikenya towards Okinohama. The flames were coming getting closer. It was hot and I was afraid so I entered the Gozabune River, the water came up to my chest. The huge B29 bombers flashed their silver wings and dropped bombs like they were throwing rice cakes (*mochi*) and after a while the whole area around Mt. Bizan was burnt (“*za~a*”) by the petroleum fuelled flames. The “red-light district” was burning in front of my eyes. Red and yellow flames soared into the sky. Imprudently, I found myself thinking how impressive the beautiful colours were. I hid my head in the water and held my breath to hide from the occasional Grumman fighter passing by. I had to be patient for a while. Even in that situation I thought “Japan will win by striking America with kamikaze!” I had been brainwashed by the military.

Eventually the eastern sky became light, we could no longer hear the roar of the planes, I went up to the railway track with my mother and we dried our wet clothes in the vibrant flames. I received a rice ball (*onigiri*) from a farmer in Okinohama and headed towards my house, hoping it had not been burnt to the ground. Smoke was rising from various places and we had to wet our shoes numerous times on the way to our home in Sakae-machi 4-chome. Our house was gone without a trace. All that remained

was a leg from the sewing machine and an iron pot for cooking rice. We couldn't get close as it was too hot. I light-heartedly thought that if I was evacuated for a while I would be able to return home before long but childhood memories of friendships and school all became ash. All I had was the summer futon that had been covering my head and five or six pieces of brass from incendiary bombs I had picked up along the way. As we headed over the tracks at Nikenya Station we heard rumours that "Tonight an even bigger air raid will come!" so we trudged wearily for forty kilometres to Naka-cho, our hometown.