

**The Great Tokushima Air Raid 徳島大空襲****Irimajiri Yuko 入交 洋子****Sumiyoshi, Matsushige-cho 松茂町住吉**

I am now eighty years old and have humbly received congratulations for my longevity (*kotobuki*) from Matsushige-cho. Thinking back through my long life, it has been one with many ups and downs. Because of my father's duties, I was born in Tokyo and raised in Manchuria (currently the north-eastern region of China). I returned home in the third semester of my fourth year of elementary school on a destroyer ship via Korea. The journey took around seven hours from Busan to Xiaguan, we returned home with the brave spirits of those lost on the battlefield. I transferred to Suketo Elementary School during the third semester as a fourth year student. I remember participating in the celebration for the flag procession with my classmates on the day that Singapore fell (February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1942).

I lived with my grandparents. My grandfather, who died young, left to go to Kobe from Matsushige, his birthplace. From there he learned about ironworking and, with his wife, made his way to Lushu City on the Liaodong Peninsula (in China) a developing city at that time. There he worked for the Manchurian Railroad Company. He lived a hard life and returned to his hometown after retirement having made something of

himself. He made a new home in the town where he was born, Matsushige, but due to the construction of an airport he was evicted and he had no choice but to move out. At that point, he was forced to find temporary residence in Minami Josanjima-cho in Tokushima City.

Due to the sudden change of circumstances both domestic and foreign, the danger of the situation could be felt and my older brother and I were separated from our parents due to their work responsibilities in the Manchurian Coal Mining Company in Jixi district of the northeast region of what was Manchuria. At that point we returned to Japan and were left under the care of our grandparents.

When I was in the sixth grade, I went on a school trip to visit Ise Shrine, but since it was during wartime, only two schools from Tokushima participated. Due to the lack of goods at the time, we also had to ration. The food provided in hotels was limited to five *go* per person (1 *go* = about 0.18litres). We wore our traditional work trousers (*monpe*) and took our air defence hoods, we each paid ten yen for the hotel fee. At the hotel, it appeared that egg and rice would be served for dinner and all the students got really excited (since egg was only served to the sick at that time), but what was actually served was just rice and corn. I still remember that moment of anger and disappointment.

Every day after school, I went up to Gogoku Shrine in a hurry and upon arrival, I

listened to the announcements on the radio explaining the efforts of the Imperial Army and I was made to pray for the continued luck of the campaigning soldiers.

When I entered all-girls school, there were hardly any classes. My duties were to attach buttons to army uniforms and practice *naginata* (a Japanese martial art using a type of halberd) during P.E. time.

Spending my days like that every day, I ended the first semester of my second year there and I remember it was the night of July 3<sup>rd</sup> before final exams which took place on the 4<sup>th</sup>. I studied that night to prepare for the exams the following day. The war situation got worse day after day and I had been informed of damage to several areas due to the air raids. Tokushima was also due for an air raid by U.S. military aircrafts. For that reason, during my studies I had to keep the lamp from emitting light outside, which was done by putting a black sheet over it and facing it towards my desk. Suddenly, at the moment that I heard a great crashing sound, a shock wave caused surrounding objects and the tatami mats to be blown all the way up to the ceiling. In my surprise, I rushed out of the door. The nearby technical school building (of the Technical High School that existed until the nineteenth year of Showa, 1944) was completely red with flames rising over it and enveloping it. I felt like it must have been a large bomb that caused it. Everything was suddenly thrust into a sea of fire. At that moment, I escaped to a bomb

shelter that had been built in a hurry. Two or three minutes later, the air raid warnings sounded. After a little while longer, objects that appeared to be firebombs fell like rain. I ran out of the shelter from the unbearable heat and took my grandparents' hands and escaped. Without even thinking, I ran to the sports field of the technical school, because I had thought that the sports field environment would be a moist area and there would be no worry of the fire spreading there. In these humid areas reeds and tall grass grow and it was difficult to move, I took my grandparents by the hands and stumbled from place to place. A lot of people were running from the roaring flames and evacuating along the bank of the Yoshino River. Luckily there was a farm house owned by our relatives nearby and we were allowed to escape there by the time it got bright outside. They took care of us after the war ended and we later returned to my grandparents' birthplace where I currently reside.