

# Voices of A-Bomb Survivors

Interview of an A-Bomb survivor: **Ms Michiko Yamaoka**

Date: June 4, 1995

Place: Lobby, Peace Memorial Museum

Interviewer: Mitsuru Ohba

Ms Yamaoka is one of the volunteers who talks about her experiences with the A-bomb to people who visit Hiroshima. She was a middle school student when the bomb was dropped. She was one of the 25 girls who were invited to New York in 1955 for operations by an American organization, Friends, and stayed there for one and a half years. After her return from New York, she opened a dress-making school for young women to help her mother who had been suffering from the side effects of the bomb. She did not talk about the bomb for the first thirty years. After the death of her mother, she volunteered to talk about her experiences to young Japanese; this is now, her life work. She has visited the US twice in the last 20 years to tell her story.



## **1. Where were you at the time the bomb was dropped?**

I was walking on the street. Two of my cousins and I had left home only a few minutes before that. I was heading West; they were heading East. I was a half mile away from the center of the explosion. I heard the sound of a B-29 bomber. I was wondering why the bomber was flying over Hiroshima, as the military headquarters had not issued an alert.

## **2. What happened to you when the explosion occurred?**

When I saw a very strong light, a flash, I put my arms over my face unconsciously. Almost instantly I felt my face was inflating. I thought I was directly hit by the bomb and was dying. I was proud of myself for dying for my country because we had been educated so. Shortly after, I felt my body flying in the air and then I lost consciousness.

## **3. What did you see when you regained consciousness?**

I do not know how long I was unconscious. When I came to, I was in the dark. I was under a stack of broken bricks. I could not move. I heard voices asking for help or asking for water. I understood that something special must have happened to us. I was in the dark for some time. I heard something burning near me. I do not know how long I was there; it could have been half an hour, it could have been several hours. Suddenly I heard my mother's voice calling my name. I called my mother. I heard someone saying to my mother "It's too dangerous; it's impossible." My mother still called my name and I called to my mother. She was trying to rescue me from the fire. Shortly after she found and rescued me.

#### **4. What did you see after that?**

When I was rescued, my hair was burned; my face was inflated like a balloon. Though my mother did not say, I knew it. I wondered why my shirt had been burnt and hanging around my arms, I soon realized they were pieces of my skin. It was hell. I saw people looking for water and they died soon after they drank it. I saw many people go to the river in search of water and who died. The whole city was destroyed and burning. There was no place to go. My mother told me to leave Hiroshima and to stay at mycousins' house in the country side. I stayed there for a year and then came back to Hiroshima. I wanted to see my mother again before I died. My two cousins were lost and were never found. When I returned, Hiroshima was still a destroyed city.

#### **5. What was the major physical effect of the bomb?**

Though many people say that they felt the heat, I did not. I did not feel the wind either. I think I was too close to the center of the explosion to feel the heat and the wind. My skin was badly burned. I felt my body flying in the air. That was it.

#### **6. How was your stay in New York? What did you feel?**

I was thinking only of my complete recovery. I was young. I thought that it was their duty to help me because they had dropped the bomb and hurt us. I had many operations over one and a half years. Seven different families hosted me. I did not know they were volunteers. I found out that there was no official financial support for the project. The project was supported by the good-will of many American citizens. Now I really appreciate that.

#### **7. What do you want to tell the world?**

Though the US government wanted to terminate the war quickly, the country is responsible for the results of the decision. Every country is responsible for its decision to develop, possess and use nuclear weapons, or weapons of total destruction. If we really know what they are, we can understand that we should never duplicate the failure. It should never happened again. It is really important to know the facts about the A-bomb. I hope as many children in the world as possible know what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and learn what weapons of total destruction can mean to human beings.