

Atomic Bomb Experience Telling Together With Atchan

Wishing For a Future Without Nuclear Weapons and War



Director, Yuaikai

Atomic Bomb Sufferers Association in Chiba

小谷孝子 KOTANI Takako

What brings about

"true peace"?



なかおかブック

NAKAOKA BOOK

Sharing the harrowing reality
of atomic bombs with children
in Japan and across the globe,
together with the beloved ventriloquist puppet "Atchan."

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Born in Kure City, Hiroshima, on January 4, 1939.

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【ENDORSEMENT】

KAWASAKI Akira

Executive Committee Member of the Peace Boat

International Steering Group Member of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)



An Opportunity to Think About What We Can Do

Dear readers who picked up KOTANI Takako's "Atomic Bomb Experience Telling Together with Atchan," I hope you don't be too tense when reading this book. I probably shouldn't use phrases like "enjoy" or "don't be too tense." The atomic bombing experience is horrifying and is a serious and miserable matter for everyone. It is not something we can talk about lightly. Nevertheless, Kotani-san tells softly and gently about her horrific experience, always with a smile on her face, together with the adorable puppet "Atchan." I am glad that her words were compiled in a book.

Since 2008, I've been working on a project to invite Hibakusha, or the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to deliver their testimony in various locations as part of Peace Boat's global voyages. Wherever we visited, we met children and adults who embraced us with open arms and listened intently to the A-bomb testimony. But we have a problem. That is, A-bomb survivors are getting older, and it is becoming difficult to tell the experiences.

Kotani-san was six years old when she was exposed to the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. She is thinking about how the people who have the same experience at a similar age as her, or even younger, or their children, can pass on the memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the next generation. Some are not confident to tell the experience because their memories faded and did not clear any more. There are many Hibakusha who hesitate to share their experience. How can we encourage the young generation to talk about A-bomb? It's a big concern for all of us.

In those days, I met Kotani-san, who was telling A-Bomb experience together with Atchan, using her proficient ventriloquism skills. I asked her to be with us on our voyage. Kotani-san and Atchan did a great job on the ship and everywhere we visited. Because of the charming Atchan, I think many people were attracted. Kotani-san and Atchan became very popular. After returning from the global voyage, she was in high demand. I felt she was doing a marvelous job.

In fact, when Kotani-san was a kindergarten teacher at Yachiyo City, Chiba Prefecture, my wife was a kindergartener there. Kotani-san was known as a kind and reliable teacher. I believe that Kotani-san obtained useful and effective expressions while handling so many children there. I was happy I could travel and

celebrate with her the establishment of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and ICAN's winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017. I hope many people read this book and imagine the various scenes at that time. And I hope this gives you a chance to consider what we can do now.

KODAMA Michiko

Assistant Secretary General of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations

Chairperson of Yuaikai, Atomic Bomb Sufferers Association in Chiba



Reading This Book is a Step Towards Nuclear Abolition

On August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, detonating 600 meters above the ground. The city was engulfed in radiation, powerful heat rays, a blast wave, and a shockwave, causing widespread destruction. People fled for their lives through the heap of debris and flames, not understanding what had happened. Some had their eyeballs blown out or their skin hanging off their bodies. On the 9th, Nagasaki was also hit by an atomic bomb, killing the lives of 210,000 people in both cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The A-bombs instantly shattered the ordinary lives that people took for granted.

After the war, the US military strictly controlled the news coverage of the atomic attack. The Japanese government concealed the damage inflicted by the atomic bombing, and the suffering survivors were left without help or any medical treatment. Meanwhile, many A-bomb survivors died.

However, the public outcry grew after the Daigo Fukuryu Maru incident in 1954, when a Japanese fishing boat was exposed to “ashes of death” (a nuclear fallout) from a hydrogen bomb test at Bikini Atoll. This led to the development of movements against atomic and hydrogen bombs across Japan, eventually becoming a nationwide campaign. Encouraged by this public sentiment, the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations (Nihon Hidankyo) was founded in August 1956. Yuaikai, or the Atomic Bomb Sufferers Association in Chiba, is an affiliate of Nihon Hidankyo.

In its founding declaration, Nihon Hidankyo vowed to “save humanity from its crisis by drawing lessons from our experience and saving ourselves at the same time,” and under the pledge of “No More Hibakusha” and “No More Nuclear Weapons,” Nihon Hidankyo has tirelessly and persistently, with tears of sadness, appealed to people in Japan and abroad about the reality of atomic bomb damage, despite facing numerous difficulties.

Seventy-four years have passed since the end of World War II, and as the A-bomb survivors age, it is becoming increasingly difficult to pass on their first-hand accounts of the reality of the atomic bombing. However, our long-standing efforts to move the world toward nuclear disarmament have resonated with many people, and we often receive requests from various organizations and schools to share our testimonies, saying, “We must not forget the horror of nuclear weapons” or “We want to pass on our experiences to future generations.”

The number of Yuaikai members who can testify is decreasing, making Kotani-san an indispensable person. Her storytelling style of the atomic bomb experience, expressed through ventriloquism with the puppet "Atchan," is particularly acceptable and easy to understand for people of all ages. Kotani-san's sincere personality has also made her popular.

We hope that "Atomic Bomb Experience Telling Together with Atchan" will be widely read and move people to take the first step toward nuclear abolition as citizens of a nation that has experienced atomic bombing and as individuals.



CHAPTER 1

Unforgettable Memories of the Atomic Bomb: The Devastation of the Moment of Impact and the Suffering of the Survivors

And What Happened on That Day, at That Moment?

On August 6, 1945, at 8:15 a.m., an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. This was the first time in human history that nuclear weapons were used in warfare. Three days later, on August 9, another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

In one burst of blinding light, the cities were instantly destroyed. Over 20,000 precious lives were lost in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Those who barely survived are still tormented by the fear of dying and are in constant agony because of the horrific scenes they witnessed and the after-effects of radiation exposure, including A-bomb sickness or other diseases that develop many years after the atomic bombing.

As time passes, the number of people who experienced the horrors of the atomic bomb or who know the hardships of World War II is getting fewer. Memories of the A-bomb and the war are fading. The nuclear proliferation is spreading worldwide, and there is even a growing movement in Japan to accept militarization.

To put an end to this dangerous trend and prevent the horrors of nuclear weapons from ever happening again, I decided to testify about my experience of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima.

My constant companion in this endeavor, and a great source of support, is "Atchan," a ventriloquist's puppet. Yes, using the ventriloquism I learned when I was a kindergarten teacher, I, together with my partner "Atchan," share with children the horrors of the A-bomb and the preciousness of peace.

Fortunately, my A-bomb testimony, which began in 2003, has received a lot of attention, and the scope of my activities has expanded beyond Japan to the various countries around the world. Let me share a glimpse of our usual conversation with "Atchan" and myself.

The PIKADON was dropped

KOTANI: Hello, everyone.

ATCHAN: Hi!

KOTANI: Today, I'm going to tell you about my experience with the A-bomb when I was in first grade. I'll also tell you about how I met Atchan (the ventriloquist puppet) and why I started giving testimony about my experience. Atchan, listen together with everyone else, okay?

ATCHAN: Okay!

KOTANI: By the way, Atchan, how old are you now?

ATCHAN: FIVE!

KOTANI: Okay, you are five. When I was five, Japan was at war. It was called "World War II," and the whole world was fighting.

ATCHAN: Um, really? I did not know that.

KOTANI: And when I was five, my father passed away from illness.

ATCHAN: Oh, that's sad.

KOTANI: My father was a soldier in the navy. So, our family was living in Kure City, Hiroshima Prefecture, where there was a naval base. But after my father died, my grandmother was living alone at my father's family home in Hiroshima City, so we all moved in with her. That was in March 1945, when I was six years old. And then in April, I entered elementary school, and on August 6, an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima City. That's the story I'm going to tell you about.

Our grandmother's house, where we had recently moved, was located in Minami-machi (Minami-ku, Hiroshima City), about 2.5 kilometers from the hypocenter. We had six family members: my mother, my grandmother, a sister 4 years older than me, a brother 2 years older, another brother 3 years younger, and myself.

After losing my father, my mother worked tirelessly to support our family. Still, life was difficult. Food rations (a system in which the government provides food and necessities) were gradually diminishing, forcing us to rely on the home of a relative in the countryside for evacuation. Coincidentally, the date and time of our move were set for August 6 at noon.

The morning of the 6th was so beautiful and serene. It was hard to believe we were in the thick of a war. Around 7 a.m., an air raid siren sounded once but was soon canceled, and local people went about their daily lives as usual, going to work or doing their labor service.

Since we had some time until our scheduled move, my siblings and I decided to go swimming in the river behind our house. We ran off together to the Kyobashi River (the river that runs through the eastern part of

Hiroshima City), which flows into the Seto Inland Sea. Hiroshima City has many rivers, and people often swam, fished, and gathered seaweed for food.

As we ran happily under the blue sky, we gradually heard the sound of an airplane.

"Is it a B29?"

We all felt uneasy, but it flew away quickly, so we thought,

"No biggie!"

and started running again. However, I was quite thirsty, so I turned back to the house alone.

While I was drinking water in the kitchen, suddenly the window glass flashed brightly and with a tremendous boom! The house collapsed, and I was trapped underneath.

... I don't know how long it has been. I could hear my mother calling our names desperately.

She was upstairs, getting ready for the planned evacuation.

"Mom, help!"

Hearing my voice, my mother came to rescue me. Fortunately, I was in a space between the fallen wall and pillar, so I only had minor scratches.

But when I crawled out, the scene I saw was unlike anything I had seen before, as if I had fallen into hell.

Hiroshima was a sea of flames. People were fleeing everywhere, most of them severely burned, their skin hanging down, their hands outstretched like ghosts.

They came in droves to me, who was simply standing there stunned, and pleaded, "Give me water," "Help me," reaching out their hands. And then, one by one, they collapsed and died. I could only stand there trembling, frozen in fear.

At that time, no one knew what had happened. Because there was a blinding flash of light (pika) followed by a huge boom (don), the adults said, "Pikadon has fallen. It was much later that we learned that an A-bomb (see column on pages 16-18) had been dropped.

The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima was a uranium weapon named "Little Boy."

And three days later, on August 9th, a plutonium bomb called "Fat Man" was dropped on Nagasaki.



scenery of Hiroshima's former days

The Death of My Three-Year-Old Brother and War's End

ATCHAN: The A-bomb... it's scary!

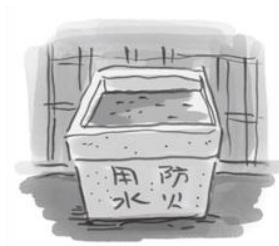
KOTANI: During wartime, every house had a "fire prevention water tank" so people could quickly put out fires if bombs fell. When the bombs dropped, many people ran to these tanks to cool down, but they overlapped and died. In the river behind our house, many bodies floated because people were so hot and thirsty.

ATCHAN: How many people died?

KOTANI: About 140,000 people died in Hiroshima, and 70,000 people died in Nagasaki. That's about 210,000 people in total.

ATCHAN: What happened to your sister and brother, who were with you to a river for swimming, and your three-year-old brother? Was your grandma safe?

KOTANI: My sister, elder brother, younger brother, and grandma were all injured in the explosion. They had severe burns and other injuries.



Fire prevention water tank

My mother, soon after rescuing me from underneath the house, went out to look for the rest of the family. She returned with my sister and brother. My sister's whole body was severely burned. As my brother was staying behind the house, he was not exposed to the direct heat rays, so he did not get burned. However, the pieces of glass flying from the blast pierced his head and face, leaving him drenched in blood.

My mother asked me to watch over two of them, and she went find my younger brother. However, because he was only three years old, he was blown away by the explosion and was difficult to find.

Finally, my mother found my brother and took him back home. His face was completely blackened. When my mother wiped his face with her clothes, his skin peeled off and hung down.

The heat ray from an atomic bomb explosion is estimated to be between 3,000 and 4,000 degrees Celsius. Even temperatures of 1,000 degrees Celsius can cause severe burns. I can only imagine how hot and painful it must have been.

My grandmother returned home with terrible burns all over her body. She had been chatting on the street with the neighbors when the A-bomb was dropped down.

On the morning of August 10, the fourth day after the bombing, my unconscious brother finally woke up.

Mother gently made him hold water in his mouth.

Then he said, "Mommy, airplanes, scary... water, so yummy..."

And with those words, my three-year-old brother passed away.

He was the youngest and most adorable brother. I was the closest to him in age, so I took the best care of him and played with him all the time. I lost my dearest brother.

Even though I was only six years old, I had a profound sense of loss, grief, and misery.

Because it was a hot summer, the wounds on my brother's body quickly festered, and maggots appeared. We couldn't take him to the crematorium, so Mother burned him to ashes by herself. She did not shed a single tear.

I think Mother did not cry because I stood by her side and watched. But the cruel experience of cremating her own child with her own hands must have caused her immense sadness and suffering. I wonder how much she cried when she was alone. My heart aches when I think of her pain.

On August 15, Japan surrendered, and the war ended.

ATCHAN: It should have ended earlier, much earlier.

KOTANI: Yes, Atchan. If the war had ended sooner, millions of people throughout the country wouldn't have lost their lives.

ATCHAN: No war. No war!

KOTANI: Absolutely. War is something we must never allow to happen again.



Words left by my mother, my dreams, and my struggles...

KOTANI: When the war ended, children evacuated by Gakudo Sokai returned to Hiroshima City.

ATCHAN: What's "Gakudo Sokai"?

KOTANI: Well, it means that students from the third to sixth grades of elementary schools live in the countryside with their teachers.

ATCHAN: Why did they do that?

KOTANI: It was to protect the children. The war was getting fierce, and there was no food in the city. Bombs could fall at any time. So, the children and their teachers evacuated to the countryside.

ATCHAN: That must have been hard.

KOTANI: I'm sure it was very difficult. When the war ended, those evacuated children returned.

The children all said, "Oh, we can finally see our moms and dads!"

Every child cheered happily as they came back. But almost all of them had lost their families and became "atomic bomb orphans."

ATCHAN: That's so sad...

KOTANI: The evacuation saved the children's lives, but those who lost their parents had no choice but to depend on themselves. As a result, a shelter for A-bomb orphans (see column on pages 19 · 20) was built on Ninoshima Island (Minami Ward, Hiroshima City) in the Seto Inland Sea.

After the war ended, my mother spent day after day running around the burnt ruins, looking for food and medicine for our family. Despite her busy schedule, she found time to visit Ninoshima Island and care for the children in the facility there.

Meanwhile, I was perfectly healthy, with no burns or illnesses, so my mother did not take care of me. One day I couldn't stand it anymore, and I cried, "Why don't you take care of me instead of taking care of other people's children?"

My mother replied, "Don't be selfish. Your mother comes home to you at night, but the children on that island will never see their parents again, no matter how long they wait."

She then told me, "Even in the most difficult times, you should be a person with a generous heart who cares for others as well as yourself."

Six years later, when I was in the sixth grade, my mother passed away from leukemia caused by A-bomb sickness at the young age of 43. Those words were the legacy she left me in her short life. Without forgetting them, I have cherished them and lived by them ever since.

ATCHAN: Did you become an orphan?

KOTANI: Uh-huh. But I still had my grandmother, and my older sister, and my older brother, and as a family of four, we pulled together to live our lives. My sister went to night high school and worked during the day. My brother worked as a paperboy. I worked in a beauty salon after school in junior high. My grandmother took care of the household."

ATCHAN: What about your grandmother's, sister's, and brother's injuries?

KOTANI: My grandmother and my sister had keloid scars from burns all over their bodies, and later they suffered from lung cancer and liver cancer, which were aftereffects of the radiation. My brother had small pieces of glass in his brain and had to have several surgeries to remove them. But we all looked to the future with hope.

ATCHAN: Great!

After my mother died, I was depressed for a while. But when I was in the first year of junior high school, my friend's mother was very kind to me.

She worried about me and asked, "Are you eating enough?"

"Do you have any problems?"

She always paid attention to me and encouraged me so much.

My friend's mother was a kindergarten teacher, which mirrored my own mother's work caring for children at a facility on Ninoshima Island. This made me "dream" to become a kindergarten teacher in the future. If there is no war, we can have "dreams." Such a simple thing was very new to me at the time.

Once I discovered my dream of becoming a kindergarten teacher, I tried to live my life brightly, always with a smile.

But there were people who didn't like me. They were my friends who had keloids from the A-bomb and suffered from discrimination.

They said, "You don't have keloids like we do, and you're not sick. You can smile because you're happy." I was shocked. I was so sad that I wanted to cry.

Why can't I just live cheerfully? Maybe I wasn't considerate enough of others, even though I was healthy and not sick. I was so confused, and my feeling of regret for my own thoughtlessness gradually grew.

Then I began to think, "Even though I am an atomic bomb survivor, I still shouldn't talk about the A-bomb.

From then on, I decided to bury everything about the atomic bomb and exposure deep in my heart and never talk about it again.

【column】 What is an "Atomic Bomb"?

What is an "Atomic Bomb"?

An atomic bomb, also known as a nuclear bomb, is a weapon that uses nuclear fission, such as uranium or plutonium. It was the first type of nuclear weapon used in warfare.

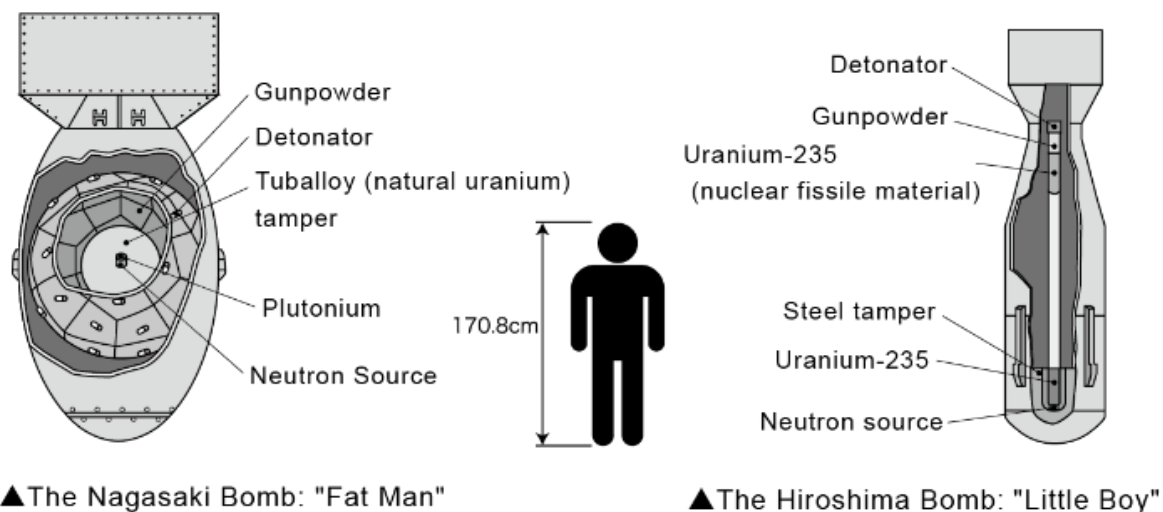
During World War II, several countries, including Germany, Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom, were engaged in the research and development of atomic bombs.

The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima was a uranium-235 weapon code-named "Little Boy." The bomb dropped on Nagasaki was a plutonium-239 weapon code-named "Fat Man."

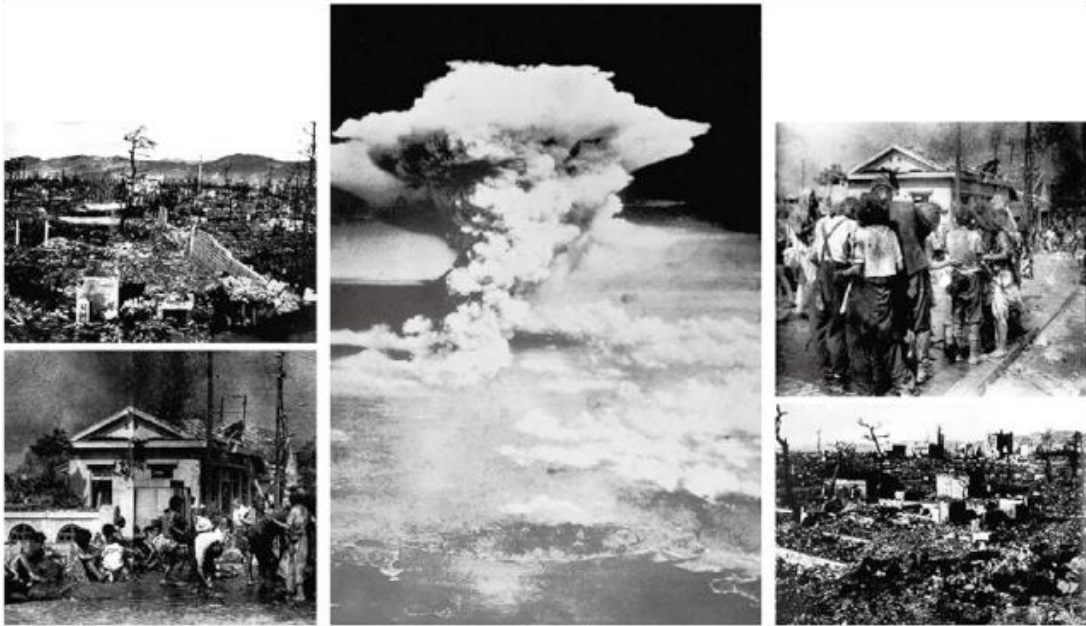
The nickname "Little Boy" is believed to have originated from the fact that it was smaller than its original design specifications, although there are alternative theories.

The primary purpose of dropping different types of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was to assess the destructive power of these new weapons, which had distinct structural differences.

【Illustration of an Atomic Bomb】



【column】 Atomic bombing causes three types of damage: "Heat Ray", "Blast", and "Radiation"



Atomic bombing causes three types of damage: "Heat Ray", "Blast", and "Radiation"

"Heat Rays": At the hypocenter, the heat rays reached 3,000 to 4,000 degrees Celsius at the surface. The majority of people exposed to these heat rays suffered severe burns that penetrated deep into their internal organs, resulting in death either immediately or within a few days.

"Blast": The blast wave generated an air pressure of 35 tons per square meter around the hypocenter. For comparison, an African elephant weighs around 7 tons. At the moment the bomb exploded, the sheer force of the blast propelled many people away, killing them instantly before they could be exposed to heat or radiation. Some theories suggest that, as for the power of the atomic bombs, the U.S. military initially focused on the lethal effects of the blast wave rather than the consequences of radiation.

"Radiation": Radiation is the most characteristic feature of nuclear weapons. It penetrates deep into the human body, damaging cells, altering the blood, and disrupting the hematopoietic function of organs such as the bone marrow. This can lead to severe damage to the lungs, liver, and other organs.

Nearly all individuals exposed to radiation within one kilometer of the hypocenter died. Even those who were not injured or who were involved in rescue efforts or searching for missing family and friends around the hypocenter were also exposed to residual radiation and subsequently died.

The diseases caused by the atomic bombs are known as "atomic bomb sickness," and approximately 110,000 survivors currently hold the "Hibakusha Kenko Techo" ("Atomic Bomb Survivor's Certificate") as of the end of March 2023, which exempts them from out-of-pocket medical expenses.

【column】 Ninoshima: An Island in Hiroshima Bay / From A-bomb and War Orphans' Home to Ninoshima Gakuen

Ninoshima: An Island in Hiroshima Bay

Ninoshima is the largest island in Hiroshima City and is located at the southernmost point of the city (Ninoshima-cho, Minami Ward). From 1895 to the end of World War II in 1945, an army quarantine station was established on the island. After the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, it was used as a temporary field hospital. Approximately 10,000 A-bomb survivors were brought to Ninoshima, and a memorial was erected to commemorate those who died and were buried on the island.



From A-bomb and War Orphans' Home to Ninoshima Gakuen

In 1946, on the former site of the military quarantine station in Ninoshima, a facility was established to care for war orphans and homeless children affected by the atomic bomb. In 1948, it was recognized as a child welfare institution under the Child Welfare Law and was renamed Ninoshima Gakuen (Ninoshima Gakuen School) in 1952. Since 1966, the facility has also included a higher education and nursing department for individuals with intellectual disabilities.



*Photo courtesy of Ninoshima Gakuen Social Welfare Organization



Children in the Atomic Bombed Area



CHAPTER 2

A Turning Point in My Life Brought About by Ventriloquism: Realizing My "Mission" to Accomplish

What I kept deep in my heart

I was six years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Miraculously, I survived with only a scratch because I was trapped in the gap between the walls and pillars of a collapsed house.

My mother, who was upstairs preparing for evacuation, was also safe. However, my grandmother, older sister, older brother, and younger brother suffered severe burns and injuries. My younger brother passed away four days later.

Six years later, I lost my mother to the effects of A-bomb sickness. She had worked hard to support our family all by herself.

But we did not give up, and our remaining family worked together to make a living. Eventually, I found a "dream" to become a kindergarten teacher.

I was filled with hope for my future and lived a vibrant and energetic life despite our poverty.

However, my happiness turned into deep remorse. My friends, who had sustained injuries from the bomb and faced discrimination, hurled hurtful words at me. After that, I felt guilty about my good health and stopped talking about my experience with the atomic bomb.

After graduating from high school, I moved to Tokyo and realized my long-held dream of becoming a kindergarten teacher. An encounter with one kindergarten child led me to learn ventriloquism, which became a major turning point in my later life.

I'd like to share with you the story of how I took up ventriloquism and, with my puppet partner 'Atchan,' began to recount my long-buried experiences of the A-bomb.

“Atchan” brings back a smile to a kindergartener's face.

KOTANI: Remember how I told you that I had a dream of becoming a kindergarten teacher, inspired by my friend's kind mother when I was in middle school? Well, let me continue the story. After graduating from middle school, I went to night school while working. Once I graduated from night school, I took the plunge and moved to Tokyo.

ATCHAN: Why to Tokyo?

KOTANI: Because I didn't want to stay in Hiroshima. Everyone there was always talking about the A-bomb and their radiation exposure. It was hard for me to listen.

ATCHAN: I see...

KOTANI: In Tokyo, I worked while attending a childcare vocational school. After a lot of hard work, I finally graduated and became a kindergarten teacher, just like I had always dreamed of.

ATCHAN: You did it!

KOTANI: I worked hard every day at kindergarten, and eventually I got married and had three children. I was so happy because it was said that A-bomb survivors couldn't have children.

ATCHAN: That's wonderful!

KOTANI: Then we moved to Yachiyo City, Chiba Prefecture, in 1970. Around that time, I joined the "Yuaikai, Atomic Bomb Sufferers Association in Chiba." I took a break from my kindergarten job while my children were small and returned to work when they grew up a bit. That's when I happened to meet one kindergartener and started learning ventriloquism.

The child was a five-year-old boy in my homeroom class. Before he started kindergarten, he lost his beloved grandfather and had been closed off ever since.

In kindergarten, he wouldn't sit down or play with anyone. He just looked blankly out the window.

"I want to reach out to this child and listen to him," I thought.

While I was thinking about what I could do, I came across an article in a childcare magazine. It was about a pediatrician who used a doll to talk to the children in ventriloquism, "No pain, no pain," when giving them shots, helping to relieve their fear and treat them.

"This is it!"

I immediately signed up for a ventriloquism workshop that was introduced in the magazine. That was in July 1974.

My ventriloquism mentor was a pastor at a Christian church in Kawasaki City (Kanagawa). He taught ventriloquism to anyone who wanted to use it for the good of society. Among his students were a police officer

who wanted to use ventriloquism to teach traffic safety and a temple monk who wanted to explain the teachings of Buddhism in an approachable way.

The ventriloquism workshop was held in Izu (Shizuoka) under the strict guidance of the mentor. He said, for example, "If you perform ventriloquism using only technique, no matter how entertaining the content is, the audience won't smile from the heart."

"First, polish your personality with all your heart."

Needless to say, these teachings had a great influence not only on my ventriloquism but also on my life thereafter.

A month after the workshop, I received a ventriloquism puppet. It was set to be a "five-year-old" child.

According to my mentor, a five-year-old would begin to understand things and develop curiosity. I named the puppet "Atchan" after my oldest son, who was three years old at the time.

Then, I introduced Atchan to the kindergarten class and had him take attendance. Everyone's face lit up with joy. Even the boy, who had always seemed so distant, turned his face towards Atchan.

After that, as I had Atchan take attendance every day, the boy gradually started to sit in his seat and smile.

I will never forget the excitement I felt at that moment.



Replacing guilt with a sense of mission

KOTANI: Atchan, I was so glad the boy opened up to you.

ATCHAN: It was a big success!

KOTANI: I was in my 30s when it happened. I am who I am today because of that experience.

ATCHAN: That's right.

KOTANI: I worked as a kindergarten teacher until my retirement, and then I devoted myself to ventriloquism activities. In the summer of 2003, I participated in a national ventriloquism convention held in Hiroshima.

At that time, encouraged by my mentor, I decided to talk about my A-bomb experience, something I had sworn never to speak of again.

In July 2003, a national ventriloquism convention was held in Hiroshima. The venue was the hall of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum (see column on page 28). I felt a strange sense of fate about it.

It was before the convention.

My mentor learned that I was a hibakusha from someone and suggested I bring Atchan and share my experience with the audience.

My teacher valued peace deeply and encouraged me, saying, "As an A-bomb survivor, you must not let the tragic event fade away. Make a speech together with Atchan about your experience."

However, I had buried those memories deep inside for a long time, and it was incredibly painful to talk about them. After much deliberation, I talked to my older sister, who had suffered greatly from the A-bomb sickness. She told me, "I was badly burned, and I faced death every day. But you were healthy, so you saw what was happening around you. Many people died before your eyes. You were given a healthy body and life by those people to convey their unfulfilled wishes. So, you must speak out. That's your mission."

Hearing these words, I realized, "Oh, I see. There's still something I can do." I replaced my guilt with a sense of mission and began to share my experiences."

But my first performance at the national competition in Hiroshima was a solo one, without Atchan. Even after returning to Chiba and starting full-fledged activities as a hibakusha witness, I continued to use photos and drawings to tell my story alone for a while.

My mentor kept pushing me to talk together with Atchan, but I couldn't bring myself to go over it.

Together with Atchan

ATCHAN: Why didn't you talk to me together?

KOTANI: I wasn't confident. I wasn't sure how to, either technically or emotionally. I didn't know how to face you.

ATCHAN: Oh, I see...

KOTANI: When it came to talking about the death of my brother and my mother, so many emotions welled up, and I just couldn't handle it. I would burst into tears, and I couldn't speak with you at all.

ATCHAN: That must have been hard...

I gave my first public testimony about my experience of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima to a large audience. After returning to Yachiyo City, I began my activity on a full scale. I started by visiting elementary and junior high teachers that I knew, but it took a while before I was able to have opportunities to share my A-bomb story. It wasn't until 2005 that I finally gave my first testimony at a school. Gradually, I was invited to more and more schools.

I was still alone when I shared my experience. I used photos and drawings to help illustrate my experiences, but whenever I talked about the deaths of my brother and mother, I couldn't hold back my tears. I often wondered if my story was too much for the children and if they would have trouble sleeping at night. All the while, my mentor kept asking me, "Aren't you going to talk along with Atchan yet?"

Then, on August 6, 2010, I was to give a testimony at the Chiba Prefectural Office. Yuaikai, the Atomic Bomb Sufferers Association in Chiba, has now asked me to use a ventriloquist puppet to tell my story.

I was so confused. Not only did I lack the necessary skills, but I also lacked the confidence to speak calmly without getting emotional.

Seeing my distress, my mentor said, "You don't need any special techniques to talk about peace."

He then turned to my interaction with Atchan, the ventriloquist puppet, and advised, "Try to talk to Atchan as if you were talking to your deceased brother. Atchan just needs to say things like, 'I see,' 'That must have been painful,' and 'It's tough.' Just imagine as if Atchan is truly listening to your story."

"Now I understand. I should just talk to Atchan as if I'm actually talking to my brother," I thought, my eyes widening in realization.

If my brother were alive, I would take him to so many different places and show him all the wonderful things in

this world, telling him, "How peaceful the world has become."

My mentor encouraged me, "Atchan will be your support when the going gets tough. Remember to stay humble and keep working hard."

With my mentor's support, I gave my first testimony together with Atchan at the Chiba Prefectural Office. We managed to see it through.

The event was widely covered by local television and newspapers, and soon people all over the prefecture knew about us. As a result, I received more requests to give testimonies, which gave me more opportunities to go out with Atchan.

Before I started telling my story along with Atchan, I had unconsciously forgotten what my brother looked like and the things we used to do together.

But now, it's as if my brother is always by my side. I can remember helping him get dressed and playing in the sand with him.

What a wonder!

【photo】 Teaching days in kindergarten / The A-bomb testimony activities at Kayada Elementary School (Yachiyo City, Chiba)



Teaching days in kindergarten



The A-bomb testimony activities at Kayada Elementary School (Yachiyo City, Chiba)

【photo】 The A-bomb testimony activities at Kayada Elementary School (Yachiyo City, Chiba)



【column】 Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

In 1946, on the former site of the military quarantine station in Ninoshima, a facility was established to care for war orphans and homeless children affected by the atomic bomb. In 1948, it was recognized as a child welfare institution under the Child Welfare Law and was renamed Ninoshima Gakuen (Ninoshima Gakuen School) in 1952. Since 1966, the facility has also included a higher education and nursing department for individuals with intellectual disabilities.



*Photo courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum



CHAPTER 3

Towards the Future without Nuclear Weapons and War: Thoughts and Wishes Through Traveling Around the World

Wishing for a peaceful world without nuclear weapons

The national ventriloquism convention in Hiroshima was an opportunity for me to finally start sharing the story of my A-bomb experience, which I had kept hidden for so long. My sister, who had suffered from A-bomb sickness, had encouraged me so much, and her words gave me the courage to overcome my hesitation.

"Talk to your puppet just like you would talk to your deceased brother," my ventriloquist mentor advised, and I was finally able to confront "Atchan," my puppet, with whom I had struggled to talk owing to technical and emotional anxiety. We made our first public appearance as a duo at the Chiba Prefectural Office. Seven years had passed since I began my testimonial work.

Since then, I always accompany Atchan wherever I go.

After our testimony at the Chiba Prefectural Office was widely reported on television and in newspapers, requests for testimonies increased dramatically, and our activities expanded from our local city of Yachiyo to various parts of Chiba Prefecture.

In 2015, marking the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII, I joined other A-bomb survivors on a ship operated by the non-governmental organization (NGO) "Peace Boat" and traveled around the world to give testimonies along with other hibakusha members. Upon my return, my activities expanded further to Tokyo and other regions nationwide.

In December 2017, when the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), an international organization for which Peace Boat serves as its steering group, won the Nobel Peace Prize, I joined a tour to visit Norway to celebrate the award. On that occasion, I renewed my determination to continue giving testimonies after interacting with people from all over the world who wished for a nuclear-free world and with a radiation victim from Kazakhstan. I will share the thoughts and wishes I have gained from my travels around the world.

Global voyage with Atchan

KOTANI: We were glad that our performance at the Chiba Prefectural Office was featured on TV and in the newspapers.

ATCHAN: Yeah!

KOTANI: Since then, more people have learned about us. Now, many elementary and junior high schools in Yachiyo City have been actively teaching about peace, and we've been getting a lot of requests!

ATCHAN: We've been busy.

KOTANI: Besides sharing A-bomb stories, we've been volunteering at senior homes, kindergartens, and daycares. We've been to many different places and met so many people, from young children to the elderly. What's your favorite memory so far?

ATCHAN: Joining the "Hibakusha Project" world trip!

KOTANI: Indeed! It was truly exciting to talk with so many friends from all around the world during that tour. Well, let's talk about the Peace Boat world trip we took in 2015.

We received requests to speak from all over the prefecture after the media covered our A-bomb experience testimony at the Chiba Prefectural Office. Thanks to the news coverage, Yachiyo City conducted questionnaire surveys about war and nuclear weapons in elementary and junior high schools, and many schools started peace education programs. Our activities used to be 2 to 3 times a year, but in 2010, the year we gave the testimony at the Prefectural Government Office, we gave 8 talks, and in 2011, the number increased to 16. I spent a lot of time with Atchan.

Besides giving testimony about the atomic bombing, we also volunteered to bring smiles to people at hospitals, senior citizen facilities, kindergartens, and nursery schools. For children, we told them classic tales and fairy tales, and for the elderly, we told amusing stories based on rakugo, a traditional Japanese comic storytelling. I wrote the scripts myself, and for the rakugo, I even made sure to include an "ochi," or the punchline of the story.

After retiring from my 35-year career in kindergarten, I became fully involved in activities for the Yuaikai. It was a busy but fulfilling time.

One day, a friend from high school introduced me to Peace Boat (see column on pages 32 · 33) and its project called "Global Voyage for a Nuclear-Free World: Peace Boat Hibakusha Project" (also known as the "Orizuru Project"). In this project, A-bomb survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki board a Peace Boat ship and travel around the world for three months, sharing the horrors of the atomic bomb and delivering a message for nuclear abolition.

My friend had already participated several times and kept urging me to join, saying, "You should go too. As a storyteller, you should board the ship and tell people around the world about your experiences."

I kept refusing, saying, "I can't," but when I learned about the 2015 tour, which marked the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII, I was moved. The plan was to visit schools in cities that were members of Mayors for Peace (see column on page 32) and deliver messages to the children.

"I think I could do this for the children," I thought, and finally decided to apply. Out of 25 applicants, only eight were selected, and I was one of them.

The voyage lasted 105 days, from April 12 to July 25, and we visited 24 cities in 23 countries. In five of those cities—India, France, Norway, Panama, and Guatemala—I talked about my experiences with the atomic bomb together with Atchan.

Students in every country listened attentively, and after the talk, they always asked, "Don't you hate the U.S. for dropping the A-bomb?"

It's true that I've wondered countless times, "What if the A-bomb hadn't been dropped?" My mother and younger brother might still be alive. My grandmother, older sister, and older brother might not have suffered from A-bomb sickness... But I told them that we didn't come here to harbor hatred.

I said, "Nothing good comes from hatred. We don't want the same mistake to happen again. Let's all work together to create a world without nuclear weapons."

The students seemed to understand and said powerfully, "Oh, I see. I learned for the first time how terrible nuclear weapons are. We will work hard to eliminate nuclear weapons in our generation."

I, along with Atchan, could convey the feelings and wishes of A-bomb survivors beyond national borders and generations.

This tour was a valuable opportunity for me to gain such a sense of fulfillment.

【column】 Peace Boat / Mayors of Peace / Global Voyage for a Nuclear-Free World

PEACE BOAT

Peace Boat is a Japanese non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1983. It also refers to the voyages organized by the group. Initially focusing on cruises around Asia, since 1990 Peace Boat has frequently conducted "Global Voyages" to various destinations. Through interactions with people worldwide, the organization addresses pressing global issues such as peace, nuclear weapons, conflict, human rights, poverty, and the environment.



Mayors for Peace

Mayors for Peace is an international organization of local governments from around the world committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons. Headquartered in Hiroshima, Japan, the organization was founded in 1982 at the initiative of ARAKI Takeshi, the then mayor of Hiroshima. As of October 1, 2024, the organization consists of 21 executive member cities, with Hiroshima serving as the chair city and Nagasaki as one of the 11 vice cities.

Beyond nuclear disarmament, Mayors for Peace aims to raise global awareness and contribute to lasting world peace by addressing issues such as hunger, poverty, refugees, human rights, and the environment through collaboration with its member cities.

Global Voyage for a Nuclear-Free World: Peace Boat Hibakusha Project



The press conference is over, and now we're embarking on a 105-day voyage!

*The details of the voyage will be introduced on pages 34•35.

【photo】 PEACE BOAT GLOBAL VOYAGE



PEACE BOAT Hibakusha Project ("Orizuru* Project"):

The 8th "Global Voyage for a Nuclear-Free World: Peace Boat Hibakusha Project"

Dates: April 12 to July 25, 2015 (From and to Yokohama Port)

Ports of Call: 24 in 23 countries.

Participating Hibakushas (Survivors): 8



▲ La Guaira, Venezuela

▲ With Venezuelan government officials



▲ Ypres, Belgium



▲ Puerto Quetzal, Guatemala

*Orizuru, an origami crane, is a symbol of peace, particularly in Japan, associated with the hope for healing and recovery from the atomic bombings.



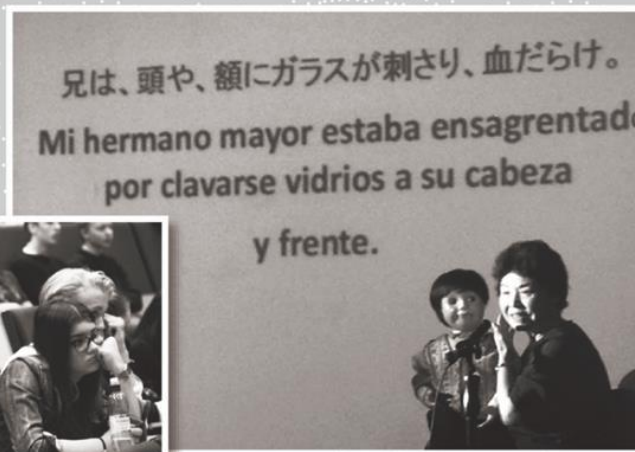
▲ With students
in Spain (top) and
France (bottom)



▲ With the Mayor of Kochi, India



▲ Swedish students listening
intently to the testimony



▲ Shot with Atchan as Spanish
subtitles are shown in the background



▲ Group photo with students



▲ A hibakusha talks
with students after
his testimony (Spain)

Celebrating ICAN's Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo

KOTANI: When we got back from Peace Boat's global voyage, the city of Yachiyo arranged a report meeting at the citizen's hall for us.

ATCHAN: Thank you to everyone who cheered us on!

KOTANI: Before our departure, we were given 900 cards from middle school students in the city. They asked us to deliver their messages to friends around the world. Along with the seven A-bomb survivors who sailed with us, we handed those message cards to each student we met. They were all pleased and said they would treasure them.

ATCHAN: That was great!

KOTANI: At the report meeting, in addition to talking about our trip around the world, a junior high school student read a poem titled "Our Thoughts" in front of the citizens. They also shared episodes of creating the message cards. It was a wonderful event.

ATCHAN: That was a lot of fun!

KOTANI: In 2016, we participated in another Peace Boat voyage, "Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and South Korea Short Cruise (9 days)." And in 2017, ICAN received the Nobel Peace Prize, and I decided to attend the celebration in Oslo, Norway.

ATCHAN: This time, I stayed at home. I wanted to go with you to Oslo!

In response to growing international consensus on the inhumanity of nuclear weapons, the United Nations (UN) in New York convened a "Negotiating Conference on a Nuclear Weapon Prohibition Treaty" in March 2017. In July, the UN adopted the "Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)," marking a significant victory for the voices of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which were finally reflected in global rules.

For its leading role in this achievement, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) (see column on page 40) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

As Peace Boat is one of ICAN's international leadership organizations, we immediately planned an event to celebrate the award. We organized a tour for A-bomb survivors to visit Norway and witness the award ceremony on December 10th.

The tour had 35 participants, consisting of 20 hibakusha, six second-generation hibakusha, four family members, and five staff members. Some of the hibakusha were elderly and disabled, so their children accompanied them on the tour to provide support. Atchan remained at home this time.

The flight departed Narita at 10:00 p.m. on December 7 for Oslo, the capital of Norway, where the award ceremony was to be held.

Once there, on the ninth, we exchanged with journalists from all over the world as well as a radiation victim of Kazakhstan (see column on page 40). On the same day, we presented four species of A-bomb survivor tree seeds to the University of Oslo: ginkgo, kurogane holly, Japanese hackberry, and jujube. Mayors MATSUI Kazumi of Hiroshima and TAUE Tomihisa of Nagasaki also attended the presentation event. Both mayors were already in Norway to attend the Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony (see column on page 40). When the A-bombed tree seeds sprout, they will be planted at the University of Oslo's botanical garden. "Please come from Japan to see the growth of these trees," a university official said.

Finally, on the 10th, ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. On that day, about 200 Japanese hibakusha and ICAN members watched the moment at the Nobel Peace Center's public viewing area in front of Oslo City Hall.

At the award ceremony, along with ICAN Executive Director Beatrice Fihn, Setsuko Thurlow (a Hiroshima survivor residing in Canada) gave a speech on behalf of the A-bomb survivors.

"Humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist. Nuclear weapons endanger everyone we love and everything we hold dear. While some nations accept the nuclear deterrence theory to keep the world safe, nuclear weapons are not a necessary evil; they are the ultimate evil." She strongly called for the abolition of nuclear weapons. We were deeply moved. Everyone stood up and joined hands to show their emotion.

After the award ceremony, 2,000 people paraded 1,000 meters from Oslo Station to the Grand Hotel. Setsuko Thurlow and others were staying at the hotel and met the people who paraded from the balcony.

On the following day, the 11th, a peace concert was held at the Oslo Spektrum (a multipurpose hall in Oslo) as a related event, attracting 20,000 people. A piano that had been exposed to the A-bomb in Hiroshima was brought to the venue, and its beautiful sound, which did not seem to have suffered such a horrific incident, resonated throughout the hall.

"Some countries have not signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons."

The host commented, "These are countries that rely on the 'nuclear umbrella.' Among them is Norway."

The audience vehemently booed these nations. As 20,000 people jeered with such intensity, it shook the entire hall.

Until then, I had always thought with no doubt that we were the only Hibakusha in the world. But later, I learned that there are many people in this world who have been suffering from radiation sickness, including those who were exposed to depleted uranium shells and hydrogen bomb tests. These people are standing up, joining hands, and making a strong appeal for a world free of nuclear weapons.

I understood this clearly in Oslo, which gave me a lot of courage. It remains with me as a great, powerful source of emotional support while I continue my A-bomb testimony activities.

【photo】 ICAN Receives Peace Prize: Oslo

ICAN Receives Peace Prize

ICAN Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony Tour: Oslo

★Dates: December 7–13, 2017 (Nobel Peace Prize Awarding Ceremony: December 10)

★Destination: Oslo, Norway ★Participants: 35 persons



▲ A global exchange between media, A-bomb survivors, and a radiation victim from Kazakhstan (front row, fifth from the right)



▲ Sowing seeds of A-bombed trees at the University of Oslo (second from the left: Mayor Taue of Nagasaki City, third from the left: Mayor Matsui of Hiroshima City)



▲ The Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony (left photo: Setsuko Thurlow giving her acceptance speech)



▲ Setsuko Thurlow (left) and Beatrice Fihn, ICAN Executive Director (right), enjoying the view from their hotel balcony



▲ Smiles all around at the peace parade!



▲ The ICAN Nobel Peace Prize tour participants

【column】 ICAN / Kazakhstan's Radiation Victims / ICAN's Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony:
Participants from Japan

ICAN (the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons)

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), a global network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to the abolition of nuclear weapons, was founded in 2007, with the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) as its parent organization. The international secretariat is located in Geneva, Switzerland. As of 2024, ICAN has active partners in 110 countries.

Kazakhstan's Radiation Victims.

The Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, situated in northeastern Kazakhstan, was said to have been used by the former Soviet Union for conducting 456 nuclear tests between 1949 and 1989. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the test site was closed. The Soviet Union had hidden the effects of civilian exposure, which only came to light after the closure of the site. It is believed that the radioactive fallout from Semipalatinsk has resulted in health issues, including cancer, affecting as many as 200,000 people.

* A Kazakhstani victim of radiation



ICAN's Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony: Participants from Japan

Japanese attendees at the ICAN Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony included Hiroshima Mayor MATSUI Kazumi, Nagasaki Mayor TAUE Tomihisa, Chairperson TANAKA Terumi, and Assistant Secretary General (at the time) FUJIMORI Toshiki of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations, and KAWASAKI Akira, Executive Committee Member of the Peace Boat and International Steering Group Member of ICAN.

What Brings True Peace?

KOTANI: Atchan, we got a lot busier after my return from Oslo.

ATCHAN: I know.

KOTANI: The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted at the UN, and ICAN won the Nobel Peace Prize. Because of this, a lot of people are interested in the issue, so we are frequently asked to speak at workshops and events for adults.

ATCHAN: It's a lot of work, but it's fun!

KOTANI: A lot of time has passed since the A-bombs were dropped, and fewer and fewer people remember the war. At school, too, the teachers born right after the war are retiring, so the teachers are getting younger.

ATCHAN: That's right.

KOTANI: The days of WWII are farther away. But we must not forget about the horror of the war and the atomic bombs. Even today, there are still 12,520 nuclear weapons in the world.

ATCHAN: Really? That is scary!

KOTANI: It would be horrible if even one of them was used. I'm determined to keep talking about my experiences of the atomic bombing with you, Atchan, and ask young people who will shape the future what true peace is and what it brings.

< Number of Nuclear Weapons by Country (Nuclear Warhead Count)>

Russia: 5,580

United States: 5,044

China: 500

France: 290

United Kingdom: 225

Pakistan: 170

India: 170

Israel: 90

North Korea: 50

(* As of June 2024. Surveyed by RECNA, the Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University. Numbers are rounded and differ from actual totals.)

"Ventriloquism will change your life," my ventriloquism mentor used to say.
I've come to truly believe that.

Since the war, I've lived life to the fullest. Now, at this age, I have found my new path and walk it alongside my puppet "Atchan," an avatar of my younger brother. I've had the opportunity to connect with people from all over the world and think about the happiness of everyone. I am grateful for the luck of having such a lovely life.

My mentor, who significantly influenced my life, passed away in 2016.

My grandmother, who took care of my siblings and me after our mother passed away, lived a long life and died at the age of 88.

My brother died at the age of 80. For the last ten years of his life, he suffered from a stroke caused by a small piece of glass lodged in his brain.

My sister is married and has four children. She is still very healthy. She is my precious and supportive presence.

I receive many requests for the A-bomb testimony directly from the people who have seen or heard my testimony in the newspapers, on TV, or on the radio. One-third of the requests are through the Yuaikai. After returning from Oslo, I appeared on NHK's (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) well-known radio program in March 2018. The reaction to that program was very positive. I received many contacts from people.

I enthusiastically continue visiting hospitals, senior centers, kindergartens, and nursery schools with Atchan as part of our "smile volunteer" activities. In addition to that, I continue my A-bomb testifying activities, which makes me physically tough.

However, when I share my A-bomb experience at elementary and junior high schools and see the innocent and sincere reactions of the children, I am filled with energy and courage.

"I must keep going!" and "I must continue to tell my story to protect these children," I think to myself, feeling the spirit come out.

I have a particularly memorable experience with a child's reaction.

When missile experiments were being conducted frequently near Japan, making us feel threatened, I gave a testimony at an elementary school. After the talk, a sixth-grade boy said, "Until yesterday, I thought it would be great if another country attacked the country that threatens other countries. But after hearing your story today, I realized that it's wrong to fight with weapons against weapons. Dialogue is important, isn't it?"

He also said, "There are children like us in that country, too, and children are the first to be sacrificed."

When his male teacher in his fifties heard this feedback, he burst into tears and said, "I knew nothing about the war either. I had absolutely no idea how to teach it. But you have learned well."

Seeing this scene, I felt deeply that our activities were meaningful.

True peace, in my opinion, is brought not by weapons but by "heart." I want to continue telling children about this for as long as I can. And I hope that even one person, even just one word, will pass on what they heard from us to someone else. That is the wish of us A-bomb survivors.

The testimony activities I am engaged in are just a small, humble seed-sowing. But I will continue to work hard. With the little life I have left, I intend to continue speaking out every day until the end of my life, regardless of my age.



KOTANI: And so, our story in this book comes to an end. Atchan, we'll miss it a little.

ATCHAN: Me too.

KOTANI: The story in this book finishes, but there are still wars going on all over the world. Conflicts continue. I don't want the children and young people of today, who will live in the future, to experience the same pain I felt as a child. So, Atchan, we'll keep telling our story.

ATCHAN: Let's do our best!

KOTANI: Atchan, before we end, let me share a little poem written by a hibakusha with all of the readers of this book.

*Visitors to Hiroshima and Nagasaki,
Please walk softly on the asphalt.
Many people died beneath it.*



KOTANI: We thank you, everyone.

ATCHAN: Thank you!



【AFTERWORD】

Afterword by the author, KOTANI Takako

When I talk to children, I always keep one thing in mind. That is, to look at everyone's face and eyes. If even one child looks down, I feel a sense of responsibility, wondering if they're understanding what I'm saying. That's why I look at the children with all my heart, and I'm so happy when they look at me.

Seventy-four years have passed since the end of World War II. It is becoming increasingly distant from the past, and there are fewer opportunities for younger generations to hear firsthand accounts of the war from those who lived through it. I want people to remember the history of war in Japan and the rest of the world and to always reflect on the past so that we don't repeat the same mistakes. I wrote this book because I desperately want the future generation to avoid the tragic experiences I had as a child.

In the A-bomb testimony that "Atchan" and I give in various places, I try to convey not only the horror and misery of war and atomic bombing but also how precious our everyday lives are. Every morning you wake up, your mother prepares breakfast, and you eat it with your family. At school, you can be with your friends and study together.

What a blessing to live such a normal life!

There are many children around the world who don't have enough food, can't go to school, and can't get medical treatment when they're sick. I want the children living in Japan today to never forget the gratitude they should feel for their ordinary, unchanging daily lives, which are actually very fortunate.

Times are changing, but conflicts continue to break out around the world, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons has not stopped. There are still nearly 14,000 nuclear weapons in the world. However, I would like to encourage people to think about what they can do, to find out what they can do, and to take action instead of just standing by and hoping that someone else will change the situation. No matter how small it may be.

Weapons do not bring "peace." A warm heart that cares for others is what calms the minds of people around us and can change the course of the world. I believe that human beings have such power. I would be more than happy if you, the reader, could find your own "key to sowing seeds of peace" through this book.

Finally, I would like to extend my profound gratitude to Mr. KAWASAKI Akira, Executive Committee Member of the Peace Boat, and Ms. KODAMA Michiko, Chairperson of Yuaikai, Atomic Bomb Sufferers Association in Chiba, for their wonderful recommendations at the beginning of this book.

August 2019, KOTANI Takako

Dear readers: Upon the Publication of the Second Edition

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all readers for the publication of the second edition of this book. Since the publication of the first edition, I have received numerous heartwarming comments, such as “It was very easy to read” and “I read it over and over again.” These comments have assured me that the thoughts and feelings that I and “Atchan” poured into this book have reached your hearts.

What is even better is that I am grateful to have expanded encounters and exchanges with many people who have come to understand and support our activities through this book.

In my ventriloquism performances about peace, there is no laughter. Because of this, when I first started my activities, some people would ridicule and say, “That’s not ventriloquism; it’s just a puppet performance.” However, after this book was published and it became clear that Atchan was a stand-in for my three-year-old brother who died in the atomic bombing, people’s perceptions changed dramatically. They began to take the tragedy of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima seriously, realizing that it was not a distant past event but a grave problem that could still happen today.

This book has vividly illuminated the relationship between Atchan and me, making it easier for the readers to imagine that daily life in Hiroshima at the time was no different from what it is now and that one single bomb had resulted in the tragic death of a cherished family member. In this way, the book complements our testimonies about the atomic bomb, filling in the gaps that our words alone cannot convey.

This year marks 20 years since I began sharing my experiences of the atomic bombing. It was my late mentor who encouraged me to participate in the national ventriloquism competition in Hiroshima, saying, “You should tell your story there.” Coincidentally, this June, a national ventriloquism convention happened to be held in the very same Hiroshima (Hatsukaichi City), and I decided to challenge myself by attempting to obtain my “shodan,” or first-degree rank in ventriloquism.



▲At the technical certification course of the National Ventriloquism Convention (Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima)

This time, instead of my mentor, the tutors and seniors at the Harukaze Ichimon School cheered me, saying, "This is your last chance to take on a new challenge in the same city as Hiroshima!" They have all read my book and have come to understand my activities.



Under the intensive guidance of my seniors, I thoroughly relearned the basics of ventriloquism and participated in the technical certification course. Thanks to their support, I achieved the shodan and was given the stage name "Harukaze Akashi." The name "Akashi" is derived from the Japanese word for "proof." My seniors chose this name for me and implied the message, "Continue to tell the proof of the A-bombing."

I feel as if I am receiving encouragement also from my mentor in heaven, saying, "Keep up the good work!" Driven by the "wishes for peace" of those who have connected with me through my testimonies about the atomic bombing and this book, I will continue to tell the story with Atchan with a sense of mission.

September 2023, KOTANI Takako



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Lead the Cultural Tide,
Strike the Lofty Ideal Bell.

The haunting images of the atomic bomb seared into her six-year-old mind.

The loss of her beloved mother and young brother.

The guilt of being unharmed and healthy after the bombing.

Through these trials, the author discovered that her "mission" was to tell her experiences. It is her humble planting of seeds that will grow into a garden of peace.