

## NAGASAKI SURVIVORS

### Stories of Endurance and Courage

By Lynne Shivers

**B**etween 1966 and 1995, as I interviewed atomic survivors, I frequently traveled from Hiroshima to Nagasaki by train. As I took the train south to Nagasaki, I had to change from the fast express train to the slower, regional train in northern Kyushu. The train wound slowly past small fishing villages, sometimes right next to the beaches. Fishing nets were piled on the sea walls. Narrow streams coming out of the mountains emptied into the ocean. Blue and brown fishing boats on mud flats leaned to one side when the tide was out. Many rice fields were planted right up to the train tracks. Fewer signs in English appeared further south as fewer foreigners visited. As the train entered Nagasaki City, it traveled through the Urakami valley before reaching the downtown station. The Urakami railroad station sign uses the image of a stained glass church window, an unusual image in Japan.

Each time I visit Nagasaki, seeing this landscape is an evocative introduction to the city. For various reasons, this “second city” that that was the site of an atomic explosion in 1945 has generally been overlooked or even ignored. Yet the experiences of its atomic survivors (*hibakusha*, meaning “bomb-affected person/people”) are just as painful and powerful as those of Hiroshima. In addition, how *hibakusha* lived their lives after the initial months also shows how they dealt with their long-term physical and emotional suffering. By their actions, and the telling of their actions and their stories, a peace movement grew in the city, replacing the silence of the first thirty years. It is impossible to tell all the stories of Nagasaki’s almost 300,000 *hibakusha*. Yet learning a few biographical accounts is revealing and important.

Other issues related to the Nagasaki explosion—such as reasons for bombing Nagasaki, how the atomic explosion can be understood in the wider context of World War II, and comparison of the blast with the one in Hiroshima—all these issues can be examined elsewhere in widely available sources. What is more difficult to find are personal experiences such as the ones given here.

For the survivors, short-term physical effects of radiation are well known. Long-term effects were mainly various forms of cancer, still appearing in *hibakusha* sixty years later. Long-lasting psychological damage came in the form of low energy; massive discrimination against *hibakusha*, mainly because of their ugly scars; inaccurate fears of contamination; and fear of conceiving damaged children. Significant effects were well documented in Robert Lifton’s groundbreaking study, *Death in Life* (1968). This research initiated our understanding of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. No understanding of *hibakusha* is complete without examining this aspect of their lives.

#### HIBAKUSHA PROFILES

Profiles are arranged initially in chronological order, when significant events took place, or when actions became important to the wider society. I interviewed Dr. Akizuki, Eiko Fukuda, and Sumiteru

Takiguchi; information from the other *hibakusha* profiled here was gathered from other sources.



Dr. Akizuki, an atomic survivor, offered medical relief immediately after the Nagasaki atomic bombing and for the rest of his life.

Credit: Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum

#### Dr. Tatsuichiro Akizuki

In 1945, Dr. Tatsuichiro Akizuki was a physician at the First Urakami Hospital (the present-day St. Francis Hospital), located only 1,500 meters from the epicenter. He remembered that the initial bright flash of light was followed by an enormous blast. The whole hospital collapsed in debris around him and the other workers and patients. He thought the bomb must have hit the hospital directly (a common misperception in both cities). When he got to a room and looked out, this is what he records:

*. . . dun-colored smoke or dust cleared little by little. I saw figures running. . . . The sky was as dark as pitch, covered with clouds of smoke; under that darkness, over the earth, hung a yellow-brown fog. . . . All the buildings I could see were on fire: Urakami Church, the largest Catholic church in the east [Asia] was ablaze. Electricity poles were wrapped in flame like so many pieces of kindling. Trees on the near-by hills were smoking, as were the leaves of sweet potatoes in the fields. . . . It seemed as if the earth itself emitted fire and smoke, flames that writhed up and erupted from underground. . . . It seemed like the end of the world.<sup>1</sup>*

Dr. Akizuki and other staff helped remove patients and other employees from the burning hospital. Soon, people arrived with various wounds and terrible burns. Staff created sparse meals of rice and pumpkin. A few days later, a civilian patrol demanded that the hospital become a relief center with Dr. Akizuki as the leader. He resisted, saying he was only a doctor, but the patrol leader was adamant. The worst of the pain, confusion, fear, and death lasted to the end of the September.<sup>2</sup>

For the rest of his life, Dr. Akizuki was thought of as a heroic figure as he continued his medical work at the hospital. Later he became chairman of the Nagasaki Foundation for the Promotion of Peace.<sup>3</sup>

### Train Engineers

The Nagasaki Main Line railroad tracks run north and south through the whole city. On the day of the explosion, two engineers, Kunito Terai and Katsumi Nonaka,<sup>4</sup> took it upon themselves to carry out heroic efforts to save people and to gather the dead to transport them out of the burning wreckage of Urakami valley, either to functioning hospitals or to cremation centers. The relief train made a total of four runs up and down the valley, saving about 3,500 people.<sup>5</sup> No one gave them orders to do this; they saw the need, they had the train, and they used it. Dr. Akizuki, in reference to the engineers, noted that “A large number of injured people were carried in open freight cars from a makeshift station between Minchinoo Station and Ohashi to the national hospitals in Omura, Isahaya, Kawatana, and Ureshino.”<sup>6</sup>

#### Eiko Fukuda



This photo by Yamahata, probably his most famous, shows a little boy wearing a quilted hood (for protection in air raids) and holding a rice ball.

Credit: Photo by Yosuke Yamahata; location: Nagasaki City; serial number A-13-01. Photo provided by Shogo Yamahata.

Eiko Fukuda was ten years old when the bomb hit. She and her mother were walking 1.8 kilometers from the epicenter. The blast threw Eiko into a ditch though she remained conscious. She and her mother rushed home and found their house burning. They decided to head for an underground shelter, but it was overcrowded and they left. They learned they would be able to take a train ride out of the burned area. Eiko had difficulty climbing up to the cars, and she fantasized about seats on the train. But there was only the floor, and it was jammed with people. They got off at Isahaya and had to wait two hours to be transported by truck. Finally they arrived at a school, not a hospital.

They developed high fevers, but the other symptoms soon left and the fevers dropped. She experienced headaches until she turned twenty-seven. She had partial paralysis for the rest of her life. In spite of this, she graduated from junior college and taught for seventeen years. Former students visited her and invited her to their weddings.<sup>7</sup>



Yosuke Yamahata was a photographer who took photos as he and friends walked through Nagasaki on August 10, 1945. His photos are considered the best record of the Nagasaki bombing.

Credit: Shogo Yamahata

#### Yosuke Yamahata

Yosuke Yamahata, a photographer attached to the Japanese News and Information Bureau, was dispatched to the army north of Nagasaki. On August 10 before dawn, a day after the explosion, Yamahata and four other men arrived in Nagasaki. After it grew light, the crew spent all day walking south to north through the city. Yamahata took incredible photographs that today are considered the best record of the effects of the Nagasaki explosion.

His most famous photo is of a child wearing a home-made air-raid hood, holding a rice ball in one hand and looking straight at the camera. Yamahata took three general types of photos: (1) large landscapes showing the physical destruction of buildings,

twisted metal, and ground covered with massive amounts of rubble; (2) small group scenes of people in shock: lying, sitting, standing with others, or groups of people doing relief work such as carrying a person on a stretcher; (3) close-ups of single individuals, in shock or dead. Yamahata wrote, “It is perhaps unforgivable, but in fact at the time I was completely calm and composed. In other words, perhaps it was just too much, too enormous to absorb.”<sup>8</sup>

Yamahata attempted to publish his Nagasaki photographs, but the American Occupation Government (1945–52) refused permission. Nevertheless, they were published in 1952. Yamahata died in 1966 of cancer at age forty-nine.<sup>9</sup>

#### Dr. Takashi Nagai

Dr. Takashi Nagai was born in 1908 and in 1934 married Midori Moriyama, a member of the Catholic community in Urakami valley. Dr. Nagai converted to Catholicism within a year. In 1945, he was head of the Radiology Department at the Nagasaki University of Medicine. Dr. Nagai sustained a bad head injury as a result of the atomic blast, and his wife was killed. After carrying out relief work, he and other medical people went to a section on the edge of Nagasaki called Mitsuyama and walked through villages, offering medical relief from August 12 to October 8.

When he returned to Nagasaki, he went to his family’s home in Ueno cho and built a tiny hut called “Nyokodo,” meaning “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The hut was barely large enough for one bed. He wanted to live as the poorest of the poor and possess nothing. His sacrifice and dedication deeply moved people.<sup>10</sup>

In November, 1945, Nagai spoke at a memorial service to all those who died in the atomic blast. Part of the speech follows:

... On August 15, the Imperial Rescript which put an end to the fighting was formally promulgated, and the whole world welcomed a day of peace. This day was also the great feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. It is significant to reflect that Urakami Cathedral was dedicated to her. And we must ask if this convergence of events—the ending of the war and the celebration of her feast—was merely coincidental or if there was here some mysterious providence of God. . . .

*Is there not a profound relationship between the destruction of Nagasaki and the end of the war? Nagasaki, the only holy place in all Japan—was it not chosen as a victim, a pure lamb, to be slaughtered and burned on the altar of sacrifice to expiate the sins committed by humanity in the Second World War? Let us give thanks that Nagasaki was chosen for the sacrifice. Let us give thanks that through this sacrifice peace was given to the world and freedom of religion in Japan. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.*<sup>11</sup>

Although many hibakusha did not agree with Dr. Nagai’s opinions



Dr. Nagai, an atomic survivor, offered medical relief immediately after the Nagasaki bombing by visiting survivors in caves surrounding the city. He later became famous for his views on the significance of the bombing.

Credit: Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum

## ESSAYS

about Nagasaki being “. . . a pure lamb to be slaughtered. . .”, they did not feel it was proper to criticize him openly since he had carried out courageous medical relief work right after the atomic explosion. In 1949, Emperor Hirohito visited Dr. Nagai, and Nagai was also given the first Nagasaki honorary citizenship award. Nagai died in 1951.<sup>12</sup> His influence contributed to the relative silence of Nagasaki hibakusha through the following decades.

### Sumiteru Taniguchi

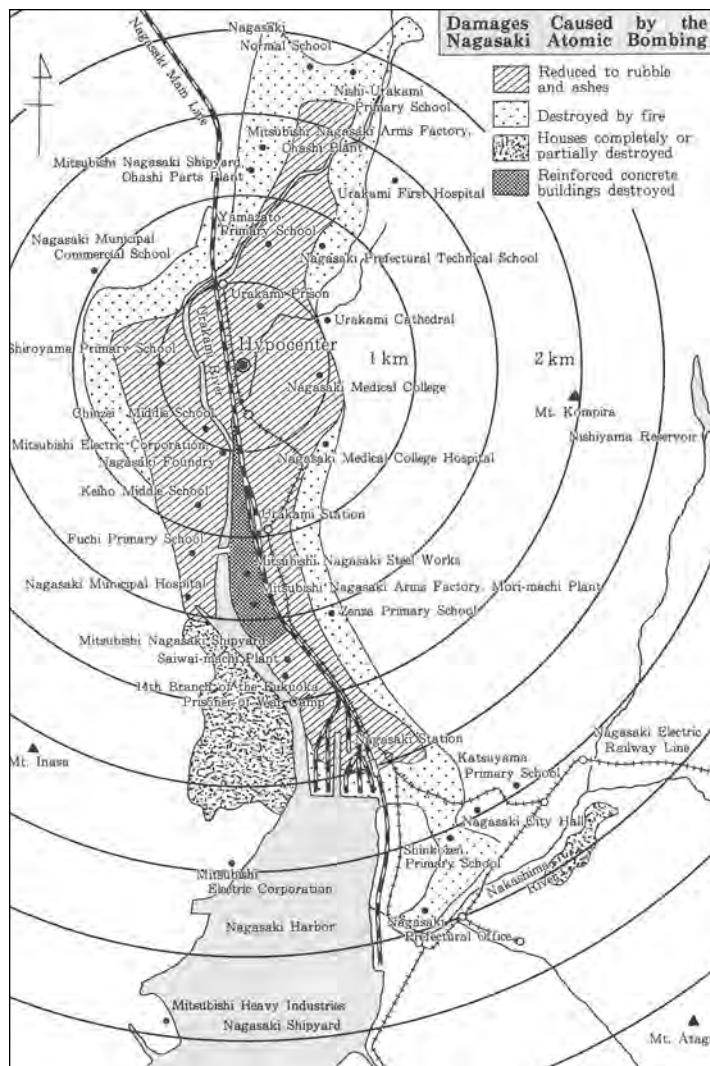
Because of his unique and incredible experience at the time of the atomic explosion, Mr. Taniguchi is one of the most famous Nagasaki hibakusha. In 1945, he was a sixteen-year-old postal worker and was delivering mail two kilometers away from ground zero. The heat rays of the explosion hit him from behind, and the forceful blast threw him off the bicycle. After a few minutes, he was able to stand up and realized he was injured. In his own words,

*The skin from the shoulder to the fingertips of my left arm had peeled off and was hanging down like a tattered old rag. I passed my hand around to my back and found that the clothes that I had been wearing were gone. When I brought back the hand and looked at it, I saw that it was covered with something like black grease. I had suffered terrible burns all over my back and left arm. Strangely enough, there was no pain or bleeding whatsoever. . . . I stayed in [the air raid] shelter for two days without eating or drinking. My memory of those two days is foggy because I was so debilitated at the time, but I recall having the skin of my burned arm, which was smeared with dirt and debris, cut off, and also crawling to the well of a demolished house below the shelter and drinking water.<sup>13</sup>*

On the third day, he was rescued and taken to a hospital to receive treatment. His story continues,

*Finally, I was admitted to the Naval Hospital in Omura and for 21 months had to lie face down and motionless in bed. For a few days after the explosion there had been no pain or bleeding, but now high fever, blinding pain, and anemia pushed me to the brink of death. Lying prone and unable to move, and caught in the grip of excruciating pain, I could only shout out: “Kill me!” Not one of the many doctors and nurses who treated and cared for me thought I would survive. When I felt even just a glimmer of health, though, my spirits were boosted and I struggled to live. After nearly two years in this state I was finally able to stand up by myself. Constantly lying down during that time had caused terrible bedsores to appear on my chest and they penetrated right down to the ribs. I convalesced for another two years before finally being able to leave the hospital, but I doubted that I would ever be able to work with such a body.<sup>14</sup>*

When I met Mr. Taniguchi in 1986, he was deeply involved with the Nihon Hidankyo (Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organization), formed in 1956 with offices in all Japanese prefectures. It “. . . has worked for the abolition of nuclear weapons and for the care and compensation of hibakusha by the Japanese government.”<sup>15</sup> It has carried out numerous citizens’ conferences over the years and sent dozens of hibakusha to various countries to engage with others on nuclear weapons issues. (Beginning in 1957, the Japanese government provided limited medical care and welfare aid



Nagasaki is built in a long, narrow valley through which the Urakami River flows. Hills south of the epicenter partially protected the downtown area from the atomic blast.

Credit: Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum

to some hibakusha, aid that has increased over the years. Yet it falls short of the complete coverage Hidankyo calls for.)

In addition, it has sent delegations to the United Nations, Kiev (to learn about the Chernobyl accident), Nevada (to talk with people downwind of the nuclear tests), Auschwitz, and the International Court of Justice in the Netherlands. Nihon Hidankyo was nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1994 by the International Peace Bureau, and in 2005 by the American Friends Service Committee.<sup>16</sup>

### Surprising Developments

Pope John Paul II visited Hiroshima on February 25, 1981, and Nagasaki the next day. His visit was a turning point for many hibakusha. An old legend said that “sometime the holy father will visit Nagasaki.”<sup>17</sup> In a Hiroshima speech, the pope included these words:

*War is the work of man. War is the destruction of human life. War is death. . . . Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand out from all those other places and monuments as the first victims of nuclear war. . . . To remember the past is to commit oneself to the future. . . . To remember Hiroshima is to*

*abhor nuclear war. To remember Hiroshima is to commit oneself to peace. . . . the waging of war is not inevitable or unchangeable. Humanity is not destined to self-destruction.*<sup>18</sup>

The fact that the pope spoke out against nuclear war was powerful encouragement to Hiroshima and Nagasaki hibakusha to take positive action against nuclear war.

### Conclusion

The Nagasaki Peace Park and museum are not easy to find; you have to search for them. In only a few places can you see damage created by the atomic blast. In fact, it would be easy to be oblivious to the trauma and endurance that has taken place there. Nevertheless, there remain today about 110,000 Nagasaki hibakusha whose biographies are important to listen to and learn from. The struggles and courage of hibakusha in Nagasaki stand out as remarkable stories of overcoming one of the most catastrophic events of the twentieth century. ■

### Suggested Research Questions on Nagasaki Hibakusha

1. What were common elements among hibakusha profiled here?
2. What were some unique elements of each hibakusha story?
3. Which hibakusha story is most powerful for you and why?
4. How did the pope's visit change how hibakusha think and act?
5. Do you believe that Nagasaki stories are important to understand? Why or why not?
6. What were two main differences between the Hiroshima bomb and the Nagasaki bomb?
7. Do you agree that Nihon Hidankyo should be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize? Give reasons for your answer.
8. What to you are some surprising pieces of information in this essay?
9. What more would you like to learn about the survivors in Nagasaki?
10. Find some of the sources listed in the bibliography. The Jenkins collection of Yamahata's photographs gives a vivid record of the effects of the Nagasaki bomb. The Lifton psychological study of survivors gives more information about Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome.

### NOTES

1. Tatsuichiro Akizuki, *Nagasaki 1945*, trans. Keiichi Nagata (New York: Quartet Books, 1981), 26–27, 117.
2. *Ibid.*, 117.
3. Public Information Section, Nagasaki City Hall, ed. '89 *Municipal Centennial Nagasaki 100*, trans. Brian Burke-Gaffney (Nagasaki: Nagasaki City, 1989), 75.
4. Koichi Wada in discussion with the author, Dec. 1986.
5. *Nagasaki Speaks, A Record of the Atomic Bombing*, trans. Brian Burke-Gaffney (Nagasaki: Nagasaki City, 1989), 100.
6. Akizuki, 72.
7. Eiko Fukuda in discussion with the author, Dec. 1986.
8. Robert Jenkins, ed. *Nagasaki Journey: The Photographs of Yosuke Yamahata, August 10, 1945* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, Co., 1995), 94.
9. *Ibid.*, 19, 48, 107.
10. Takashi Nagai, *The Bells of Nagasaki*, trans. William Johnston (New York: Kodansha, 1984), v–viii, 68, 83, 92.
11. *Ibid.*, 107, 109.
12. Paul Glynn, *A Song for Nagasaki* (Hunter's Hill, Australia: The Catholic Book Club, rev. ed., 1989), 137, 142, 153.

13. Sumiteru Taniguchi, "Eternal Scars," in *Testimonies of the Atomic Bomb Survivors, A Record of the Devastation of Nagasaki*, eds. Teruaki Ohbo and Terumasa Matsunaga (Nagasaki: Nagasaki City, 1985), 46.
14. *Ibid.*, 47.
15. American Friends Service Committee, "Quaker Organization Nominates Hiroshima Survivors for Nobel Peace Prize, Nihon Hidankyo Represents Hiroshima Survivors of Atomic and Hydrogen Bomb Blasts," [www.commondreams.org/news2005/0127-02.htm](http://www.commondreams.org/news2005/0127-02.htm), accessed 1-27-05.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Sr. Yoko Hamada in discussion with the author, Dec. 1986.
18. Pope John Paul II, "Appeal for Peace," *The Meaning of Survival, Hiroshima's 36 Year Commitment to Peace* (Hiroshima, Japan: Chugoku Shimbun, 1983), 280.

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To receive more recent sources on Nagasaki, contact the director of the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, Nagasaki, Japan. In addition, the Peace Resource Center at Wilmington College has the largest lending library of materials on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the United States. (Pyle Center, Box 1183, Wilmington, Ohio 45177, Phone: (937) 382-6661, ext. 371, E-mail: [prc@wilmington.edu](mailto:prc@wilmington.edu).)

LYNNE SHIVERS is retired from a career teaching English at the Community College of Philadelphia. In 1966–67, she worked as a volunteer at the World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, a peace center jointly run by Japanese, especially atomic bomb survivors, and Americans. In 1986, she served as interim director of the center. Since her retirement, she has put her full attention toward organizing and publishing her research about the lives of Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors since 1945.