

Memories of War 001: Shigeko Sasamori

# 戦争の記憶

Memories of War 001  
: Shigeko Sasamori

Interviewed by

Yohei Hayakawa

The BBB: Breakthrough Bandwagon Books

Originally told in Japanese by Shigeko Sasamori

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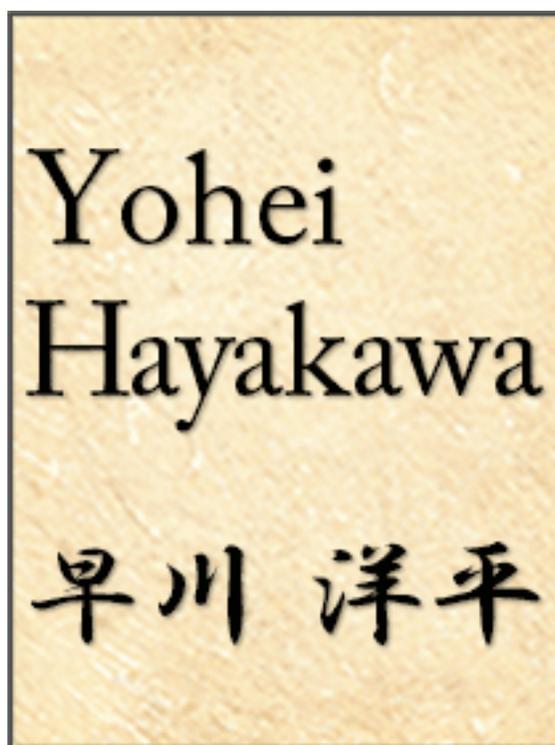
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The BBB website

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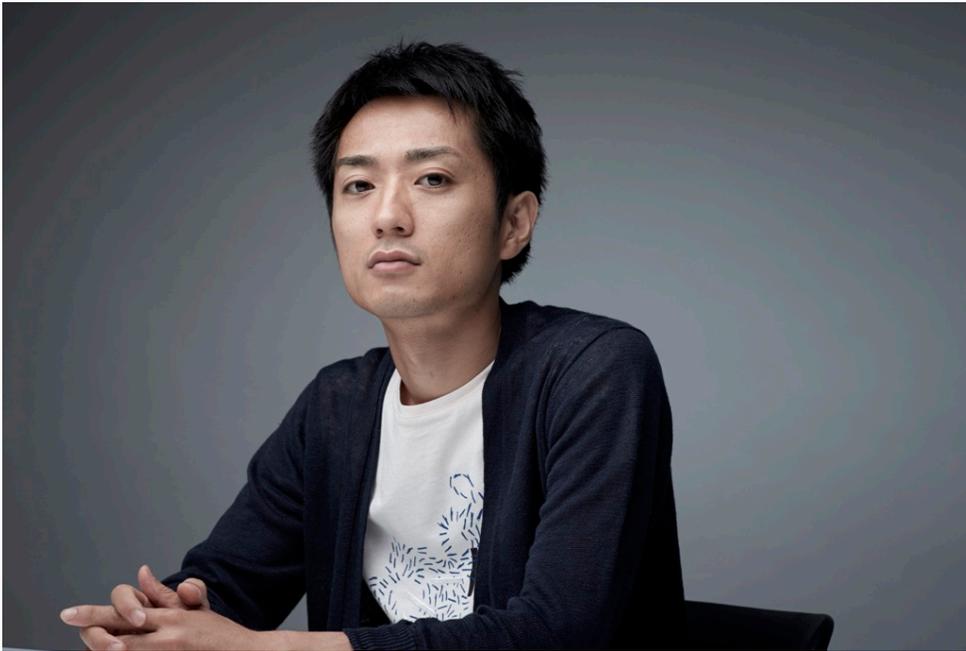
## About This Project

—*Memories of War* is a project which leaves voices of the people who survived the war. We are not supporting any specific organization, and we are not agitating any thoughts.—

Moreover, please be consent about the following descriptions.

-The contents of the interview have left the voices and thoughts of the people who survived from the war. Moreover, there might be inappropriate expressions but we have left the voices as it was spoken.

-The articles were recorded based on the knowledge and memories during the interview were taken. Therefore, there might be memories difference and some ambiguous point.



Every year, at the day of the end of the war watching the media, watching the movie *Grave of the Fireflies*, I decide in my heart 'Not to make a war again. War is cruel.' But another busy day starts from August 16th.

This year 2013, it is not a year of a turning point, but after 68 years from the war, is it just me who feel that we have a lot of movies about war like *The Wind Rises*, *Emperor*, and *The Eternal Zero*.

As an interviewer, living in Hiroshima where we had the first atomic bomb in the world, I had to face this theme. I have been thinking about it for a long time. But I took time in starting this project ...

While it is during this time, few people told me; I want you to hold an interview with people who experienced the war. Podcast can leave the voices for 50years, 100years, for the future.

Almost 70 years after the war, the number of people who survived the war is decreasing every year.

That is why I have to leave their voices.

*Memories of War* is not a radio program and does not agitate to any specific thoughts.

I just wanted to leave the voices of the people who survived the war, carefully with this interview for our future children, and to all people in the whole world.

I hope that people will start to think what peace is.

**Yohei Hayakawa (Media Journalist)**

**October 1st 2013**

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## About Shigeko Sasamori

*It was 10 years after the atomic bomb; she went to the US for her surgery. Praying for the peace for Japan, her mission was to talk about her experience in Hiroshima.*



**Birth June 16th 1932, Hiroshima**

**From California USA**

On August 6th, 1945 she was only 13 when she experienced the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. She saw a silver airplane glittering in the blue sky. Suddenly, something white fell. She was deeply injured with a big burn scar on her body, but recovered somehow after her parents sacrificed themselves taking care of her.

Then 10 years after the atomic bomb incident, she went to the US to have surgery for Keloid, and later an American journalist Mr. Norman adopted her. 'These are the thoughts of God.' she said, praying for the peace for Japan. She talked about her experience in Hiroshima.

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## **I saw something white falling from the silver airplane ...**

**——So, Mrs. Shigeo, what were you doing and where were you on August 6th 1945 in Hiroshima?**

I was still 13, first year in junior high school. There were many people suffering because bombs were falling everywhere in Tokyo and Osaka. Although there were no bombs in Hiroshima, but I saw the B29 airplane that carried the bomb flying above the sky very often.

During those days, the buildings were destroyed purposely for evacuation, what we called 'building evacuation'. Young men were sent for soldiers, so it was elders and women who did it. Junior high school students helped to put all the rubbles away.

That day, our school was the first volunteer to do it. It was 8am in the morning, we were about to start our work, and I heard the noise of the airplane and looked up the blue sky. It was so beautiful without any clouds.

The airplane glittering so bright with a beautiful jet stream, I told my classmate 'Look, it's so beautiful' and the next moment, something white fell from it. I was told later that it was a parachute with a bomb. There was a huge bomb blast and I fell on the ground. I was at Hiratsuka city, about 1.5km from the center from which the bomb fell.



**——At that moment, didn't you realize that it was a bomb? Any fear or pain you felt?**

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Yes, I think everybody who was there, felt no pain and fear, we were all burned in an instant. My sister thought that the sun fell in to the earth. She and her classmates were helping the soldiers at the factory in Kaida city. There was a big noise and they saw a big fire ball sinking from where they were.

——**We imagine what is called the ‘mushroom’ clouds ...**

I was tossed before the ball of fire appeared but I think the clouds appeared after the ball of fire. There were people saying that they saw the red column of flame before the clouds. I fainted for a long time. When I looked around, it was so dark, and so black. I was burned so badly but with no pain. While sitting in the dark, it became brighter and I started to realize that the bomb fell nearby.

‘Just follow the adults when the bomb falls.’ That was what we were told, and I tried following the adults passing by. There were many people injured, the skin was turned over with the burn and people with pink skin were walking along, towards the river. There were many people at the riverside. Many people were inside the river until I couldn’t see any water. Suddenly, I heard baby’s cry and the noise of the people around. Till then, I couldn’t feel or hear anything. I didn’t even noticed that 1/4 of my body was burned.

After crossing the bridge, I went to the elementary school, which was a shelter. I fainted under a big tree and was carried to an auditorium, stayed there for 5 days. I couldn’t open my eyes and I wasn’t sure if it was day or night I just screamed ‘I am Shigeko Niimoto from the Sendamachi Icchome. Please give me water. Please find my parents.’ I got tired, but I tried many times hoping that someone will notice.

After all, nobody gave me water. I didn’t know that I shouldn’t take any water while being heavily burned. Many people died after tasting the water. My mother tried to find me everyday calling my name. Whenever she heard people being burned and carried to the camp, she walked and looked for me even to the next island.

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## My mom found me burned like a charcoal.



We had two houses. The 'summer house' was by the riverside near the fish market. It was safe being protected by the fish market and my mom was there. She was tossed about in the house and when she walked out, every house around was crushed.

From the 'summer house' she could see our first house. She heard many voices and tried to remove all the rubbles to help the neighbor. But she couldn't find any survivor. It was very hard for her to find where the voices came from. While removing the rubbles the fire was coming towards her. 'I am very sorry, I don't know where you are' She had to leave.

My father was outside. He went to fishing the day before and was on his way to the neighbor to share the fish he caught. He also saw something white falling from the airplane. 'It's the bomb! Escape!' He screamed towards the elders and ran towards the fridge at the fish market. After the bombing, he came out from the fridge and saw the neighbor being burned all over.

If my father was late to escape for a moment, he was burned together. Because my parents and our house were safe, I could recover. There were no medicine, and the hospital was occupied, my parents cured me with cooking oil.

——**That is an unbelievable experience.**

Yes, it was an unbelievable experience. My mother never told me what happened to me until I was old enough to understand the situation. That is why I can talk about it to you today.

She had a candle in her hands and called out my name 'Shigeko, Shiegko ...' walking around the shelter. 'I'm here ...' she told me that I called for my mother with a faint voice. I looked like a charcoal, she couldn't realize me at once. My face was swollen up black she couldn't see clearly my eyes and nose. My hair was burned but because of this short hair my head, forehead, and my ears were not burned. My father peeled off my skin, which were badly burned black. My mother used the cloth and the cooking oil to clean my face trying to open my eyes, nose and my mouth. The pus keeps on coming out, it had to be washed away. My parents took care of me very well and they were always with me.

——**How long did it take for you to be able to open your eyes and started eating?**

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I can't remember very well. I think it was before the New Yen currency changing in February 16th 1946. My classmate's mother came when I was sleeping and I heard their conversation. 'Shigeko was lucky. My daughter was under the rubbles I couldn't take her out from there. There were fires coming towards us and my daughter said 'Mom please go. If you stay, what will happen to my younger sister without a mother.' ' She had to say good-bye with her daughter. I think that was a very hard decision.

I heard a lot of news about the town of Hiroshima. There were many dead bodies everywhere and the soldiers would just pick up like garbage to the incineration ground. The bodies were full of maggots and flies.

——**How did you feel when you heard all the news?**

It was a war, so I knew that many people would die. At first, I thought that many bomb were dropped in Hiroshima. But it was just one huge bomb. Nobody knew that there was such a huge bomb and we were always scared that we might have another.

I didn't listen to the radio when the war ended but I heard my family and the neighbor talking. Japan lost the war. We didn't had anything to eat and we had to give away all our belongings to the army.

——**How did you feel about the military authorities back then?**

In those days, we thought the emperor was God. We were told not to look directly at the face. I was very happy that the war ended. After the war, the foreign countries sent food and clothes for us and the reconstruction at the city was carried out with some support.

I started to think very strongly that if there were no wars, we could all be friends and be happy. As I became old, I realize how the war was so cruel. That is why I would always talk about the war when there are people asking about it. I heard that there is a story to change the constitution now. Why? I was very surprised. I hope it won't change to the direction where the war may happen.

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## **Nuclear power plant and dignity of Japanese**

**——While interviewing, I realize it is a very scary thing not to know anything about the war. Listening about your terrible experience, I started to know something about the war but I am very sure that many people have no idea about what happened. It takes time to understand what happened before we were born.**

I have watched the movie about the Meiji Restoration and the Great Kanto Earthquake and I knew what happened but still, I do not get a hint about it. The other day, I talked with the young people about the nuclear power plant. We discussed about whether to continue or to abolish it and one boy said the he wasn't sure what will be the best answer for us.

I know how you feel. Even after you have listened to my terrible experience it is still difficult to have the idea to know about the war. Everything happened before you were born.

But you should think about the future. Study what is happening today, and think about your future what you should do. I do not agree with the nuclear power plant. Because of the radiation, many people suffer from cancer and died.

My father and mother died because of the radiation. They were not burned but they suffered from the radiation. We can make power supplies without the atomic energy. I think we won't need any nuclear reactor if new power supplies develops everyday, and the Japanese scientist can put more effort in their studies and researches.

One scientist said that 'It is advisable to be able to abolish a nuclear power plant but with today's new technology we can build strong and durable nuclear power plant, we don't need to take away everything.'

I asked him, 'How about the nuclear reactor in Fukushima prefecture. Can't you do something with it? The radioactivity has been leaking.' He answered, 'I specialize in building one but not in repairing one.'

First of all, I think we have to stop the nuclear reactor because of what had happened in the past and the present.

Japan's popularity has fallen recently. We must never start a war. Never own any nuclear weapon. Stop the nuclear power plant. That is what we should declare to the world. And Japan will gain its' respect. We can't stop the nuclear power plant today or tomorrow, but we can lose it little by little.

**——From what you see, do you see any changes in Japanese people?**

I think that the grace in Japanese has fallen. Long time ago, Americans were happy to accept Japanese foreign students for home stay. Japanese were very polite, kind and they keep their room very clean. But now, they say the Japanese students are noisy and untidy. There are some polite students, but mostly they have a very bad impression about Japanese.

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**Went to the States for the operation. Became a nurse.**

**——Mrs. Shigeko, when did you go to the States for the Keloid surgery?**

It was 10 years after I was exposed to radiation in the atomic bombing. I was 23 years old. I stayed for a year in the United States.

**——I heard that there was a donation in the States, and 25 people went together. Didn't you feel complicated going to the country, which dropped the atomic bomb?**



That time, I participated in a bible study with Mr. Tanimoto from our church. I think Mr. Tanimoto talked to Mr. Norman about us to help cure our Keloid. Mr. Norman was a journalist from the States and later he adopted me as his daughter.

It took 2 years for him to collect all the money from donation. One day, I went to the hospital with the pastor. Mr. Norman, the doctor and the nurse were there and I had an oral consultation.

To fly to the US, we were required to be capable to have the stamina to take the flight to the US and to be able to recover from the operation as a condition. I never imagine that I will make it since I had many surgeries at the Japanese University Hospital. I had no clue what was it like to go to the US. I did not expect anything at all.

But I was chosen to go to the US. I think this is the providence of God. God couldn't tell men to stop war, but he let us experienced the sufferings and the consequences of the atomic bomb. We shouldn't have war, God wants us to live in peace and be happy when you see the scars on my body you can feel and understand rather than telling in words. There are many reasons for going to the US as well and it is also the providence of God given.

But he didn't have any chances to tell us. That is why we have our own mission to complete. If you look at my marks on my body, you can feel something rather than telling in words. There are reasons for going to the United States as well. This is all the providence of God.

**——What made you start to think like that?**

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My family believed in Buddhism. I always followed my grandmother. After the bombing, I started to walk the neighborhood and on my way to my friends' house, I heard a beautiful music and there was a church. There were people singing.

They invited me to come in. I listened to the pastor speech. I couldn't understand but I felt so comfortable, I started to visit the church every Sunday.

Mr. Tanimoto asked me if there were any other people like me, and so I invited all the schoolgirls who got injured to the church. Once a week, we had bible study. I wanted to be a nurse since I was little and every time I visited the Japanese University Hospital, my feelings got stronger.

'I won't be with you forever, so decide your destiny by yourself.' My father told me. I decided to fly to the United States again, just because I wanted to see my friends and I enjoyed spending time in there. Mr. Norman helped me for everything and I could study because he adopted me.

——**Would you mind sending some messages to our readers?**

It is very important to keep our heart of love and consideration by our side and we won't want to start to have any war. Life is the most important thing in our world.

I am very happy to be interviewed and that my stories are being recorded. I guess this is my destiny.

God is leading us. I can speak and tell the stories. But I can't produce it for the listeners for the Internet radio. Mr. Hayakawa, you can do it. Let's help each other and let's leave the stories for the future. This is love. Take care. Value your life and work hard.

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