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朝鮮人徴用工の手記

Memoirs of a Korean conscripted worker in wartime Japan

Chosen-jin choyoko no shuki

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Preface

Though many years have passed since the events and memories described in this manuscript, I decided to commit them to writing because they were too important for me to forget.

By the end of 1944, the inevitability of Japan's defeat in war was becoming increasingly clear. It was at this time that many Korean youth, both men and women, were conscripted under various names and guises to join the war effort. Some were sent to the battlefields of Southeast Asia, while others were mobilized to labor in Japan's munitions industries and coal mines. My conscription notice arrived in early December 1944, and I was assigned to work at the Toyo Kogyo Company located in the Niho-cho, Mukainada district of Hiroshima City.

Before the start of hostilities, Toyo Kogyo was a manufacturer of a three-wheel motorcycle that it called the "Mazda." However, with the outbreak of war, it was transformed into a munitions manufacturer tasked with producing the Type 99 Rifle.

My goal was to write a memoir of all that I had seen, heard and experienced during my ten months in Hiroshima. But there was one experience in particular that motivated me to refresh my memories of what had occurred before, during and after those ten months. That experience was none other than the dropping of the first atomic bomb in human history, which brought about both the final defeat of the Japanese Empire and the liberation of my homeland.

The destructive power of the atomic bomb and the death rays it unleashed were unequalled by everything that had preceded it since the dawn of human history. Yet, it was this same destructive power that liberated the weak and small nation of Korea by sounding the death knell for the Empire of Japan.

As a survivor of the fearsome conflagration of the atomic bomb, I have come to believe that recording my memories of what I witnessed in that hellish environment can serve a meaningful purpose.

During the war, Hiroshima had a population of about 400,000 and was ranked among Japan's six largest cities. But by August 1945, the elderly, the ailing, women and children had been evacuated to the countryside, leaving behind a population of a little more than 190,000 people in the city.

More than 70,000 persons perished instantly when the bomb was dropped, and an additional 70,000 or more were injured, bringing the total number of atomic bomb victims to approximately 150,000 people. According to newspaper reports, more than 20,000 of the casualties were Korean.
I survived this terrifying atomic conflagration with hardly a scratch, and was able to return home alive. I believe I owe my life and survival to a woman whom I came to know at the dormitory where we were housed at Toyo Kogyo. Her name was Kazue Okada, a member of the dormitory staff. I have remained mindful of my indebtedness to her as the true savior of my life.

So many years have passed that my memory is vague on some points. With the help of the journal that I kept, I have attempted to write this memoir.

December 1970

It was in November 1989 that I began to think of applying for an Atomic Bomb Survivor Certificate issued by Japan. I took out the memoirs I had written nearly twenty years earlier, thinking that perhaps it could serve as reference material for my application. With this thought in mind, I showed my manuscript to Haruko Inoshita, who was visiting South Korea. She asked to read the manuscript, and went on to translate it into Japanese and plan for its publication so that it could be made available to Japanese readers. Certain parts of my manuscript I found embarrassing, but as an elderly man now in his seventies, I came to feel that I preferred to leave a full record of the poignant journal entries of my youth. Most of the people that appear in my memoirs are probably now deceased. Since coming home to Korea, I have never revisited Hiroshima, and I suspect that very little remains of the Hiroshima that I came to know. My earnest hope is that this book will help readers gain a better understanding of the truth of wartime Korean conscripted workers in Japan.

October 1990
Jeong Chung-hae

(In South Korea)

Chapter 1

From Seoul to Hiroshima

Conscription Notice Arrives

By the end of 1944, the so-called Greater East Asian War (Pacific War) was approaching a final climax, and Japan was running woefully low not on only physical resources, but on human resources as well.

During this period of extreme need, young adults from various regions of the Korean peninsula were being conscripted into Japan's military industries and mines. In certain instances, they were mobilized and taken directly to the battlefield. Young Korean women were also being mobilized for the war effort and were forced to join what was euphemistically called the Women's Volunteer Corps. According to what I heard, many of those who joined the Women's Volunteer Corps were sent to the front lines to serve as comfort women for Japanese soldiers.

Because of this, the parents of girls lived in constant fear and trepidation. As all unmarried women were being forced into the Women's Volunteer Corps, parents with daughters of marriageable age would marry them off as soon as an available man could be found. There was no time for asking questions about the prospective husband's social status or his character, nor was age a consideration as girls were being married off to immature boys as well as to old men. In some cases, girls were married off to weak and sickly men. This sad and tragic situation continued for a considerable time.

Young people who remained in Korea were either conscripted for work within Korea or made to serve various military industries. The vast majority of young people in Korea were classified as personnel for some sort of duty. I made every effort to avoid conscription and succeeded in obtaining an identification document showing that I was working for a military industry. With this paper in hand, I was confident that I would be able to avoid conscription.

My days of peace came to an end around **the end of November 1944.**

Turmoil and anguish overtook our peaceful home when a conscription notice was delivered to our door. It was not as though I had never considered the possibility, but the reality of holding a conscription notice in my own hands was overwhelming. The date of my induction was set at December 8—the day the Japanese referred to as the Anniversary of the Acceptance of the Imperial Rescript (commemorating the attack on Pearl Harbor). My conscription came as part of a third wave of conscription notices that had been issued. The duration of service was one year, and there was absolutely no way to escape mobilization once a conscription notice had been delivered. This of course meant that I had no choice but to prepare for induction. During the short week that followed, I was busy setting all my affairs in order at home, and at the factory where I was employed.

December 7 marked the last night that I would spend with my wife and children. I spent a troubled and sleepless night, not knowing whether this would be the last that I saw of them in this life, or whether we could realistically hope to be reunited someday. The sleepless night ended as the fateful morning dawned.

The morning of **December 8** was extremely cold, as the temperature dipped to 19 degrees below zero Celsius. There were reports that mainland Japan had become the target of aerial bombing, and that the carpet-bombing was part of a greater scorched earth strategy. Where were we heading to in Japan? This was the question that filled our minds that day. Would we be assigned to a factory or to a coalmine? In any case, we were stepping into a war zone where bombings had become a daily routine. It was as if we were travelling in search of a place to die. For five years, I had worked at the Fukumoto Concrete Plant located in Yeongdeungpo in Seoul. I was hired in June 1939 at the age of 21. Two years before getting my conscription notice, I married, and was leading a peaceful and happy life. My older child (Dong-seung), a boy, was three, and my second child (Jing-ji), a girl, was just six months old. Although an aunt and her family lived nearby, I was deeply concerned for my wife, who had left her faraway home to marry and live with me in Seoul. Now that I was being sent to some distant and unknown destination, what would become of my wife and children who were completely dependent on me? A dark cloud hung over me as I prepared to leave my home.

As the moment of farewell approached, I sensed that the chances of surviving and being reunited with my family were hopelessly slim. I had stuffed my old clothes in a rucksack and was carrying a suitcase as I shuffled forward with heavy feet. I looked back to say a few last words in parting. Then, I was off to the designated meeting place where the conscripts from my area were to congregate that day—the square in front of the Yeongdeungpo Ward Office.

The square was already full of people. Some were leaving, and many others had come to see them off.

First, there was a roll call. Next, the conscripts fell in and marched past the Chosen Hotel on the way to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, where we joined several other groups of conscripts that had come from various areas. A farewell ceremony soon ensued.

When the farewell ceremony ended, we were organized into companies and went to the various inns in Seoul to which we had been assigned for the night.

My company was assigned to the Gyeong-il Inn in Jongno Gwancheol-dong. We spent a terribly uncomfortable, cold and unpleasant night at the inn. It seemed that there was no fire burning in the *ondol* stove. I remember it was so cold that the owner took pity on us and brought some firewood to the room and lit a fire.

Years ago I had come to Seoul on a school trip. On that occasion also, we had stayed in Gwancheol-dong at a place called the Samsan Inn. The exciting and happy memories of that day stood in stark contrast to what we were made to experience that night at the Gyeong-il Inn.

That terrible night finally came to an end as the morning of December 9 dawned. We finished breakfast early in the morning and headed toward Seoul Station. We walked through the streets of Seoul in small groups as we weathered the freezing winds of December. We were a miserable bunch of young men representing a people that had lost their homeland. Where were we going, for whom and for what purpose?

When we arrived, the Seoul Station square was already teeming with people. Family members and relatives were running around anxiously, looking for sons and husbands that had left home just one day before. When reunited, families acted as if they had not seen each other for years and years. The

thoughts going through the minds of those leaving and those there to see them off must have been the same. Once again, tearful farewells had to be exchanged. But even this was a gift for those who had thought that they would never again meet each other.

Among all the people who had gathered, I was unable to find a single person that could bring me joy. It was not that no one had come to see me off. I had no doubt that they were standing in Yeongdeungpo Station, waiting for the train that would be carrying me away.

The train was crowded with conscripts, and the time of our departure was approaching. The locomotive blew its whistle, and the train began to slowly pull away from Seoul Station.

I thought I would never again see Seoul Station. Probably no one imagined that he would live to see this place again. And I was one of them. There was no way of knowing what the young men that had been squeezed tightly into this train were thinking. With downcast eyes, all of them were totally silent.

The crowds left on the platform were wiping their tears and waving feverishly at their loved ones. Soon the train passed Yongsan Station and crossed the Hangang Railway Bridge. Nothing had changed, and nothing was unusual about the Han River and the bridge that morning.

Now we were passing through Noryangjin Station. Next would be Yeongdeungpo Station, where my wife and children were waiting. Though our separation was no more than a day old, it felt as if I was returning home after a long, long absence. My heart was pounding with excitement as the station came into sight.

The train finally came to a full stop at Yeongdeungpo Station. People everywhere were looking for their husbands and sons. My family members were huddled in a corner of the platform. My wife, younger brother and close relatives were standing together. Miss Ryoko Miyamoto, from the factory where I worked, was also there. I got off the train. Only a day had passed, but I was overwhelmed by a sense of nostalgia. What should I tell them and how? I was completely at a loss for words, and all that I could do was to stare vacantly at their faces.

Every word that I tried to utter seemed to rob me of my breath. The locomotive blew its whistle, signaling its imminent departure and total insensitivity to the emotions that were washing over the mass of people exchanging their final farewells. Many people were leaving and many more would be left behind, but no one was willing to release the tight handgrips that they shared with their friends and loved ones. Bereft of all words, tears flowed as people stared intently into each other's eyes.

My wife's voice was quivering. "Take care of yourself and hurry back."

She covered her face. With these words of farewell, I softly released her hand and turned to board my train.

From the train window, I could see my wife and brother wiping their tears. And as the train distanced itself mercilessly from the platform, they stood motionless as if frozen in time.

On the Way to Busan

Mindless of the emotions of its passengers, the train continued to run.

I bid my farewell to Seoul, to Yeongdeungpo and to my family. If I am lucky, I will live to return home around the same time next year to be reunited with all that I hold dear. No, I must, and I will live to return.

The train rolled past Siheung and then past Anyang Station without making a stop. As I closed my eyes, the faces of my family appeared before me one after another. I had left my young children in the care of my wife. Sending her husband off to an undisclosed destination, she was now left to live alone in a strange town with no one to turn to. I was overcome with sorrow and pity as I thought of her plight.

The sullen atmosphere of the train gradually gave way to loudness and levity. It seemed the young men were making a conscious effort to shroud their fears and anxiety with boisterous talk. Having come this far, everyone could see that sulking could not make things better. We had to accept reality, or better yet, pretend to enjoy the long train trip—as if we were tourists bound for a grand tour of Japan. Each, in his own way, was contributing to the general uproar, as the situation gradually deteriorated into a wild party. The southbound train continued to pass station after station, all of which we knew well.

In those days, the trip to Busan would have normally taken one day, but our slowly moving special train did not arrive at Busan Station until late at night on **December 10**. (The delay was probably because our train made frequent stops to allow prioritized munitions trains to pass through.) Today, the same distance can be covered in four or five hours.

We spent a dreary night in Busan, Korea's second biggest city, located on the southern tip of the peninsula. I had never before been in Busan, and was thinking to myself that this was going to be my first and last time here.

We had breakfast at the inn shortly after dawn, and headed out for our meeting point at Busan Port's No. 1 Pier. All the conscripts were lined up. They were preparing us for being handed off to the guides from various factories and workplaces in Japan. The responsibility of the Municipal Labor Department officers who had brought us here from various points in Korea would end, once this hand-off had been completed.

The scene that we found ourselves in on that day was reminiscent of scenes from a slave market as depicted in the movies. How sad and tragic the fate of those who have been robbed of their homeland!

There I stood, waiting to be told where I would be going and what work I would be performing. My only prayer was that I would not be assigned to a coalmine in Hokkaido. It was rumored that death and injury knew no end in those coalmines. The moment of truth was now on hand, and the course of my life or death would soon be determined by a fickle order.

We knew that American bombers had started to bomb mainland Japan and that even the capital city of

Tokyo was now the target of such attacks. Would I be sent to suffer the destruction that was raining down from American planes? Or would I be shunted away to some treacherous mine? I held my breath in anticipation as the fateful moment approached.

The conscripts were given their assignments and handed over to their respective guides. It was determined that my group from Yeongdeungpo would be sent to work at the Toyo Kogyo Company in Hiroshima. I had no idea what this company did, but it was clear that I would be working in a factory. I breathed a sigh of relief to know that I had dodged the bullet of being sent to work in the mines that I feared the most.

There was no choice but to acquiesce to fate. Yes, this was my fate. There was no one that I could blame and no one that I could hate for what was happening to me.

We had all left our homes in Seoul at 1:00 p.m. on December 8. But soon we would be pulled apart. Each would follow his own fate, some going east and others going west.

The Buddhist teaching of "all living things must perish and all meetings must culminate in separation" aptly described our situation.

With luck, a conscript could hope to return home alive to once again see the rivers and mountains of his hometown. But otherwise, there was no guarantee that even a dead conscript's lifeless remains would ever return home.

All of us from Yeongdeungpo gathered around a flag that bore the name "Toyo Kogyo" and quickly lined up. The guide for Toyo Kogyo was a relatively tall man in his fifties named Noguchi. This Mr. Noguchi chose me to be the group leader for the passage to Hiroshima, an appointment that gave me the status of "company commander."

A total of 200 conscripts from various parts of Seoul had been assigned to work at Toyo Kogyo.

Crossing the Genkai Sea

At around 8:00 a.m. on **December 11**, we began to board the ferry that awaited us at the pier. This ferry, the *Kongo Maru*, was an immense ship. When everyone was aboard, the ferry sounded its doleful whistle and began to move slowly away from the pier. We were now no different from captive birds in a cage.

As we boarded, we rushed to reach the upper deck wondering when, if ever, we would see Busan Port again. Some were crying as they fixed their gaze on the port and the mountains of our homeland. Others furiously waved their handkerchiefs and called out, "O port of Busan, be well! I dream of the day of my homecoming. Don't let anything change you until that day!"

No doubt, there was not a single Korean whose eyes remained dry that day. All hearts were broken as our homeland slipped out of sight.

If only we were going to fight and work for our homeland and for our own people, our hearts could have been consoled. But we had been forcibly mobilized to work for a foreign nation and people, and

nothing could relieve the pain and sorrow that came from belonging to a small and impotent nation. To make matters worse, it began to drizzle. The cold rain only added to the torment of our hearts.

We reached the open seas a little while after we departed Busan Port. The immense ship that was carrying us now seemed to be no bigger than a blade of grass. The angry waves of the Genkai Sea lifted, then dropped us in steady succession as our ship danced an ireful dance on its way to Japan. I don't know when and where they came from, but our ship was soon sandwiched by a pair of patrol boats. A reconnaissance plane circled above us. These were blunt reminders that we had entered a war zone. Suddenly, we could not free ourselves from the dark thought that an enemy submarine could appear at any moment. In fact, rumors were rife that American submarines occasionally entered the Korean Strait and threatened the ships that plied these waters. I shivered at the thought that I could become fish food before ever reaching my destination. These fears aside, we safely arrived at Hakata Port in Kyushu some ten hours after departing Busan. We had heard that the ship was scheduled to dock at either Shimonoseki or Moji, and were surprised that our destination had been changed to Hakata. This is when we learned that ships in wartime frequently changed their course. The sun had already set when we disembarked at Hakata. All was dark around us, and the freezing rain had followed us all the way to Japan.

Setting Foot in Japan

We had arrived in a foreign land after a journey of many hundred miles. The sorrows of a homeless people were multiplied as we set foot in Japan. Yes, we had arrived in the Japan that we had heard about and read about in books. Everything that we saw and heard seemed new and strange. Walking silently in the cold rain, we finally arrived at Hakata Station. The special train that was going to take us to our destination was waiting quietly in the station.

While we were standing in the square in front of the station, a roll call was taken. The rolls were organized according to the company that would employ us. Having completed this procedure, we all boarded the special train. After the passage of some time, the train blew its whistle and began to pull away from the platform. The passengers of the train looked as if the life had been taken from them. The faces reflected a deep sense of lethargy and despondency that was perhaps unavoidable after the long voyage across the Genkai Sea. Our fatigue was compounded by bouts of motion sickness and a growing feeling of insecurity.

The company's Mr. Noguchi sat next to me and shared some words of encouragement.

"You must be exhausted after the long voyage and train ride. We will arrive in Hiroshima tomorrow morning. So, tonight will be the last of this long trip."

He continued to speak to me.

"Right now, the train seems to be going through the Kanmon Tunnel (undersea tunnel between Shimonoseki and Moji)."

After boarding the ferry, the company guides accompanying us had done everything to make us comfortable. They surprised us with services that we did not expect. Perhaps they were simply trying to impress us and to gain our confidence. Whatever their motive, we were thankful for their attention.

We had all left our homes with awful rumors ringing in our ears—rumors that had fanned our fears and anxiety. But the care and consideration that the guides had shown us so far were beginning to foster a sense of security among us. We felt the actions of the guides foreshadowed how our future employers would treat us. All that we now hoped for was that the work would not be too demanding.

As the night grew darker, the exhausted conscripts began to doze off, and the eastern skies were already bright when we awoke. The train was now running along the coast of the Seto Inland Sea. The surface of the sea was astonishingly calm and flat, and perfectly reflected the red morning sun. The glittering surface seemed to multiply the beauty of the Seto Inland Sea. Indeed, the blinding glitter added a crowning touch of beauty to the scene that was unfolding before us. The beauty of the coast of the Seto Inland Sea at daybreak cannot be adequately described in words. Back home, this was the season of extreme cold and snow. But the month of December in these coastal stretches is no colder than September or October back home, when trees are just beginning to change color.

The very first thing that impressed me in Japan was its natural beauty. The hills and mountains of my homeland were barren in their reddish brown hues. In contrast, here in Japan, all was green, as though one were looking at a painting. Nowhere was there a desolate hill or mountain to be seen.

Have the hills and mountains of my home country always been barren? No, the mountains of old were as beautiful as an embroidery. It was Japan that stripped our mountains of their trees. Regardless of size, all available pine trees were felled for their resin and processed to obtain oil. How could our mountains remain green under these conditions? All our mountains had been made desolate so that our rivers overflowed their banks with each heavy rain.

Japanese farmhouses appear to differ in style from ours, but these were only minor differences that masked basic similarities. What am I thinking at this moment? I must not forget that I was forcibly conscripted and brought to this land. How strange that I am drawn to the beauty of the scenery and find the style of farmhouses to be so interesting. On the other hand, what is good is good, and affluence and beauty are always preferable to barren desolation.

While I was lost in thought, the train had continued toward its destination, and before I knew it, there was only one station left before Hiroshima. My heart was beating fast with excitement as Hiroshima approached. It was as though I was entering an unknown jungle. The combination of anxiety and anticipation was becoming too much to bear. What kind of city is Hiroshima? What does Toyo Kogyo, where I am headed, manufacture? Is the work going to be dangerous? These unanswered questions multiplied my anxiety.

Suddenly, a loud voice boomed from an unseen corner of the train. “Prepare to disembark!” It seemed the voice belonged to Mr. Noguchi. The order had caught the conscripts by surprise, and they were now moving about busily in preparation. Shortly after, the train came to a jolting stop at Hiroshima Station.

“So, this is the Hiroshima that was awaiting our arrival.”

When I tried to disembark, I was stopped, and was told that my station was the next one, which was Mukainada Station. I thought to myself that Toyo Kogyo–the company or perhaps the factory that was to be my final destination—was probably located in the suburbs of Hiroshima City. In wartime, it was

certainly better to be located outside the city rather than in the city center. The train next stopped at a small and lonely station. Mukainada Station was similar to Noryangjin Station in Seoul.

Start of a New Life; Food and Shelter

My group quickly disembarked and gathered in the plaza facing the station. We lined up and anxiously awaited the next order. We were told to load our baggage on a small bus parked next to the plaza. Having done that, we followed Mr. Noguchi on foot and walked to our dormitory, which was about 20 minutes away. Our dormitory was a new two-story wooden structure that faced the sea. This was what we would now call home. This was the No. 2 Dormitory. The building had been recently completed to welcome the conscripts from Korea. It was a little reassuring to know that we were to be housed in a new structure.

Shown to our rooms, we immediately started to unpack. My room was on the second floor. This was a large room covered with 20 tatami mats. New, clean, shiny, silk-like bedding for ten people was neatly folded on one side of the room. Two-tiered closets lined the other side of the room. I assumed this space was to be used for personal items and for putting away the bedding. The room was approximately 10 *tsubo* (33 square meters) in area.

Someone who was lying down called out laughing, “Good preparations have been made for the wedding. What remains for us to see is the groom (by which he meant our work).”

Of the three fundamental elements of clothing, food and housing, I felt that the housing was good enough. If we eat well and sleep well, we should be able to work well. That certainly would make us all feel good. But it was too soon to jump to conclusions and to feel good.

This was **December 12**, and we were already in mid-December. But Hiroshima was warm, and flowers were still in bloom in the garden outside our dormitory. The scene reminded me of September or October in Korea, when the leaves begin to turn red. The view of the sea from the window was breathtaking in its beauty. Large and small vessels crisscrossed the distant waters. A deep breath of the salty air was soothing to the lungs, and there was something heartwarming in the lazy movement of fishing vessels on the still sea. I had to say that our dormitory and the surrounding environment were really quite good. I felt that all was well and that we had made a good start.

Lunchtime soon arrived. I was wondering what the fare would be. There was a sense of anticipation mixed in with a little bit of worry. The quality of the second fundamental element of our existence would soon be revealed. Among the three elements, clothing seemed to be of lesser importance. Simple work clothes would serve us well in the factory, and the type of clothes we wore would be determined by the type of work assigned to us. Large dining tables lined the sunlit cafeteria. Everything looked new. Young women wearing white aprons were busy preparing the food in the kitchen that faced the cafeteria.

We took our seats at the dining table. Our food was soon brought to us. The meal consisted of rice and a side dish served in separate bowls. Both the rice and side dish were more than enough, and tasted good. I was thinking to myself that probably this was a special meal because it was our first. It was unlikely that the food would always be so plentiful and good. Sooner or later, someone would inevitably raise his voice to complain.

In any case, it seemed we wouldn't have to worry about lodging and food. Because I was so hungry, the warm and delicious meal seemed to breathe new life into my body.

Air Raid Siren Welcomes Us

As we left the cafeteria after finishing lunch, a loud siren began to moan. It was as if the siren had been timed to match our schedule. The siren was sounding a preliminary alert, which was soon replaced by the desperate screech of an air-raid warning. It seemed that we had been brought here to serve as targets for the enemy's aerial bombing. Everyone had to run to the air-raid shelters. With a megaphone in hand, the dorm supervisor was yelling, "Hurry, hurry!"

Our group of 200 conscripts that had arrived just moments ago was stunned and lost. We were "as chicken being driven to town hall"—a Korean saying describing an unexpected occurrence that greets a newcomer. Surprised and taken aback, we had no idea where the shelter was located. Having finally found our way into the shelter, we lowered our heads and huddled together. There is no way to describe the helplessness that we felt. Why were we here in the first place? For whom were we doing this? Why did we have to suffer through air raids in a foreign land far removed from our homes?

The all-clear was sounded after the passage of some time. We were told the enemy planes had passed over us today. Perhaps some other neighborhood might have been hit. But for now, we were safe. Everyone came out of the shelter and breathed a sigh of relief. We had experienced occasional air-raid warnings in Seoul, but these had all been in the dark of night and not in daytime. How different things were in Japan from what we had experienced back home! Here, the enemy was brazenly conducting its air raids in broad daylight. This realization added to our anxiety. There was no guarantee that these episodes would always end this way. No one could say that bombs would not one day rain down upon us.

Chapter 2

Early Days at Toyo Kogyo

A New Life

Life in Hiroshima was governed by a fixed schedule. Dinner was at 6:00 p.m., and the food was as good as the lunch. After we finished, people began to return to their dormitory rooms. I joined a few others to walk on the beach near the cafeteria. The refreshing sea breeze and the sight of distance ships helped me forget the passage of time.

As I am from the landlocked province of Chungcheongbuk-do (South Korea's only landlocked province), I have a special love for the sea. Having just arrived, the surrounding landscape was unfamiliar to me. But I was already beginning to feel that life in this town of Mukainada could be good. Before us was the sea and behind us mountains, and this stunningly beautiful setting was neither of the city nor of the village. My new life had already started. All that I could do now was to breathe the good air and make the best of the environment in which I had been placed.

As I watched ships go back and forth in the distance, scenes from my hometown and the faces of my wife and children flickered before me, as if they were from a distant past. It was getting cold, and we all began to head back to the dormitory. Returning to my room, I was surprised by the complete silence that reigned in this unheated room covered by tatami mats. I sat down to write a letter to my wife:

> I am writing this letter on December 12 while at the No. 2 Dormitory of the Toyo Kogyo Company. This is a munitions factory located in Hiroshima. I still don't know what they make here, but I am quite sure the company is manufacturing weapons. When I was leaving home, I feared I would be assigned to a coalmine. But you don't have to worry because that did not happen. Our dormitory is a nice and newly built house. The rooms with tatami are large and clean. They have prepared silk-like bedding to keep us warm, and the food is quite good. So, I think life here will not be difficult. I will probably stay at the factory for a certain amount of time. It does not seem that the work is going to be particularly strenuous or dangerous. So try not to worry too much. Please take special care of the children during these cold winter months. I will write again.

I also wrote letters to my mother and relatives in my hometown. As this was our first night, the dormitory office left us alone, and did not issue any instructions. The freedom we were given until late at night helped us settle down. Everyone had been kind, we had been treated well, and the bedding was comfortable. But that did not mean that sleep came easily. Thoughts of the past and of the future kept me awake. There was something sad and strange about being suddenly transported to a room with tatami after a lifetime spent in the warmth of Korean's *ondol* heated rooms. But those feelings couldn't be helped. I imagined that I would get used to the new environment in time.

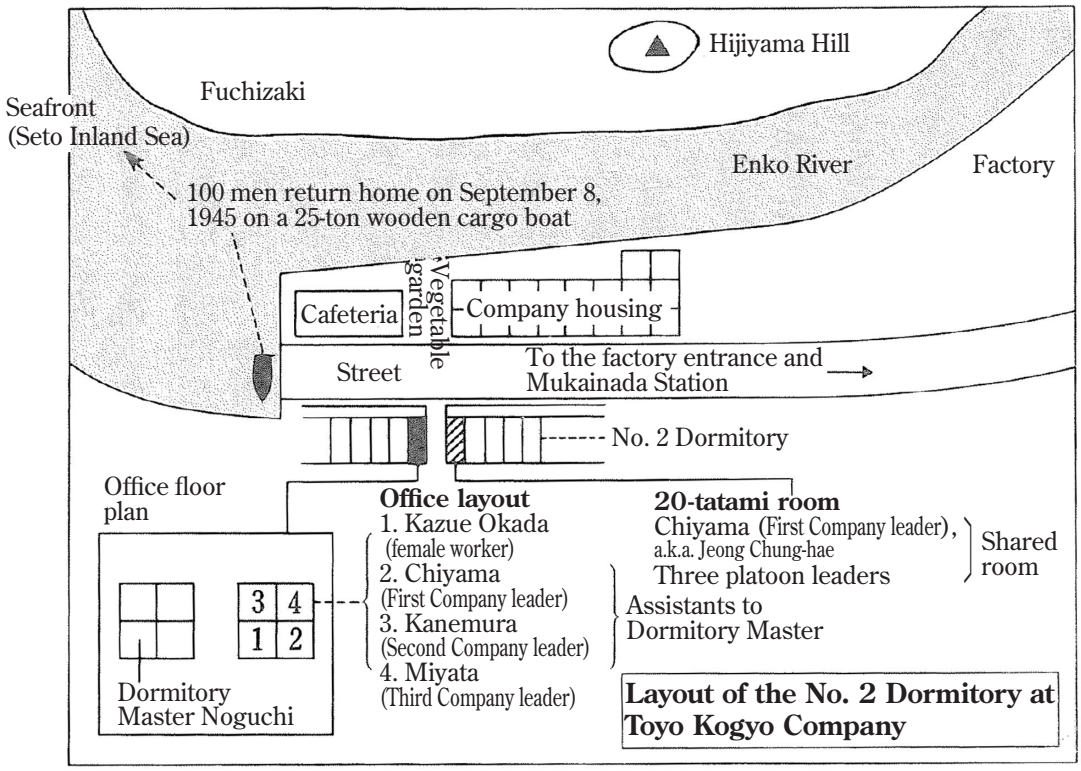
Ten men were assigned to live in each 20-tatami room. Each person was given three pieces of bedding: one thicker piece to be used as a mattress, and two lighter pieces to be used as blankets. These were silk-like to the touch and seemed to have been newly made for us. The impression was

that these would keep us warm in the unheated rooms with tatami. It seemed the company had gone to great lengths to prepare for receiving the conscripts from the Korean peninsula. But that would be only right. After all, they were welcoming the precious sons and beloved husbands and fathers of distant families. How else could they treat us when they had conscripted these precious individuals and brought them to work in their factories? I fell asleep while these thoughts continued to race through my mind.

I don't know how long I had slept when the call to rise rang out through the room. It was still dark outside. This was the first full day of my new life. We obviously had not been brought here to eat and play, nor were we looking to spend our days eating and playing. There was a roll call after everyone had assembled in front of the dormitory. How could anyone be missing? We had been brought here to a foreign land hundreds of miles away from our homes and had no idea where we were. Under these circumstances, where could anyone go? We were no better than birds in a cage. After the roll call, we did group calisthenics, washed up and went to our rooms. Our first night in Hiroshima had dawned, and the working day was about to start.

Breakfast began at 7:00 a.m., but the rules were different from the previous day. Beginning today, everything was to be done according to proper procedure.

We all lined up in single file in front of the kitchen and took the bowls of rice and the side dish handed to us by the women working in the kitchen. We then returned to the tables that we had been previously assigned to eat. The bowls where blackish, similar to plastic bowls in use today, and had a peculiar smell, which made them a little unpleasant. The rice was mixed with soybeans. The side dish consisted of bamboo shoots and meat, which I found to be quite palatable. (We later learned that the meat was horsemeat.) I found that horsemeat was widely eaten in wartime Japan. The amount of food was just right for me. There would be no reason to complain if the meals were always going to be this good.



Source: Jeong Chung-hae, "Memoirs of a Korean conscripted worker in wartime Japan," Translated by Haruko Inoue. *kawai Publishing Company*, 1990.

After breakfast, we returned to our rooms, where we waited for our next instructions. I took the letters that I had written the previous night to the office and requested that they be mailed. Five people worked in the dormitory office, including Mr. Noguchi, who is the dormitory master. Of the five workers, one was a pretty young woman who looked like she was 22 or 23 years old. She introduced herself, saying that her name was Kazue Okada. "Are these letters for your hometown?" she asked in a kind voice. "I will mail them out right away," she smiled.

It was now 9:00 a.m. Orders were issued to gather in front of the dormitory. When everyone had gathered, the 200 conscripts were then divided into two companies. I was put in the first company and was appointed company leader. Next, each company was divided into three platoons, and each platoon was divided into three squads. After all assignments had been made, platoon and squad leaders were also chosen.

The conscripts from Seoul had now been given their group assignments, and our dormitory rooms were reassigned to match our group affiliations. The room given to me was located to the right of the entrance. Like the previous night, this also was a large room with an area of about 10 *tsubo* (33 square meters). It was warm and had a very nice view. Four of us were assigned to this room, my three roommates being the platoon leaders in my company. With the assignment of groups and rooms done, all the scheduled events for the day had now been completed. We were free for the rest of the day.

We heard that Tokyo was now being bombed several times a day. This was a disturbing piece of news. Here in Hiroshima, we have experienced one air-raid warning so far, and all else has been quiet. The enemy probably knew that Koreans had been brought here! In any case, I was happy to be safe.

December 14: This marks the third day that I am here. They say all things begin on the third day. This turned out to be true for us, as we were told that we would begin working today. The two companies assembled in front of the dormitory, and Mr. Noguchi, the dormitory master, introduced a young man to us. His name is Mochizuki, and he is to be our drill instructor. Instructor Mochizuki was formerly a corporal in the Imperial Army and looks very stern and serious. The conscripts brought here already know what they are doing, and it seemed to me that we didn't need to be trained and educated anew. We have come to work at a munitions factory. Why then do we have to receive military training?

After lunch, the two companies assembled in front of the dormitory. Instructor Mochizuki marched the two companies through the factory premises, which were surrounded by a long wall, and into an open area. This was the drill ground where we were to undergo training. The training was very basic and would have been suitable for elementary school children. The whole affair was very childish.

At the end of the training session, Instructor Mochizuki assumed a very solemn attitude and spoke to the conscripts. It was not a speech, but more like a briefing:

> Men, you have all been contributing to society by working at one occupation or another. There is a reason why you are undergoing training that is elementary and basic. From this day on, you will be living as a group. For that, you must return to the starting point and receive moral and spiritual education. Do not laugh at the fact that you are being trained like elementary school children. Instead, do your best.

There was no reason for anyone to question what the instructor was asking us to do. It didn't matter whether we were being treated as kindergartners or elementary school pupils. There was no choice for us but to follow orders and abide by the program. We were placed in the situation of a young girl who had been delivered to a temple. We had no voice in what was to happen.

The childish training session ended in the afternoon and we returned to the dormitory. The next day, and the day after that, we had to undergo the same childish training. The training was more like a child's game of playing house. It seemed our job was to eat three meals a day and to go back to playing house.

Talking About Work (The Groom)

December 17: Instructor Mochizuki says he has something different to tell us today:

> Men, today I want to talk to you about this factory. I am sure this has been foremost on your minds since your arrival. The thing is that information on munitions factories is confidential and must not be shared. On the other hand, you will be working in this factory soon, and I think that it will be useful to know these things in advance.

As though he was going to tell us something that he really should not be talking about, Instructor Mochizuki observed a solemn silence for a few moments before continuing:

> In the past, this factory was dedicated to manufacturing a three-wheel motorcycle called the Mazda. More recently, the factory has been manufacturing the Type 99 short rifle and also some aircraft parts, which makes this an important munitions factory. The manufacture of rifles is divided into a number of separate processes that are undertaken in Factory No. 1 through No. 11. Additionally, there is a foundry, a woodwork factory and a number of other workshops that specialize in manufacturing parts. These parts and components are all brought together and assembled to produce a complete rifle. At the end of your training, you will be assigned to work on one of these processes.

I began to feel better listening to Instructor Mochizuki. After all, he had solved the third and last question that was bothering me.

Working a lathe to produce parts for a rifle should not be that difficult. Furthermore, the workplace probably would not be that dangerous. Needless to say, however, whatever the work may be, an operating error could result in injury. Hence, the work would demand absolute care and concentration.

There was nothing for us to do at the end of the day. How long were we going to repeat this simple daily routine? When would all of this come to an end?

Food and Other Things in Hiroshima

Living in a large group makes you realize how different people can be. People come together after dinner to entertain themselves in parties of their own making. Some bring navel and mandarin oranges, others come with sea cucumbers and abalone, while others are even able to procure some

sake. For the people brought here to work, this is the only available diversion and recreation.

Oranges are the most plentiful fruit in Hiroshima. They say that Shikoku, which is not far from Hiroshima, has many orange orchards. (This area is similar to today's Jeju Island.) In Seoul, oranges are rare and strictly rationed. What seemed so precious to us in Seoul can be bought freely at surrounding orchards. We joked that we should take advantage of this chance and eat oranges to our heart's content until we get diarrhea. The fishing village of Fuchizaki, which is located across the river from Mukainada, is famous for its oysters. There are many oyster farms in this area, and one can see tall heaps of oyster shells everywhere. From time to time, we are served oysters cooked with rice, which is really delicious.

At low tide, the beach behind the cafeteria becomes an ideal place for picking sea cucumbers and clams. The beach is strewn with sea cucumbers and clams that no one comes to collect. Maybe this is because they are shorthanded and don't have anyone to do this. At the end of the working day, it was fun to harvest the beaches. Whatever we picked we would boil or grill, and entertain ourselves in a drinking party. This was particularly satisfying. Although all sorts of foods were in short supply, there was much that we could find to eat here.

Our dormitory faced a relatively tall mountain that was covered with bamboo and pine trees. Standing at the summit was like standing in a different world. The foothills were dotted with onion fields that stretch out in orderly formations. Onions are hard to find in Seoul, but here they are grown in slightly elevated foothills. It seems that the land near forests and groves is rich and fertile. Tall bamboo trees that reach into the sky grow in dense clusters. I have heard that bamboo grows in the southern parts of Korea, but I also hear that giant timber bamboos don't grow in Korea. I am guessing this is due to differences in climate and soil. Where giant bamboos grow, bamboo shoots can be harvested. In places, the shoots had already been harvested, leaving nothing but a small stump. In other places, shoots could be found just beginning to break through the ground. Just imagine how strange a sight this was for us. Shoots grow out of the dark soil where not a blade of grass grows, and suddenly a plump bamboo shoot begins to rise up. There is a saying, "Don't turn your back on a bamboo shoot." I suppose this is a reference to the amazing speed at which bamboo grows. The shape of bamboo shoots is etched in my memory, and still more its taste. I can never forget the taste of bamboo shoots cooked with some meat.

December 31: The last day of 1944 was finally on hand. Today again, we went through our silly drills and came back to our rooms. Twenty days have passed since we arrived in Hiroshima. What are these people thinking? They have dragged us here and are feeding us from their precious store of food. Why then do we spend all our time in drills that benefit no one?

New Year's Day in a Foreign Land and Talent Show

January 1, 1945: New Year's according to the new calendar is not given much attention back home, and is scorned as being the "Japanese New Year."

I recall that New Year according to the solar calendar was a mere formality forced upon us. On the other hand, we welcomed the lunar New Year by rising at dawn to take part in a tea ceremony. After that was done, we wove straw sacks and made tofu for the New Year. I remember that when someone came to the door, we hid the tofu by covering the kettle with hay and cow feed. Those were my

memories from the old days.

The solar New Year is important in Japan and is not to be neglected. But they say many people continue to celebrate the lunar New Year on farms and in fishing villages. This may be wartime, but important days of the calendar like New Year are not forgotten. We were given one day off and some special treats had been prepared for us.

On the morning of New Year's Day, we each received a few pieces of rice cake made of sticky rice. In addition, each squad received a bottle of sake. However, rice cake and sake did not make New Year's in a foreign land any less dismal for us. Back in Korea, seasonal turning points in the calendar are celebrated with people rushing home to spend the holiday with family and relatives. But living under foreign skies, we were robbed of this possibility. Lying down and closing my eyes in the unheated tatami room, my heart is filled with images of the hills and mountains of my hometown and my wife and children. How is my wife spending the coldest days of winter? How will she and the children welcome the New Year when blizzards are blowing outside? Their New Year must be far more dismal and miserable than mine. This too is a tragedy brought on by the war.

In the afternoon, the head of the Second Company and its platoon leaders came to my room. They said they had come to discuss something. Their idea was to organize a talent show. They said this was everyone's wish and that it would be better than spending the whole day aimlessly. I agreed with them and quickly called the platoon leaders under me. After discussions, we accepted the proposal and immediately started to make preparations.

There were many talented people in our two companies, and everyone was excited. As a start, we put together a plan, outlined a program and decided to build a stage in the cafeteria after dinner. As we wanted to invite people from nearby communities to join our talent show, we put up some posters in the streets where company housing was located, with the following message:

"On January 1 beginning at 7:30 p.m., the Korean conscript workers will hold a talent show at the No. 2 Dormitory. Please come and enjoy the show."

This was going to be our show. But since we would be performing in front of Japanese people, everything had to go smoothly. Moreover, the performances had to be good and exciting. The reputation of 200 men was at stake. Beyond that, the Japanese would be sitting there, judging the cultural level and cultural accomplishments of the entire Korean peninsula. Once our plans started to move forward, we suddenly started feeling as though it was going to be an international event, and not just for our own fun.

The first step was to put together a list of people who wanted to perform. Next, we arranged a program and held a rehearsal. Having chosen Mr. Harimoto (Chan) from the First Company, Third Platoon, as the master of ceremonies, we went ahead with the rehearsal. It was a case of "roasting beans with thunder lightning," as Koreans would say, or improvising. We improvised a program consisting of songs, stand-up comedy, skits, magic and other performances. Our assessment of the rehearsal was that we had a pretty good show on our hands. Particularly impressive was the master of ceremonies, Mr. Harimoto. The words just seemed to flow out of his mouth as he moved the program forward. We agreed that the rehearsal was a success. We all wanted to bring Japanese people on stage also, particularly the young women who worked in the cafeteria. We agreed to bring them on during

intermission. We consulted the young women in advance and placed them on the program.

After dinner, a stage was hurriedly put together in the cafeteria. Soon the large cafeteria was filled with people. It was no surprise that we would have a full house. After all, our numbers alone came to 200. I don't know where they had heard about the talent show, but we were surprised to see people in the audience who had come from the village of Fuchizaki that was located across the river.

I can think of two reasons why so many Japanese came. First, wartime Japan was a dreary place with little opportunity for entertainment, such as movies and musical shows. Day in and day out, people had nothing to do but produce weapons. The second reason was the people of mainland Japan knew very little about Korea, and were curious to see how backward we were. I have to admit that in elementary school, I too had learned that the people of Taiwan were cannibals who spent their days hunting and eating people. I was convinced that the Alishan area of central Taiwan was populated by cannibals. As these were the times that we were living in, the Japanese people were extremely curious to see what kind of talent show the people of the Korean peninsula would put on. This is why they came.

The curtains rose at the appointed time, and we went through the ceremonial observances (bowing in the direction of the Imperial Court and singing the national anthem). After an opening address was delivered by the leader of the Second Company, Mr. Miyata, the performances began.

The performers were dressed in the clothes that they had brought with them and had ingeniously arranged whatever article of clothing they could find. The result was that the performers actually looked quite good. But because there was no music and the lighting was poor, we could not recreate a very convincing theater-like atmosphere. On the other hand, the performances were wonderful. Mr. Harimoto, the master of ceremonies, wowed the Japanese audience with his flawless and fluent Japanese. When Yu Gwang-hun (who previously worked at the Namdaimun Market) took the stage to sing, he was called back again and again with calls of encore. The audience clapped excitedly for each skit, magic show, and comedy performance. The Japanese women (kitchen workers) came on stage during intermission to sing and dance. This was also a lot of fun.

Preparations had been made in a hurry, but the outcome was amazingly good. The Japanese people who had come to watch were full of praise and said, "It was an excellent show and a lot of fun!" It seemed the dormitory master and other staff members took great pride in the performances, and were extremely happy with the praise that was being heaped on us. It was as if their own sons and family members had been praised. There was no time to rehearse the performances, but what we found was that there were many talented people among our 200 colleagues.

It seemed some of the conscripts had been actors in their previous life. Also, there were singers and magicians among us. This is what made the show such a success. On their part, the performers were anxious to show off their talents, and this is why they had proposed holding a talent show in the first place. This talent show really changed how people looked at us, and their assessment of Koreans was suddenly and significantly improved. Up until now, we had been regularly scorned and looked down on as "people from the peninsula." But ever since the talent show of January 1, people looked at the Korean conscripts with different eyes. We were suddenly very popular and held in higher esteem. Moreover, the Japanese audience seemed to have been surprised by the level of our cultural sophistication.

What they realized was that we were actually superior to them. By this time in the war, very few capable Japanese people remained in Japan. Most of the people with skills had long ago been sent to battlefields overseas.

After the talent show, the office staff, as well as the women working in the kitchen, treated us in a much more friendly way than in the past. Our conversations with them also became warmer.

One of the women working in the kitchen was named Miss Doi. She was a plump and cute young girl. One day, she said to me:

> I used to hold the Korean conscripts in contempt because I thought they were stupid people from a very backward area. This is what I had been told by my parents in the countryside. But gradually I realized that the opposite was true. My parents are farmers in the countryside and told me this because they had heard the same from others. The point is that they too had never met Koreans. Please forgive me for this misunderstanding.

She was apologizing to me, but how could she be blamed for this? We had been forcibly brought here from Seoul, where most of us had been active and valuable members of society. On the other hand, with the exception of the leaders of society, the Japanese people who still remained in Japan at this point consisted for the most part of the elderly, the ailing, women, children and the physically disabled. It is true that we bore the pejorative label of "conscript," were dressed in shabby factory clothes, and treated like slaves. But that did not change the fact that we were all gentlemen of considerable standing back home. It was quite natural for us to become the target of the keen interest of these young women.

Being a company leader, I often went to the office and had frequent contact with Miss Okada, the woman who worked in the office. At some point, I began to feel that she was giving me special treatment. Whenever I received a letter, she would bring the letter to my room and even joke with me. Here I was in a foreign land, hundreds of miles away from my home where I knew no one and was clueless about my surroundings. Hence, it made me happy to think that there was a woman here that entertained warm feelings toward me.

January 2: When we finished breakfast, I noticed that Instructor Mochizuki was already at work. It seemed this was going to be another day of training with "one, two, three" cadence calls. We were led out to the cold athletic field and repeated the same infantile drills.

New Conscripts Arrive; Tour of the Factory

Around January 5: About 100 new Korean conscripts arrived at the No. 2 Dormitory. They were from the Incheon area. They must have had the same worries and insecurities as we did, but they had the advantage of having us as their guides. The new arrivals formed the Third Company, and were assigned rooms in a building that faced ours.

January 6: We underwent training with the Third Company. How long would these meaningless drills continue? I had had enough. It was not that I was eager to start making weapons. The truth was that I was fed up with the routine of running around in the cold and wind-swept field.

January 10: I was called to the office in the afternoon. I was told that Instructor Mochizuki wanted to see me. "Your group will soon be transferred to the factory. So these dreary drills will be over in a couple of days," he told me. Then he continued, calling me by my name, Chiyama. (This is the Japanese name that I had assumed under the order to assume Japanese names.)

"Chiyama, there is something I want you to do. On January 13, there will be a ceremony marking your formal entry into Toyo Kogyo. I want you to swear the oath on behalf of the Korean conscripts at the ceremony."

"Yes, I will do that," I replied.

This meant the Third Company that had arrived on January 5 would complete their training after only a week. Compared to them, the members of the First and Second Companies had had to repeat these meaningless drills for nearly a month.

January 11: The day of our transfer to the factory was approaching, and for some reason, we had not been taken out for training on this day. After lunch, we were told that we would be given a tour of the factory. This would be the first time for us to see the inside of the factory. What kind of factory was it? What were they manufacturing and how? What were the other workers like? Was it going to be a dangerous workplace? I felt the same kind of anticipation as a groom going to his wedding in the old days. Who was going to be his bride? Was she pretty? Was she tall or short? Was she sickly? I could not wait to see the factory.

After lunch, the three companies were led inside the plant. The first stop was the foundry where all castings were produced. But the foundry had nothing to do with us. Next was the area where the Type 99 Rifle was manufactured. We toured all of the facilities, going from Factory No. 1 through No. 11. We also visited the woodwork factory and assembly factory. The entire plant consisted of a dozen or so buildings dispersed over a strip of land facing the coastline that extended over a distance of two to three kilometers.

Most of the factory workers were women. That is, women accounted for over two-thirds of the workforce. The remainder consisted of old men, the ailing and underage youth. Among the technical workers, there were many who had some form of disability. As we continued the tour, the conscripts were saying things like, "The work at Factory No. 9 looks easy" or "Factory No. 5 seems nice." There were some who said they preferred Factory No. 11. This was where the barrel of the rifle was bored. "They said it takes about an hour to drill through the barrel. So after you set the lathe, you have plenty of time to flirt with the girls. That would be fun."

Having walked through the entire plant, the anxiety that had been festering in my heart seemed to melt away like a patch of snow in the springtime. When we returned to our rooms after the tour, everyone appeared to be happy and excited. I too was feeling happy. The plant was manufacturing small parts for rifles and most of the workers were young women. This was going to be a pleasant workplace for young men like us. We would be surrounded by young women and the work itself could not be all that difficult or strenuous. Would anyone be pushing to finish these guns as soon as possible to send them to the battlefield?

That terribly silly month of training was finally coming to an end. I felt refreshed and relieved, as if I

had lowered a heavy load that had been torturing me.

After dinner, Instructor Mochizuki came to see me. “Follow me,” he said curtly. He led me into the factory and a large hall. What did he have in mind at this time of night?

“Sir, why did you bring me here,” I asked. Instructor Mochizuki was laughing as he fished out a piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to me. “Chiyama, read this,” he said. It was the text of the oath that I would be swearing on behalf of us all. “Read it out loud a couple of times. This is for practice.” He then continued:

> Expectations are high for the conscripts that have been brought over recently from the Korean peninsula. The company has high expectations and the military too. For this reason, the ceremony is going to be a big event. Many high-ranking military officers will be here. The company’s President Matsuda and all the top executives will also be in attendance. If you fumble around with the oath, that will damage the honor of all Korean conscripts. You need to practice in advance. We are here on the request of the Dormitory Master. Now, read the oath in a loud and strong voice.

As instructed, I repeated the oath several times in a loud voice. “That should be enough.” Instructor Mochizuki looked satisfied.

Entrance Ceremony

January 13: The weather was unusually nice. A month had passed since our arrival in Hiroshima, but the days so far had been filled with boring drills that were no better than child’s play.

After today’s entrance ceremony, we would officially become employees of Toyo Kogyo. Regardless of whether I was here on my own volition or according to the will of others, I was now going to be a full-fledged employee of this factory.

At exactly 10:00 a.m., the 300 Korean conscripts of the No. 2 Dormitory assembled in a large hall and formed orderly lines. When the time came, a group of military officers marched into the hall with their military swords rattling at their side. The collars of their uniforms were decked with gold stars. The officers took their seats on the raised stage, as did the company’s president and executives. I was already standing at the foot of the stage facing forward. This is where I was to swear the oath. The ceremony was over in about an hour. We were now employees of the company and ready to go to work. In the afternoon, our work assignments were finalized. I was assigned to Factory No. 10, where the work consisted of manufacturing the bolt mechanism that went into the Type 99 Rifle.

Working in the Factory

January 14: The weather again was fine and balmy. After breakfast, lunch boxes were handed to us. The boxes were made of wood and were relatively long. I opened mine to find that our lunch for the day consisted of oysters and rice. This being our first day at work, I assumed that this was a special treat. Holding our lunch boxes, we followed Instructor Mochizuki and marched to the plant. It was strange to think that I was going to be a metalworker from this day onward. This was a complete about-face from my previous job. A clerk at a concrete factory was going to be transformed overnight

into a metalworker at a munitions factory. This was a 180-degree transformation. We all lined up in the open field facing the plant, and were quickly divided into groups corresponding to the factory to which we had been assigned. Officers from each factory counted the members in each group and led us to our assigned places. A little over a month ago, we had stood in Busan Port where we were divided into groups, some going north, others south, and yet other east and west. The words "All meetings must culminate in separation" once again came to mind.

Led by someone who appeared to be the factory manager, I entered a building that had a sign reading "Factory No. 10" written on it. When we walked in, the workers who were all operating lathes and other machines turned toward us in unison. The factory was not very spacious, and had two lines of machinery. At one end, there was a sizable workbench for finishing metal parts. There were several dozen women workers and also a small number of men.

The factory manager lined up the twenty or so of us who had been assigned to this factory, and introduced us to the workers. Faces were relaxed and smiling on both sides. The factory manager, named Nakamoto, was a short man who looked like he might be 34 or 35 years old. He gave the impression of being a mild mannered man.

Factory Manager Nakamoto addressed the female workers:

> These are our new workers. You are requested to be considerate to them and to teach them how to operate the machines. Much like you were at the beginning, these men have no previous experience, and are very unfamiliar with the machinery. I am asking you to keep this in mind as you instruct them.

Most of the female workers were young women around the age of twenty, and they continued to smile while the factory manager spoke.

Even to us, it was immediately obvious that there was a shortage of workers compared to the number of machines. How was it possible for this factory to be fully operational? When did this factory begin to suffer such a shortage of workers? This shortage could not have existed from the start. The workers had been drafted into the military one by one, and could not be replaced. Women had been mobilized to do the work, but their numbers no longer sufficed. So, finally they had mobilized us and brought us here to make up for the labor shortage.

Next, the factory manager gave a detailed explanation of the rules of the factory and named each piece of equipment on the floor. Finally, he reviewed the names of the parts that we were manufacturing. After that, each one of us was assigned a machine. The one that was assigned to me was called a milling machine.

With absolutely no previous experience as a metalworker, how was I to operate this machine? My predicament was almost humorous if not just plain shocking. As I stood staring at the machine, a female worker approached me. She was a plump and pretty young girl. She bowed very politely and said her name was Murakami. I also bowed.

Miss Murakami started with a question, "Do you speak Japanese?"

“I know the language,” I replied.

As previously explained, the Japanese people living in the country’s mainland generally believed that we Koreans were stupid. This young girl was no exception. I introduced myself and said in fluent Japanese, “I know nothing about this work and beg your indulgence.” Miss Murakami opened her eyes wide and turned red in the face. Perhaps she was embarrassed by her own heavily accented Hiroshima dialect that stood in sharp contrast to my proficient standard Japanese. She smiled and said, “There is nothing to worry. It is not as though we know so much either.” I noticed her gold-capped tooth that glittered when she smiled.

Miss Murakami gave me a detailed lesson in the names of the parts of the machine and how to operate the machine. From there, she went on to explain the names of the parts that were being manufactured in this factory. But with no previous experience, the lesson was not easy to absorb. My job in the milling process was to shave and shape the bolt mechanism that goes into the rifle. I tried my hand at it, but did not succeed. Miss Murakami stood next to me and continued to instruct me. “Don’t worry if it doesn’t work at first. Just keep on milling until you get it right.” With these words, she returned to her own post. After a while, the female workers left us in charge of most of the machines, and went to work in the finishing station.

Our first day at work ended, and we returned to our rooms in the dormitory. Everyone was excitedly exchanging stories about their day at work.

This was **January 14**, 1945. We had left our homes on December 8, and a whole month had passed before we had begun to work in earnest. After dinner, I was writing letters to my parents and my wife back home when Miss Kazue Okada came to see me from the office. I presumed that she was delivering a letter that had arrived for me, but I was wrong. She came close to me and said, “I was bored, and I came to talk with you.” She then continued:

> Tell me your impressions of the work today. More than a month has passed since your group came to Toyo Kogyo. I imagine that all of you were anxious to know what we were making here and whether the work was going to be dangerous or not. Tell me how you felt going into the factory and operating the machines. Please let me know.

She was completely right. In fact, it was as if she had read my mind. I said:

> Miss Okada, going into the factory and operating the machine, I realized that the work is much easier than I had imagined. I was feeling like something was stuck in my chest, but that suddenly melted away today. The environment of the factory is really good, and what we are producing is easy to make. So, this is the ideal factory for us.

She then asked me, “You say the factory environment is good, but what about it makes it so good?”

This is how I answered. “First of all, the factory is clean. Secondly, a hundred flowers are in bloom and butterflies and bees are flying around everywhere.”

Blushing a crimson color, Miss Okada said, “I’m asking you a serious question and you, Mr. Chiyama, are just joking with me.”

I laughed, and replied:

> But it's true. The factory is full of women, and they are all young and pretty girls of marriageable age. You can imagine how exciting it is for young men like us to be working in a flower garden. That's why I said that.

She smiled and asked, "Is it that nice to have young women working around you?" She then explained who these girls were:

> Actually, they are very much like you. They were drafted into the Women's Volunteer Corps and brought here from all over Japan. The only difference is that you are male, and they are female. But I guess there is another difference. They are working for their own nation and people. You understand what I mean without my explanation. We really appreciate your hard work.

She bowed her head in a gesture of gratitude.

What Miss Okada was trying to say was that it was only natural for the Japanese to be fighting and working for their own country and people. We, on the other hand, had been conscripted and brought here against our will and were struggling for a cause that was not our own. She did not dare speak words that could be construed to be unpatriotic and had chosen her words carefully to be evasive. In any case, it was good to know that there were women in Japan who understood our position and our sentiments. Here was a woman that I had met hardly a month ago. Yet, somehow, she had read what was in the hearts of the Koreans, and she did not hesitate to express what she had come to know. I lowered my head and said, "Thank you." I felt that she would understand anything that I told her, and decided to share the following story with her:

> I want to say something about the Women's Volunteer Corps. Please hear me out and please don't misunderstand what I am about to say. The Women's Volunteer Corps also exists in Korea and just as in Japan, young unmarried girls are mobilized and forced to join the Corps. We are living in an age of crisis and total national mobilization. Therefore, it is the clear obligation of citizens, both men and women, to fight for the nation and people. Women of mainland Japan are taken to work at places such as munitions factories. It seems, however, that Korean women are taken to work under different conditions. I don't know the facts of the matter but according to rumors, Korean women are sent to the frontlines of the war. What do they expect unmarried young women to do on the frontlines? You don't need that many nurses, and even if they are needed, what can these untrained women do? Just imagine what the answer to the question could be.

Miss Okada looked surprised. "If that is true, do you mean to say they are taken as comfort women?" She tilted her head to give me a doubtful look, as if to say it was impossible that these women were being sent to sacrifice themselves on the frontlines.

I wanted to change the subject, but she asked, "Mr. Chiyama, does it make you happy to be working in a factory surrounded by young women?"

I answered with a chuckle:

> Yes, definitely. No young man dislikes pretty girls. The same is true about homes, where the atmosphere is happy when husband and wife are together. Just imagine a society or a factory with only men. That would be so stiff and dull. A harmonious and genial atmosphere is possible only where men and women are together. This is particularly true for young men and women. This is also true in this No. 2 Dormitory. Do you know how big a difference your presence makes here? Thanks to you, life is so much brighter and cheerful. Miss Okada, you are like a beautiful flower or a shining bright light in the No. 2 Dormitory.

She blushed and smiled. "You are being too generous, and you are embarrassing me. What am I to do?"

In every room of the dormitory that night, there was a festive party of sake and oranges. Were the conscripts trying to forget their despair with food and drink?

January 15: The weather was again pleasant today. We took our lunch boxes and went to the factory. Miss Okada joined us for breakfast and stood at the door, waving as we left. "Have a good day." That simple phrase from a kind woman made us feel so much better as we headed toward the factory.

Miss Okada's days are busy with many tasks and responsibilities. She has to do everything, from playing the role of wife and sister to serving as a waitress. In any case, Miss Okada is a woman that the No. 2 Dormitory cannot do without.

When we enter the factory, the female workers who were already at their posts came running and greeted us. Everyone is very kind. Miss Murakami, the woman in charge of teaching me, is particularly good to me. I had come to work because I had to, but I wasn't feeling that bad. This was only the second day since our first meeting, but Miss Murakami was treating me like anyone else. The young women told us that for a month, they had been watching us going through our drills on the athletic field. All this time, they had been hoping we would join them as soon as possible. It seemed that we young Korean men had been the topic of excited conversation among the factory's female workers.

It was now time to start work. Miss Murakami turns to me to say, "Let's try this once more." She flips the switch to turn on the motor and repeats the instructions she gave me the previous day. I am clumsy and uncomfortable handling the piece that I am milling. She says, "Don't worry if you can't get it right at first. Just keep at it." It is obvious that she is being very considerate as she teaches me. "You don't have to hurry. Go slowly and you will get the knack of it soon. So, don't worry. We were the same when we started working here."

After the milling is done, I measure the piece against the gauge and find that eight out of ten, or perhaps nine, are defective. My failures don't seem to affect Miss Murakami, and she keeps instructing me the best that she can. All this time, she never stops smiling. If this were a man instructing me, he would have lost his temper by now. If I were the instructor, I too would have been very irritated.

This munitions plant had a daily production quota of 900 rifles. If less than 900 Type 99 Rifles were produced every day, the factory had failed to meet its obligation. I didn't know how the factory was doing before our arrival. But what I can say is that after we arrived, a full day's work seldom produced

more than several hundred rifles that could pass the final test. I thought that our efficiency would improve as we became more skilled, but it was clear that it would be absolutely impossible to meet the goal as things stood now. The situation was the same in the other workshops and factories throughout this plant. As a result, the consumption of material would increase, while the output of rifles would decrease.

This was a war of attrition. The combination of lagging production and increased depletion of supplies was a real problem because depletion would at some point exceed production. Of course, this was not our problem, but it did seem that a huge miscalculation had been made somewhere along the line. Consider what had happened to us. We were all productive members of society, living in our homes and doing our job in one capacity or another. But we had been mobilized and forcibly brought here. Next, we had spent an entire month playing around and doing nothing productive. Then suddenly, we had been placed in front of machines that we had never seen or heard of before, and told to operate the mills and lathes to produce rifle parts. How could anyone have expected us to succeed? Suppose we had the needed skills. Even then, how could anyone have expected us to work earnestly and faithfully?

Before long, the factory managers began to constantly walk around the factory floor to give direction and encouragement.

After about two weeks, we had become more or less used to factory life, and our work efficiency improved. At this point, the work became more interesting, and being able to work among a lot of young women meant that we were never bored.

A month or so after we started working in the factory, air-raid sirens became frequent enough to keep us on our toes. But we had not yet experienced an actual bombing.

Chapter 3

Education at the Western Work Training Center

Transfer to the Western Work Training Center

February 28: I was resting in my room after the day's work when Miss Okada came to call me. "They want to see you in the office." Four people were already in the office—two each from the Second and Third Companies. From the First Company, I had been summoned, together with a fellow named Kanemura from the First Platoon. When our group of six had assembled, Dormitory Master Noguchi spoke to us, saying orders had been given from above:

> The military has ordered that the leaders among the Korean conscripts must go to the Western Work Training Center for one month of training. This is why you have been called to the office. Make preparations because you will be reporting to the training center on March 1.

This was certainly an unexpected order. We were told the training center was located in Nara. All of us were taken aback by the sudden order.

Dormitory Master Noguchi went on to say, "This is an order issued by the military, and there is absolutely no way to change it. You are leaving tomorrow morning. Make sure you are ready."

All of us protested strongly and said, "Please choose someone else." But we were told the decision could not be changed. It was clear that we had no choice but to go. This was our situation. We ate what we were given, we wore what we were told to wear, and we were paid the monthly wage that had been determined for us. All that we could do was to work for a predetermined period of time and wait for when we could return home.

Miss Okada was standing in the corner of the office, looking at us with a worried expression.

Arriving in Hiroshima, I had spent an entire month in the most boring and disgusting training. Finally the real work had started, and I was just beginning to settle into a stable routine. Now, suddenly I was going back to training. I had no idea what the training was about, only that it was going to take place in Nara and would take an entire month. Even the sound of the name "Western Work Training Center" was depressing.

I had no choice but to prepare to depart. But there was very little to prepare–only my newly washed work clothes and simple toiletries. As I was packing, Miss Okada came to see me. She looked pale. "Hello Miss Okada. Are you feeling all right?"

She replied, "No, I am feeling a little gloomy." Could it be that she also was feeling anxious about our training in Nara?

"Mr. Chiyama, I won't be able to see you for a month and it worries me to think what you will be going through during that time. It's strange that I am feeling so nervous about your going to Nara." She then let out a muted laugh.

I replied, "Thank you Miss Okada. But I'm not going away for good and this is good-bye for only a month. I will be back after a month's training, so we will meet again. Take care of your health, and please look after my colleagues."

Before going back to the office, she said "Working in the dormitory is no trouble at all. But I'm afraid your training will be an ordeal. I will see you tomorrow."

The six of us selected for training in Nara would be accompanied by Instructor Mochizuki.

March 1: The morning of our departure, there were no clouds in the early spring skies. We had an early breakfast and assembled in front of the dormitory. We were a group of seven headed for Nara. The dormitory master and all other office workers came out to see us off. "Have a safe trip," they called to us. I exchanged a brief good-bye with Miss Okada. The seven of us then walked briskly toward Mukainada Station, where we would board a train bound for Tokyo.

This time, the train trip was much more enjoyable than the previous one because the destination and the purpose were clearly known. Nara was Japan's capital city during the ancient Nara Period. It would have many famous sites and historic spots. We would be like tourists going to a historic city, and that would be great fun. At the same time, it was depressing to think of the training that awaited us. The train passed through Kobe, and we finally arrived in Nara in the late afternoon. As we entered the city, we saw that there were no tall buildings. This was a quiet and beautiful city.

We walked through the urban district and entered a wooded area located at some distance from the city center. On the street that we walked, there was a sign pointing in the direction of the Western Work Training Center. Eventually, we came to a bamboo forest. We walked along the path that skirted the forest until we came to a clearing where a number of small and large buildings stood. Finally we had arrived, as was evident by a sign that read "Western Work Training Center," and we entered through the main gate. My first impression was that we had entered a prison area. I immediately imagined that once inside, we would be treated like cattle. They would tie ropes around our necks and pull us around for an entire month. We would have no choice but to obey every order. From the main gate, we walked another ten minutes through the bamboo forest, until we came to a drill ground, in front of which stood a long and narrow building.

Instructor Mochizuki went in to report our arrival, and returned with someone who introduced himself as the dormitory master of the Training Center. "You must be tired from the long trip," he said as he led us inside.

His name was Kinoshita, a mild-mannered man in his forties who was missing one of his front teeth. The dormitory had been newly built for the purpose of re-training conscripts brought from Korea. The dormitory was already full of young Koreans from munitions factories throughout Japan, who like us, had been selected for training here in Nara. They were all our unfortunate compatriots. The weather in Nara was quite different from Hiroshima. Surrounding by mountains and hills, the air in Nara was chilly and very cold in the morning and evening hours.

Training

March 2: This was a very cold day and the start of another terribly boring regimen of training.

We got up at six and had to wash up immediately. One of the men was brushing his teeth as he walked to the bathroom. He was caught by a group leader and given a harsh scolding. The idea was that everything had to be done in the correct and stipulated place. For example, we were not allowed to smoke anywhere except in stipulated places. Corporal punishment awaited any violator who was caught.

After washing up, we immediately assembled on the drill ground. But this was not as simple as it sounded. We were given five minutes to wrap our legs in puttees and present ourselves for inspection. There was nothing special about the drills. After calisthenics, there was some running. When that was finished, we went back inside. We were told to undo our puttees and fold them neatly. We would have to wrap these back on when we returned to the drill ground.

Breakfast was at 7:00 a.m. The large cafeteria was lined with low tables. We sat formally on the floor, waiting for the food to be brought to us. Persons in charge of serving the meal that day brought kettles to the tables. Next, a lidded bowl of rice and a side dish were placed in front of each person. As hungry as we are, we are not allowed to remove the lid and start eating. Dormitory Master Kinoshita seated himself at the table facing the conscripts and spoke.

“Before you eat, you must express your gratitude to the Emperor. Repeat after me.”

I only had one bowl of rice the night before, so my stomach was now growling. Getting up early and running for about an hour had made me hungry. Two bowls of rice would still leave me hungry, but all that I could have was one bowl of rice mixed with soybeans and adzuki beans. Under these conditions, the dormitory master’s instructions barely registered with us. Dormitory Master Kinoshita began his recitation.

“Every grain of rice and drop of water is ours only by the benevolence of the Emperor…” We had to repeat these words that went on for about two minutes. Finally, when we were finished, we said in unison, “With your permission,” and finally removed the lid from our bowls.

But Dormitory Master Kinoshita was not yet finished. “You must chew your rice properly before swallowing.” He then began to explain the meaning of the Japanese expression, “A crane lives a thousand years and a turtle ten thousand years.” The crane (*tsuru*, a homonym for an onomatopoeic word used to describe slurping sounds) can live only a thousand years because it swallows its food without chewing, but the turtle (*kame*, a near homonym for the word for chewing) can live ten thousand years because it chews its food well. The lesson was that we should chew well because we would not live long if we slurped our food.

Dormitory Master Kinoshita’s instruction was to chew each mouthful a hundred times. One hundred times! How was that possible when our habit was to swallow our food as soon as it reached our mouth? Chewing rice a hundred times turns the rice into a watery gruel that flows directly down to the stomach. Somehow, I made it through my bowl of rice as instructed, but my stomach was still growling. It was far from a satisfying meal. It seems part of the education we were to receive here had to do with how we eat. I worried that I wouldn’t be able to bear this for an entire month. I put my chopsticks down and reached for the kettle. But seven or eight other hands were competing for the same kettle. Were we to believe that even a cup of water is precious in this training center? I assumed that not being able to drink a cup of water in peace is another part of the training here.

There are two such training centers throughout Japan. The other one is called the Eastern Work Training Center. The so-called conscripts from Korea are brought to these centers for re-training and re-education of both body and mind. It quickly becomes obvious that these two centers were not built for feeding the conscripts well and allowing them to have an easy time. After the light breakfast, we were called back to training.

I will now describe the daily routine.

We get up at six and immediately go for about an hour of calisthenics and running. After breakfast, we have a brief break before assembling in the lecture hall for lessons. This is followed by another round of training on the drill ground. The lectures given by group leaders are not difficult to understand, and repeated the same messages: "We must absolutely win the Greater East Asian War. Much is expected of you conscripts in this struggle. Keep in mind that you must work hard when you return to your factories."

After lunch, we go to a workshop located in a different building, where we place a piece of metal in a vise, and practice cutting through it with a chisel. We are given a hammer and told to strike down on the chisel with all our might. The key is to keep the elbow straight as the hammer comes down. Because we have no previous experience as metalworkers, things don't go as they should. Most miss the chisel and hit the back of their own hands. Soon our hands become covered in blood. When we try to rub our hands to soothe the pain, an instructor comes running from nowhere yelling "Stupid!" He then hits us on the head with a baton. This training continues for about an hour. Then we go back to the dormitory.

As I explained before, the rule was to remove our puttees upon returning to the dormitory. These had to be neatly folded and put away. After a 30-minute break, we were back to the routine of wrapping our legs in puttees and rushing to assemble on the drill ground within the allotted five minutes. Everyone had to be there on time. Punishment awaits anyone who arrives late or has not wrapped his puttees around his legs properly. After everyone has been accounted for, we are led outside the drill ground for running. We have to do one complete lap around the central part of Nara. We take a break after returning to the drill ground, and head off to the lecture hall for more lectures. We are free after the lectures are done. Dinner is served at six and lights are off at nine. This constitutes a day at the training center.

The training was tiresome, but not particularly hard or strenuous. I began to think that nowhere in Japan and nowhere in any country of the world could you find an institution like this Western Work Training Center. This is because the food given to us was the absolute minimum calculated to barely keep us alive.

The situation reminded me of the saying, "Feeding a biscuit to an elephant." We could have eaten our entire daily ration in a single sitting and still gotten up hungry. Instead, our food was divided into three small portions that could never be enough for young people like us. This hunger was combined with the ridiculous training program that continued day-in and day-out. At the end of each day, we would collapse in exhaustion. The pain and rigors of this life cannot be properly expressed in words.

After a week of this regimen, everyone without exception looked haggard and emaciated. In fact, we looked completely different from the way we looked when we had arrived, to a point where we

unrecognizable. Our unshaven and gaunt faces were covered with stubble, and our work clothes were filthy. All in all, we looked like a band of beggars. I was wondering what would happen to us if this situation continued for a month. The thought made me shiver with foreboding.

Instructor Mochizuki, who had brought us here, looked the same as us. He was living under the same conditions as the conscripts, and could not have looked any different from us. Instructor Mochizuki was extremely sorry that he had come. After all, he was in a position of leadership at the factory, and could lead an easy life there without having to do much. I guess he was just unlucky. Instructor Mochizuki was previously a corporal in the Imperial Army and said:

> A soldier's life in the Imperial Army may be rigorous and difficult. But the soldier's life doesn't even come close to the terrible treatment at this training center. We do not have a second to spare in this critical juncture of the war, and we cannot produce enough weapons even if we work night and day without rest. At such a critical moment, they have gathered a large number of conscripts, starved them half to death, and are sending them out every day to train like children in a program that serves no purpose whatsoever. I cannot comprehend their rationale.

If you are going to lose this war anyway, why don't you just sit and await your fate quietly? For what reason do you have to drag the precious sons and husbands of other homes into this mess? There was something sadly comical in what was going on.

March 10: The day is cloudy and very cold. As punishment, someone has been made to sit on the concrete slab under the flagstaff. Driven by hunger, he tried to escape the compound but had been caught. It is unknown how long he was sitting there, and now that he tries to get up, his legs are stiff, and repeatedly fail him. Finally, he collapses. Everyone watching is cursing and making a scene. "The poor guy is dying and is taking his last breath!"

Amid the commotion, an order is suddenly issued. "Assemble on the drill ground in five minutes!" When everyone has assembled, we are ordered to run 50 laps around the field. We were sharing the blame through an exercise that is supposed to discipline us and re-instill us with the proper spirit. But running 50 laps in this large field is too much for our starving and exhausted band. Everyone is panting for breath and ready to fall down. Everyone is dispersed over the field, but it is unclear whether they are running or just walking. After the passage of considerable time, a new order is shouted out. "Assemble in the lecture hall in five minutes!" What awaits us there is more discipline. We bend our knees to assume a formal sitting posture on the floor. We are then told to close our eyes and reflect on our faults and shortcomings. This means repeating the words, "I shall never again allow myself to be distracted and shall be absolutely obedient to orders. I shall never complain or express dissatisfaction, and shall faithfully perform the duties given me. I shall thereby loyally serve the nation and its people."

The several months I had spent at the factory in Hiroshima were like paradise compared to this.

A Visitor Comes Calling

March 15: Fifteen days had passed since we had arrived in this living hell. This day again, I was in the workshop playing that silly game of handling the chisel. Suddenly, the instructor who was

standing on the platform to which all the vises were attached barked out my name in a loud voice. He approached me and asked, “Are you Chiyama?” When I answered in the affirmative, he said, “Chiyama, there is someone to see you. Go right away to the main entrance. You have only ten minutes to get back here.”

Everyone turned around to look at me and all the hammers suddenly fell silent. Looking down from his perch, the instructor thundered, “What are you waiting for?”

I ran to the gate. Who could it be? In all of Japan, there was not a single person who knew me. I had no idea who this wartime visitor could be.

I was panting when I reached the guard station. This had already taken me three minutes. Who could it be? Who could it be? I ran into the guard station and saw the visitor sitting there. It was the owner of the Fukumoto Concrete Plant in Seoul, where I used to work. Mr. Koichi Fukumoto (Lee Su-bok) took my hand and said, “Chiyama, it’s you!” He sounded as if he had missed me. True enough, the total surprise had made both of us nostalgic. My former employer had braved the risks of war to come to see me. Words failed us as we stood looking at each other with teary eyes. He had travelled hundreds of miles to this foreign land to find me in a moment of unspeakable hardship. As the initial shock subsided, I gathered my wits and asked about my family back home. I was crying.

He continued to hold my hands and was now crying openly. Trying his best to control his emotions, he said:

> I came to Tokyo on a special mission to meet Baron Saito. After that, I went to Hiroshima and looked for you at the Toyo Kogyo dormitory. They told me you were in Nara, and I decided to come here.

I felt extremely grateful. The sentiments shared by host and guest were too precious to set aside.

No matter how precious those sentiments, our limited time together was even more precious. Of the ten minutes that had been given to me, only four or five minutes remained. The allotted time only allowed us to ask about each other and for me to inquire about my family back home. Before I knew it, my time had run out, and I had no choice but to run back to the factory. If our meeting had been in Hiroshima, we could have spent a couple of days together talking to our hearts’ content. Why did the meeting have to take place here, and why did he have to see me in my current state? This made me feel even more miserable. It saddened and worried me to think that my former employer had seen me in this wretched state. What would my wife think if she learned about my wretched state? How much pain and distress would it add to her predicament? As we parted, I was earnestly wishing that Mr. Fukumoto would just tell my wife that I was doing well.

His parting words stayed with me as I ran back. “Take care of yourself, complete your duty and come home. Let’s meet again back home.” I was wondering whether I would be allowed to return home after a year as originally promised. Would they release me and send me on my way home? The current situation certainly did not allow me to make any firm predictions. It seemed that the aerial bombings that had started around Tokyo were moving inexorably westward. No one knew when those bombs would start falling on us. Realizing the precariousness of my fate, I felt terrible that we had been forced to part with hardly any words spoken. My thoughts were with my wife and children,

and I knew of no way to calm my agitated heart. How good it would be if ten days would pass as if they were a single day!

Failed Attempt to Steal Radish

March 18: The weather was overcast and cold. Today again, we repeated the same training. During the afternoon break, Instructor Mochizuki sheepishly whispered in my ears: "I was walking by the warehouse at noon and saw they were drying radishes, probably for pickling. Let's volunteer for night watch tonight so we can steal some."

He was as hungry and starved as we were. Instructor Mochizuki belonged to the nation's leadership class, but had been unwittingly drawn into this hell where he did not belong.

I was all for it. This was an opportunity that I did not even dare dream of, and I was so hungry that I was ready to steal. This training center stood isolated in a thick bamboo forest. Even in the middle of the day, it was never a pleasant place to be. Doing guard duty on a dark and rainy night would be a frightening and spooky experience. It was terribly pathetic to think that we had been driven to volunteering for night watch duty for a chance to steal some radish. But that is exactly what Instructor Mochizuki and I did. Everyone who did not know the reason sneered at us, saying that we must be out of our minds to volunteer for night watch.

After dinner, we were given one rice ball each for a midnight meal. But we ate the rice balls immediately because there was no reason to wait until midnight, when we would be feasting on radishes. After being handed bamboo spears, Instructor Mochizuki and I separated to go to our sentry posts. As night fell, the lights in the dormitory were turned off. Everyone would be fast asleep soon. All the buildings were now dark, and it felt as if walls of total darkness were closing in on me. Standing guard alone in these deeply forested hills could be terrifying. I wasn't sure how much time had passed since I had taken my post, but suddenly I heard someone walking in the bamboo forest.

I readied my bamboo spear and stared intently in the direction of the eerie sound that pieced the surrounding silence. The footsteps were slowly moving toward me. "Who's there," I called out.

"It's me." The voice belonged to Instructor Mochizuki. He came right up to where I was standing and chuckled, "You look terribly scared standing out here alone."

Regaining my composure, I said, "Instructor Mochizuki, what is it that we are about to do? No matter how I look at it, this is plainly foolish."

He quickly replied, "Chiyama, you sound like you are having second thoughts. But listen, we're in this together. Just man up and grit your teeth." He spoke again after some time had passed. "Let's move. The time is right."

He motioned me to follow as he walked ahead. I followed while trying to silence each step I took. The dark outline of the warehouse was now in sight. Instructor Mochizuki turned around and signaled to me to come closer. He looked around then began to slink toward the warehouse. He reminded me of a cat stalking its prey. I stayed right behind him and did exactly as he did. This was all was for the purpose of stealing and eating a couple of radishes, but we were acting as if we were on a giant heist.

The absurdity of the scene did not escape me. Theft is theft, no matter whether it is a giant heist or just sneaking off with a radish or two. I was feeling the pangs of my conscience. Why had we come so far just to steal a couple of radishes? Why were we going to act against our conscience? Instructor Mochizuki came to a sudden stop within a few meters of the warehouse. Something was moving in front of the warehouse.

Could it be that someone else had the same idea as us? Had these thieves beaten us to the scene? We would have to wait our turn and go in after they had taken what they wanted. But the suspense was too great, and we approached to see who it was. A surprise awaited us. The figure in the darkness was not a thief but a janitor that had been sent by the office to guard against thieves. I assumed that there had been many thieves in the past, and the authorities had grown wary.

The plan that Instructor Mochizuki and I had hatched had ended in total failure. We were utterly disappointed. We had volunteered for night guard duty in the hope of being able to fill our stomachs with radishes. But all our trouble had been for nothing. We were just unlucky, or was this fate? We looked blankly at each other in the dark and trudged back to our guard posts.

As the night went on, rain began to fall from the ink-black sky. I was hungry, scared, and cold to the point of despair. With tears flowing down my cheeks, I sat leaning against the wooden wall of my sentry post.

Was all the trouble and suffering of this dark and wet night the price that I had to pay for the sin of attempting to steal from others? It did not matter that hunger had driven me to this predicament. There was no one to blame and no one to hate but myself. Still crying for the fate that had befallen me, suddenly I felt an icy and tingly sensation run down my spine. Soon the feeling seemed to cover every inch of my body from head to toe. I was transfixed with fear. I thought that a horrible monster with outspread arms and glaring eyes would at any moment swoop down on me, or that a disheveled woman garbed in a shroud was about to appear before my face with a maniacal smile. These thoughts must have been the result of physical and mental exhaustion. I scolded myself. “This is no time for tears! Be strong!” I stood up with fresh resolve and held my spear firmly, looking intently into the dark and on alert for the slightest noise. The night was so dark that nothing was visible around me, and the only sound that disturbed the silence was the sound of rain dripping down from the surrounding trees.

I was reminded of what an instructor had said during an educational session a few days after we had arrived at the training center:

> There are many raccoon dogs in Japan, and especially here in the mountains of Nara. Legend has it that on rainy nights, raccoon dogs appear before passing men in the guise of beautiful women to do them harm. Remember this warning. If a beautiful woman appears before you in the dead of night, don’t follow her into the dark.

This story obviously belonged to the genre of ghost stories, but the fear that had overtaken me had refreshed my memory of that ghoulish tale. I could swear that a disheveled woman in a shroud was approaching me. This illusion was also the product of the cold, hunger, and fear that were simultaneously attacking me.

I could not tell how much time had passed, but guessed that it was already past midnight. Suddenly, the silence was broken by the unexpected. Air-raid sirens began to moan. This was the first air-raid warning since coming to Nara. Soon, sirens could be heard screaming everywhere in the city, as bells pealed out their dire message. The dormitory was in uproar, with orders going out to take cover. I could imagine the confusion that my sleeping colleagues had been thrown into. Cold, hungry, and shaking with fear, I suddenly realized that this was all a blessing in disguise. Indeed, this was the massive air raid that all of us had been silently hoping for in our hearts.

After a few minutes, the roar of enemy bombers could be heard approaching from the south. But the bombers did not bother with Nara, and flew straight in the direction of Osaka. The roar of bomber engines continued, and it seemed certain Osaka was tonight's target. Judging from the ominous noise, this was a huge formation of B-29 bombers. About an hour after the bombers had flown over us, the night skies over Osaka began to glow a brilliant red. The bombers had set off huge fires.

I had always known that massive bombings were coming our way, but the fateful day had arrived much earlier than expected. If Osaka was now in the crosshairs, the bombing was moving forward at a much faster pace than I had imagined.

On March 10, a giant formation of 300 B-29 bombers had rained destruction on Tokyo. Tonight was the turn of Osaka, the nation's second largest city. I calculated that if the bombing continued at this pace, the whole of Japan would be reduced to rubble and ash within a few short months. Sooner or later, the nation would raise its hands in surrender. I watched the glowing skies with anticipation. Burn everything down, the sooner the better, so that I could go home sooner. This was going to be my ticket home. I was rejoicing in my heart. I did not care what happened.

Dozens or perhaps hundreds of B-29 bombers had rained their bombs down on the city tonight. But where I stood was perfectly safe. Even if the city of Nara were to be bombed, this training center with its dense bamboo cover would remain safe. The rain continued to come down silently, but was no match for the faraway embers that lit the night sky. Much like the saying, "Watching a fire on the opposite side of the river," we stood in the safety of Nara to watch as fire consumed the city of Osaka.

We could do no more than to imagine the hellish scenes that were playing out in Osaka. There was no way of knowing whether the bombers that night were coming by the dozens or the hundreds. What was certain to us on this pitch-black night of rain was that huge formations of enemy planes had just completed an indiscriminate bombing run. Could anything survive their fury? It was too fearsome to even imagine.

War, bombs and the aerial attacks that would pave the way to the inevitable end meant there was no glimmer of hope beyond that destruction. The only difference was whether you were fated to die sooner or to die later. Perhaps those who died sooner were the fortunate ones, as they would be spared the suffering of the bombings. But this did not hold true for us, and particularly for me. I had no reason or cause to die in this war. I simply could not afford to die in vain. None of us should die, no matter what. All of us had to stay alive to the very end.

Standing on sentry duty through the night, I was now so desperately hungry that I could not bear it anymore. Our hopes for stealing those radishes and eating our fill had been dashed, and now my empty stomach would not stop growling. Images of food of all kinds appeared before my eyes.

I suddenly remembered the garbage box that we passed on the way to sentry duty the previous evening. Yes, I had seen that it contained radish and cabbage scraps. I walked toward the garbage box, but it was too dark to see anything. I plunged my hand into the garbage and fished out any scrap of food that I could find, and carried it to my mouth. I don't know how much I found in the dark, but I was soon beginning to feel full. With food in my stomach, I was feeling better and even more energetic, as if the life force was returning to my body. No longer hungry and feeling saner, I broke into a wry smile. Yes, I was so hungry that I had plunged my hand into garbage and eaten every possible scrap without once stopping to consider how filthy these scraps were. The truth was that I had shoveled everything possible into my mouth without even realizing how filthy the stuff was. If I had been so lucky as to find a lump of rice in the garbage, I certainly would have devoured it as if it were the greatest culinary treat the world could offer. Hunger must be the greatest suffering that this world metes out to the unfortunate. With a full stomach, I could now go back to watching the conflagration of Osaka. I thought to myself that if Instructor Mochizuki had been there with me, I would not have stuck my hands into the garbage, even if I was about to collapse from hunger. For the sake of saving appearances—for the little that was worth—I felt extremely fortunate that he had not been there with me.

Enemy planes continued to come in uninterrupted waves, as if they had been tasked to overturn every inch of soil in their target city. There was little doubt in my mind that Osaka had been totally flattened by now. The bombing continued for hours, and it seemed the flames that arose from Osaka did not subside for several hours.

The enemy planes finally disappeared from the skies. The morning of March 19 had finally dawned.

As the nightmarish dark gave way to sunlight under the dense bamboo forests that surrounded us, I noticed charred pieces of paper that appeared to have been blown here from the fires of Osaka. The mere fact that charred paper from Osaka had made it all the way to Nara was enough to convince me of the devastation that had been visited on Japan's second biggest city.

On the way back from my sentry post, I took a closer look at the garbage box. There was no doubt that this was a garbage dump. Nobody in his right mind would eat out of it. That is how filthy it was. It made me sick to the stomach to picture what I had done during the night. The truth was that I could not believe what I had done.

Having been brought to Japan by force, I had been reduced to eating from a garbage dump to relieve my extreme hunger. This is a bitter truth that I shall never forget to the end of my life. The radish and cabbage scraps that I had devoured in the night were fully digested by now, and I was again feeling the pangs of hunger. I simply could not wait for breakfast. But the dormitory I returned to was in turmoil. Everyone was excitedly talking about the night's airstrikes.

There is no pleasure to be gained from imagining the suffering and death of others. Besides, Nara could be on the list of targets for the next night. If that were so, we would have only one day to contemplate the misfortune of Osaka before sharing the same fate and suffering.

We heard that the Imperial Headquarters was issuing announcements on last night's airstrike. No one is foolish enough to believe the announcements of the Imperial Headquarters. I remembered many battleground reports of the past, but most were lies and fabrications. In any case, according to the

Imperial Headquarters, the raid on Osaka was carried out by a fleet of about 90 B-29 bombers, which dropped incendiary bombs on the central districts of the city. However, the announcement continued, the damage was minor because the attack had been carried out in total darkness on a rainy night. The announcement ended with a salute to the fierce anti-aircraft fire that exacted a heavy toll on the enemy and sent them scampering into the southern skies. Whether or not people believe Imperial Headquarters announcements, there remains a real need to compose announcements that will at least sound convincing to people. From that perspective, it is remarkable that the announcement admitted that about 90 B-29 bombers had continued to drop explosive and incendiary bombs for a number of hours, as if they were walking about their own backyards. The outcome for any normal city would certainly have been total destruction. Hence, there could be little doubt that a good part of Osaka, the nation's second biggest city, had been destroyed that night. What then is one to make of the totally irrational and unreasonable statement that "the damage was minor?" No one can cover the eyes and mouths of the citizens of Osaka.

[Translator's note: The great bombing of Osaka by 90 B-29 bombers occurred in the middle of the night of March 13. It appears there is some confusion on this point, which may be explained by the author's statement that he did not have access to newspapers in Nara, and had to rely on word of mouth. It should be added that several cities around Osaka Bay were bombed between the evening of March 18 and the early morning hours of March 19.]

It was none of our business that Tokyo had been burned to the ground or that Osaka had been obliterated. What could we do, other than to applaud? But it was certainly sad to think of the price that innocent citizens had been made to pay. On the other hand, this was a calamity that they had invited upon themselves. They were in no position to blame others. No matter how desperately they may scream, it was a fire on the other side of the river. This war was not our battle and not our business. The only troubling thing was that we knew full well that the day was slowly approaching when those screaming bombs would rain down on our heads.

Hiroshima's turn could not be far away. My only hope and prayer was to find a way to survive the inevitable conflagration. But for now, my only desire was to eat, to be allowed to fill my stomach with wholesome food. I thought to myself that I would not fear air raids, bombs or anything else, so long as my stomach was full. Food, food—all that I could think of was food.

Dormitory Master's Talk

After breakfast, we went to the hall for the day's lecture. Unlike all other days, Dormitory Master Kinoshita walked in. This was a total surprise. He had a grave look. No doubt he too had watched from afar the destruction wreaked by the previous night's bombing.

He began to speak:

> I imagine you all spent a sleepless night due to last night's bombing of Osaka. This was bombing of an inordinate level. Only several days ago on March 10, the capital city of Tokyo was bombed by an enormous fleet of 300 bombers. Last night, these same bombers continuously pummeled Osaka, the nation's second biggest city, for many hours. The fact is that mainland Japan–no less the capital city of Tokyo, as well as Osaka–is being attacked by enemy planes that fly over us, uncontested by anyone. I cannot help but say that this is a dire

situation.

Dormitory Master Kinoshita then changed the subject to address other aspects of the war situation. There was something strange and unusual in his choice of subjects and words. Here he stood before us speaking without hesitation in a manner that we could not believe. The gist of his lecture was the following:

> Since the beginning of the year, the Americans have extended their bombing runs to mainland Japan, and are pursuing a scorched earth strategy that aims to burn down all our cities. This scorched earth strategy began in Tokyo, and has already reached Osaka and incinerated it. Yesterday's bombing has probably totally obliterated the central parts of Osaka. Japanese buildings are made of wood and are absolutely defenseless against incendiary bombs. Should these bombings continue, all Japanese homes will be burned to the ground within a short span of time. As you well know, the reports delivered by the newspapers and radio are all ridiculous lies. They have buried their heads in the sand as if that will do them some good. Just think about it for a minute. A fleet of 90 B-29 bombers rained incendiary bombs on the city throughout the night. What more is there to say? This war will soon end in surrender. I'll give you an example of what I mean.
>
> Look at that newly completed factory over there. I'm sure you have been watching it go up. I'm going to let you in on a secret that the public does not know. That factory was built to manufacture aircraft parts, but the factory floor remains bare, without even a single piece of machinery. They say the necessary machinery is being produced at some undisclosed location. But enemy bombers have already hit Osaka. In all likelihood, that factory will be destroyed before any machinery is installed.

Dormitory Master Kinoshita spoke in an increasingly grave tone to say things that continued to stun us—and this without any hesitation whatsoever. We simply could not believe our ears.

> As a Japanese, and particularly as a member of the leadership of this nation, I am fully aware that it is impermissible for me to stand before you and utter such unpatriotic thoughts. But what use is there in hewing to bluster and bravado when everyone, including us, is fully aware of the dire situation of this moment.
>
> There are two reasons for our defeat in this war. First is the issue of resources. Our nation is devoid of material resources, and we depend on foreign countries for all our supplies. A second underlying cause is the Japanese people's unconditional preference for foreign products. We have invited today's tragedy upon ourselves by looking askance at domestic products and blindly preferring the foreign. I have a good example to illustrate this truth. Seiko Company, Japan's top manufacturer of watches, has always produced cheap watches. It once decided to produce a high-class watch, which it priced at 100 yen and put on sale in department stores. No one bought the watch. No one even wanted to look at the watch. (At the time, Seiko watches were being sold at prices between 5 yen and 10 yen.) Out of desperation, Seiko put the name of a high-class Swiss watch on its product and raised the price to 200 yen. The product immediately became a best seller. The company had worked hard to manufacture an excellent product, but had to put someone else's name on it and sell it as a foreign product. The Japanese people blindly prefer foreign products! It is said that Seiko

stopped producing high-class watches after that and went back to making cheap ones.

I have another example. Machine tools made in Japan were of poor quality and expensive, while American machine tools were of high quality and cheaper. As a result, no one purchased the domestic product and only American products were bought. Naturally, the manufacture of machine tools in Japan came to a stop, and factories were closed. Due to this situation, domestic industries continued to decline, and the sale of imports continued to increase. Similarly, domestic coal is more expensive than American coal. Because of government export subsidies, American coal can be sold overseas at cheap prices. In recent years, Japan has gone to war in China and Southeast Asia to expand its territory and ensure access to resources. When Japan went to war with America, the flow of all the products that we were buying from that country came to a complete stop overnight. Supplies of all the equipment and the manufactured products that we had been importing disappeared. Machinery broke down and became obsolete, and we did not have the necessary parts and materials to service them. Consequently, efficiency suffered. Somehow, we were able to carry on until today, but we have now come to our limit. On the other hand, the need for materials continued to grow, and supply shortages became endemic. We then rushed to produce various types of machinery and munitions. But how could these be immediately useful?

Most of the mainland is in ashes, and time is needed to re-establish the balance between consumption and supplies. No matter how much we try to rush the process, it is already too late. This is the reality that Japan faces. We are completely defenseless and without options.

We are standing at a crossroads, and it is unlikely that we will be able to continue the war for the remainder of the year. It would be no exaggeration to say that the war will soon end. Just think about it. When your own house is on fire, where do you find the motivation or energy to go outside to wage war? How is it possible to replenish our supplies in a war that consumes such large amounts of resources? Domestic production cannot meet our needs, and there can be no path to victory for a country that has relied to such an extent on imports. In addition to physical resources, we have now exhausted our human resources as well. Therefore, Japan finds itself between a rock and a hard place. The national leadership probably intends to continue on this path as far as possible. Normally, this is not for me to say in a setting such as this, but what are they thinking? Probably you are asking yourselves why you had to be brought here to suffer hunger and undergo hardship. Given today's critical situation, what difference would it make even if everyone does his best at his job? This is a really deplorable situation.

Judging from past experience, the absence of planning is the true enemy in both war and business. Actions based on greed have a high probability of failure. Next to the love of the nation and love of the people, what I hope for future generations is a preference for domestic products. Domestic industries must be fostered, not only for the sake of domestic consumption, but also ultimately for expanding exports and thereby reinforcing the strength of the nation. This is my cherished hope for this country.

Know thy enemy and know thyself. Running about blindly can only result in tragedy. I have been made painfully aware of this truth.

Dormitory Master Kinoshita continued his talk:

> I have clearly overstepped my bounds in what I have said to you. But all that I wished to do was to tell the truth as the truth should be told. It is my hope that you will understand.
>
> I want you to know that it has pained me deeply that you have gone hungry during your stay in this training center. I am racked with guilt when I see your emaciated bodies. But given the food shortage and the lack of rations, there was nothing more that I could do. I hope you will find ample nourishment at your old jobs when your remaining time here comes to an end.

Having said all that he should not have said as a citizen of Japan speaking to a group of Koreans, Dormitory Master Kinoshita left the hall with a mournful expression.

After hearing these candid comments on the war situation, the conscripts broke up into small groups and spoke amongst themselves in whispered tones. For me, it was as if Dormitory Master Kinoshita's honesty had lifted a heavy burden off my chest. For ten years, I had felt a terrible weight pressing down on me. But now in a matter of minutes, the weight had been removed.

Perhaps Dormitory Master Kinoshita was an unusual person among the Japanese. Or perhaps he subscribed to an unusual ideology. In either case, even to our eyes, it was plain to see that there was something unusual about him. It may have been easier to imagine if the thoughts he shared with us were exchanged among friends in a private setting. After all, everyone was anxious about the war situation. But the talk had been given in the very public and formal setting of the Western Work Training Center by no less a person than the dormitory master. Moreover, the audience consisted of the selected representatives of Korean conscripts in Japan. It was in this setting that he had chosen to speak at length in highly unpatriotic terms, and to go as far as to provide concrete examples of the points he was making. This was truly a remarkable turn of events.

It seemed the Japanese people had grown tired of the long war. They were simply exhausted. And it seemed all that they were hoping for was an early end to the war, an end that would be delivered to them through defeat. I was convinced that this was the truth. I imagined that Dormitory Master Kinoshita would not have been so candid if the war were still being fought in foreign lands. But it was now the mainland that was being incinerated day by day. Moreover, the fire that had started in Tokyo was spreading fast to all cities large and small, to munitions factories and to naval ports. Within a short few months, they had all been reduced to rubble and ash. And now it was the turn of the nearby city of Osaka. How could he be blamed for refusing to console us with empty and meaningless words?

Tour of Nara

March 23: A few days had passed since the nightmarish bombing of Osaka, and March 23 turned out to be an unusually peaceful spring day. After breakfast, we found no training was scheduled today. So we stayed inside and idled away the time. This was a strange feeling. An order was given at 10:00 a.m. "Everyone assemble on the drill ground!" As always, we had five minutes to get ready and line up on the drill ground.

After a few minutes, Dormitory Master Kinoshita climbed atop the platform to address the conscripts:

> Twenty days have passed since you came to Nara and this training center. Your education program will end with just one more week of work, after which you will be returning to the factories that you have come from. To refresh your bodies and spirits, today we shall go on an excursion to see the famous and historical sites of Nara.

This came as a complete surprise to us. everyone cheered like a group of children at the mention of an "excursion." It was a delightful surprise for us. At least for today, we can leave the confines of the training center and breathe the air of freedom. We were each given a rice ball to carry for lunch.

Dormitory Master Kinoshita led the way as we marched through the main gate. Once outside, it was as though a group of prisoners had been let out of their iron-barred cells. The world around us seemed welcoming. Everyone was in high spirits and light-footed as we walked toward the city. We resembled primary school students being led by their teacher on an excursion to an amusement park. That is how happy we were.

Our first stop was the Todaiji Temple. Nara has many very large temples. Todaiji is on the eastern end, and to the west, there is Saidaiji Temple, and of course, Horyuji Temple.

There stands a relatively tall mountain to the east of the city. We picked up the pace as we approached the path that went up this mountain. A crystalline stream bends its way down the mountain. Climbing along the crest of a gorge, we came to a dense forest of ancient pine trees and strange rock formations that invited climbers to stop and marvel. This is what you would call "going deep into the mountains and the realm of the ascetic." The view was breathtaking. (I wrote this while calling to mind the temples of Korea.)

We continued to climb until we came to a point where we could look down and see the grounds of Todaiji Temple, which was surrounded by a dense grove of trees. Between the trees, we could see the Great Hall of the temple rising into the skies. As we approached, we saw two giant trees standing on either side. The trees looked to be hundreds or perhaps even thousands of years old. These were huge and rugged cedar trees, the like of which I had never seen before. The first things on the grounds of Todaiji that met our eyes were these huge, ancient trees. We entered the temple grounds and approached the entrance of the Great Hall. The immense size of this building was also overwhelming. The round, giant cedar pillars of the Great Hall would take several people to encircle. You would have to bend your neck all the way back to see the top of the structure. Sitting on the dais of the Great Hall was the statue of a smiling Buddha. It was truly awe-inspiring in both scale and majesty. The seated Buddha, we were told, was 16 meters tall. The holes of the ears, eyes, mouth and nose were large enough for an adult to fit into. This was indeed the Great Buddha of Nara. Everything on the grounds—stone lanterns, stone towers–was immense.

After seeing everything there was to see at Todaiji, we headed toward Kasuga Shrine. As we approached, there appeared before us a small airplane hidden away in the middle of a grove of trees. It was as if we had arrived on the frontline of the war. Perhaps it qualified as a small fighter plane, but it seemed it had been hidden below the trees to protect it from air raids. I believe it is this type of small plane that is used by the Kamikaze Special Attack Corps in their suicide missions—veritable human bombs heavily laden with explosives designed to sink enemy warships by ramming into them. Yes, the nation was resorting to attacking the enemy with the flesh of its youth.

We had often heard of the military song "Yokaren." Young men–really just immature youths–would receive some flying lessons at the training center at Kasumigaura before being inducted into the Kamikaze Special Attack Corps. With no time to enjoy the good gifts of youth, these young men would pledge their absolute allegiance to the Emperor, board their bomb-laden planes in search of enemy warships and dive into their targets to their death. As they boarded their planes for the last flight that would take them to the enemy, the young men were given a sip of sake as a parting gift delivered to them from the Emperor. When I saw that small plane tucked below the branches, the faces of servicemen in the final phases of the war, who would never be given the chance to mature and to bloom, flashed before my eyes. I was lost in thought as I walked. Suddenly, an unusual scene emerged before us. I had heard of the deer that roamed freely on the grounds of the Kasuga Shrine, but here they were, forming small flocks as they played lazily in the grassy field. The scene was so peaceful and beautiful that it could easily be mistaken for an enchanted land of one's dreams. How could this be a nation at war? How could this be related to the disastrous battle that was unfolding in this nation? Numbering several hundred strong, deer with magnificent antlers trotted in one direction and then another. They seemed to be enjoying the warmth of this spring day. Where other than at Kasuga Shrine could one hope to be treated to such a mysterious scene?

It was now time for lunch. We gazed at the playful deer as we ate the single rice ball that each of us had received. If this were not wartime, the day would have made for a wonderful excursion with plenty to eat and drink. As the saying goes, "Dumplings come before flowers." Because of the gnawing hunger that was always with us, there was nothing that could claim priority over filling our empty stomachs. We reveled in the sense of liberation as we ate. The souvenir shops near the shrine had little to offer other than things made of deer antlers. The horns of young deer are said to be a precious ingredient in Chinese medicines. With that in mind, even trinkets made of fallen antlers seemed valuable to us. Pushing each other aside, everyone became busy buying gifts. I too bought some gifts to take back home for colleagues.

The sun was low in the western skies when we finally arrived at Saidaiji Temple. Todaiji and Saidaiji are two temples of Nara that are well known throughout Japan. As the name implies, Saidaiji (Great Temple of the West) is a large temple located in western Nara.

The day's excursion had come to an end. What awaited us was more of the same terrible training. Just thinking about it was enough to ruin all of the day's enjoyment. The western skies burned a brilliant red when we re-entered the training center hidden in the bamboo forests. We were all dragging our tired legs, like cows being led to the slaughterhouse. Just one more week of training remained before we would be liberated from this prison-like environment. We looked forward to the end of the week.

March 25: After dinner, I was called to the next room and told to hurry. What I saw in the next room was a bag of sweet potatoes with people sitting around it. "What is this?" I asked.

The answer was, "During the excursion the other day, we spotted some sweet potatoes on a ridge of a paddy field. Today, we finally found some free time to return to get them." As colleagues sharing the same pleasures and same pains, they had called me to partake in the food. I was immensely thankful for their thoughtfulness. Just looking at the sweet potatoes made my mouth water, although some of them appeared to be rotten. Taking the one handed to me, I wiped it clean and sunk my teeth into it. It was as soft as if it had been steamed, but tasted bitter. My bad luck—this one was rotten. It was rotten to the point that it could not be eaten. It turned out that nearby farmers had thrown all of these sweet

potatoes away because they were rotten. Under the current conditions of severe food shortage, who would throw even a scrap of edible food away! Not knowing this, the men in the next room had gone and collected these rotten scraps. But could they be blamed? In the eyes of the starving, the potatoes all looked good and edible. Our hopes had been dashed, and we looked at each other with wry smiles.

A couple of days went by in our hated training program, and we were now that much closer to the end of our ordeal. March 30 was the promised day that we all waited for. The time would not pass fast enough for us.

We had now come to the last day in our month-long education at the Western Work Training Center. Tomorrow, I would be returning to the factory in Hiroshima where my co-workers were waiting. There was a faint sign of hope and relief in the gaunt faces that surrounded me. The thought of leaving the life of a prisoner at the training center and returning to the factory injected me with fresh energy. New life had been breathed into my exhausted body, and I felt that I had been saved.

Around noon, a message was relayed from the office. The message was for a certain Mr. Mochizuki who had come from Toyo Kogyo in Hiroshima. Instructor Mochizuki left with a quizzical look on his face but returned with a broad smile. Asked what had happened in the office, he laughed and showed me a slip of paper he had been given in the office. It was a telegram instructing us to come to a certain location in Osaka tomorrow after the training center's farewell ceremony. What could this be? Everyone had his own interpretation and prediction. One person guessed that something had happened at the company during the recent Osaka air raid. Another argued that we were going to be rewarded for completing the program at the training center. "Given all the hardships we endured in Nara, they are inviting us to several days of rest and sightseeing in Osaka." But this did not make any sense because the company had no way of knowing how much we had suffered in Nara. The order to go to Osaka was not an invitation to a few days of rest. In any case, I welcomed the opportunity to observe firsthand the destruction that the air raid had rained down on Osaka.

Tomorrow we would be in Osaka touring the city. Everyone looked happy.

March 31 was the final day of our stay at the training center that had turned out to be full of hardship and suffering. The spring day was even more tranquil than usual, which added to the tranquility of our hearts. In a few hours, we would finally be rid of this haunted bamboo forest. My body seemed to levitate just thinking of the impending liberation. At 10:00 a.m., an order was issued for all of us to assemble on the drill ground. Unlike all previous orders, we were told to take our belongings with us—a joyous order indeed. Cries of joy were heard in the room.

The ceremony marking the end of our training that was held on the drill ground was simple and short. If this had been the early years of the war, a ceremony like this would certainly have been a grand and solemn affair. But now that one battle after another was ending in defeat, and the mainland itself was being reduced to rubble, the ceremony was a mere formality marking the termination of our forced stay at this facility.

My unfortunate compatriots were talking to each other as they stood with their belongings. The emaciated and ragged group reminded me of the soldiers of a defeated army who had barely survived a pitched battle, and were now returning home. This was the picture of a pack of drowning rats that had been thrown into a pond. As shabby and miserable as we looked, there were signs of life and faint

smiles on our faces. We were still alive, and we still had hope.

The young men milling around on the drill ground would be going back to mines and munitions factories across Japan. We still had a long way to go before putting all the evil behind us. Would I ever be reunited with them after returning to our own homeland? Friends that had grown close over the past month pressed each other's hands as they said their farewells. Everyone hoped that this would not be the final parting. We went our separate ways, promising that we would one day meet again back home. Would we live to return to Nara? The quiet streets of Nara, the Great Buddha of Todaiji Temple, the handsome deer luxuriating in the grassy fields of Kasuga Shrine—all of these sights would soon be tales from the past.

Chapter 4

Working in Osaka

Train Ride to Osaka

The train ride from Nara to Osaka went through the city of Kyoto. Japan's wartime transportation was ridiculously time-consuming. First, we were made to wait for hours at Nara Station before finally boarding the train to Kyoto. It was already late in the afternoon when we arrived in Kyoto. We stepped outside the station and saw a large city that was completely different from Nara. The city center was quiet and clean, and the streets were laid out like a perfect chessboard, a feature not seen in other Japanese cities. Toward one side of the street facing the station, we saw a house that had burned down. It seemed this house was the casualty of a bombing that had occurred some time ago. An elderly man explained:

> This is the only house that has been damaged so far. But who knows when the B-29 bombers will appear to drop their incendiary bombs on us. In the past, I thought death came on the battlefield. But now, the mainland has become the battlefield. Who knows where death lies in wait.

He continued mournfully, "I lost all my sons in war. This is the end. This is the end time."

Dormitory Master Kinoshita had candidly shared his complaints and dissatisfaction with us at the training center. Now this old man was voicing the desperate hopelessness of the situation. "This is the end. This is the end time," he had muttered. These were people who had blindly worshipped the Emperor, bragged to the world of the prowess of the invincible Imperial Army and gone on an outrageous rampage. But now, we were hearing the Japanese openly admit defeat. Listening to their shocking admissions, I felt that the inevitable was closing in on the nation.

The old man's anxiety was understandable, but his anxiety did not in any way alleviate the worries that beset us Koreans. Now that Japanese people were dying all around us, was there any guarantee that we could avoid death?

There was no train leaving for Osaka that evening, and we had no choice but to spend the night in Kyoto. We went to an inn located in front of the station and were shown to our room by a maid. Immediately, we ordered dinner for ten people. The maid asked curiously, "Are you expecting more people to join you?"

We answered, "No one else, just this group of seven."

She replied, "We are not running a restaurant here. We cannot serve more meals than the number of guests. The rations we receive are restricted to the number of people whose names appear on the guest register."

That sounded logical enough. No exception could be made for inns. It seemed the maid had come to sympathize with us after observing us for a few moments. "I am so sorry that we cannot accommodate

your request," she apologized.

A little time went by and the maid returned with dinner. But what we saw in our bowls was far too little to save us from starvation. We ate what was put before us, but it hardly made a dent in our hunger. After dinner, we went out hoping to find something to eat.

Walking through the streets, we came upon a nighttime food stall that appeared to be selling noodles. I remembered that one night many years ago, I had gone into a food stall to have some grilled chicken on skewers, rice wine and noodles. The mere sight of the food stall made my mouth water.

Pushing away the shop curtain, we saw that the food stall was actually selling thin strips of gelidium jelly. But it did not matter to us whether it was noodles or jelly strips. We just needed to fill our empty stomachs. The jelly strips were served in delicious-looking heaps, and we ate our fill. A very pretty middle-aged woman operated the food stall. "Where are you from?" she asked.

I answered with a full and straightforward explanation of who we were.

"Thank you for your services," she sighed. Then she continued:

> I lost my husband in this war, but I have no way of dying. So this is my work now. The problem is I'm losing the will to go on. I gave my husband to the war, but it looks like everything will be for naught. Please take care of yourselves until the end so you can go back home and be reunited with your families. All will be finished if you die.

Tears glistened in her eyes as she continued to speak listlessly:

> The skies over Kyoto burned red during the recent bombing of Osaka. This food stall will soon see its end. Probably Kyoto is next on the list. It's so obvious what's going to happen.

It seemed that her despair had chased the life force out of her body. The sorrow of this street peddler spoke of the sorrow that had descended upon all the women of Japan. They had sent their husbands and sons out to distant and unknown battlefields, and were night and day drowning in fear and apprehension. But these feelings were not unique to the Japanese who had lost all sense of purpose with the approach of defeat. The nations and peoples that had been conquered and subdued by Japan equally shared these feelings. Was this not our common fate?

With our stomachs full of jelly, we returned to the inn and eventually fell asleep.

It was near dawn when I thought I heard someone moaning in the dark. It sounded like someone in our group was suffering from diarrhea and was going back and forth to the bathroom. Eating so much after a month of near starvation had triggered diarrhea. But he was not alone. Everyone was running to the bathroom, pushing others aside to find relief. Starvation is not good, but neither is eating too much.

April 1: Breakfast was served. It did not matter whether you had diarrhea or not—no one refused breakfast. As we left the inn, the female proprietor and the maid came out to see us off. "Take care

of yourselves," they chimed, as they waved good-bye. The female proprietor of the inn had also lost her husband in the war the year before. She explained that the inn had been a big success in the old days thanks to its convenient location, but that guests were now infrequent. It was very touching to think that she had so openly shared her story with us, who were guests for no more than one night. I concluded that her own sorrows had made her more sympathetic to our miserable situation.

We spent our time in the square in front of Kyoto Station as we waited to board the train for Osaka. In peacetime, the station and the streets would have been filled with people. But now, all was silent, with very few people to be seen. There was not a single young person among the passers-by, although I strained my eyes to see as far as I could. It was easy to guess that all the young people had been sent to war. The situation was the same in both cities and villages.

There we stood emaciated, and unshaven, but at least we were young. Not surprisingly, everyone stopped to stare at us as we walked the streets. Perhaps they thought we were the remnants of a defeated army who had been sent home. In any case, their stares made us uncomfortable.

We boarded the train for Osaka. What would normally have taken an hour now took two to three hours. As the train finally entered the city, all of us looked around curiously to confirm the extent of the damage done by the recent bombing. Strangely, we saw no sign of destruction even as we approached the center of the city. Japan's second largest city was vast indeed. But as the train neared the station, scenes of desolation and ruin suddenly appeared before us.

We got off at Osaka and walked through the station. The station building itself served as a bomb shelter. All the critical facilities were housed in semi-underground rooms and passages, and the reinforced concrete walls were designed to protect against aerial bombing.

Leaving the station, we stood in the streets and looked in all directions. The devastation was complete. We had heard that the city had been incinerated, but to see the devastation firsthand was a sobering experience. This vast city had come under aerial attack in the dark of night. Putting aside the obvious damage to property, what terrible toll had the bombs taken on human life? Given Osaka's large Korean population, there is little doubt that many Koreans were among the victims. There were probably many Koreans in Osaka who were in the same situation as we are. Having suffered so grievously, they must have met their death with eternal bitterness. I prayed for their souls.

The Japanese people must have been stunned by the accuracy with which the B-29 bombers had hit the central districts of Osaka.

We toured the city with an employee from the head office as our guide. The first stop on the train from Osaka that was heading for Kobe was Juso. We got off at Juso and walked for an hour before we arrived at Ikeda, where we were shown into a two-story building. Our guide finally introduced himself when we reached the second floor. His name was Obayashi, and he belonged to the company's weapons department. He said that he had come on orders of the managing director of the weapons department. He then proceeded to explain why we had been brought to Osaka, which did not make us happy at all:

> During the great Osaka air raid on the night of March 13, a ship transporting raw materials to our Osaka Factory sank near Taisho Bridge. For various reasons, the company needs to

> salvage the materials that went down with the ship. The original plan was to bring workers here from the Hiroshima Factory. But then we realized that the trainees at the training center in Nara would be returning on March 31. Hence, the decision was made to bring you to Osaka so that you could help in the salvaging project. Please understand the difficult situation that we are in and follow instructions.

We were wondering why we had been ordered to go to Osaka. It riled us to be told that we had been assigned to a salvaging project. The truth of the matter was that the company did not know how we had been treated over the past month, and that we had been reduced to skin and bones.

Looking at our emaciated bodies, Mr. Obayashi took pity on us and said, "We had no idea what was happening to you during the month and that you had been reduced to your present state. You were brought here only because we did not know."

He then unwrapped a care package from the company. Probably the gifts consisting of canned beef and fish, sweets and tobacco were intended for our consumption during the salvaging work. All of these were rare and precious items in wartime Japan. The tobacco was a brand of cigarette known as *Kinshi* ("Golden Bat"). Our mouths were watering at the sight of food. Mr. Obayashi handed each of us a can of beef and said, "Go ahead." The delicious taste of long-forgotten beef defied description. After finishing our can of beef, we felt energized and alive again. We would have wanted to eat another can of beef, but held back for the sake of appearances.

Mr. Obayashi was smiling as he watched us wolf down the food:

> The way you are eating makes the food look really good. Of course this is wartime, but what sense does it make to drive young people to starvation? Be that as it may, eat your fill and regain your health as soon as possible. This is my hope for you.

Next, we were handed cigarettes. There were about ten boxes, containing about 200 *Kinshi* cigarettes. My companions had not smoked for a month, and now they did not stop smoking until their nostrils turned yellow. The cigarettes too brought everyone back to life.

The physical relief that we had found sent memories racing through my mind. I closed my eyes and lay down, and was overtaken by a sense of liberation. Some day in the not too distant future, liberation and freedom would also come to the Korean people. We Koreans would definitely be liberated when the Japanese mainland is laid waste and the nation raises its hands in surrender. I told myself that this was neither imagination nor delusion. At that moment, I suddenly felt convinced that the day of liberation would finally come to us.

Night descended on April 1. We had eaten our fill, and did not have to worry about another day of that terrible and senseless training. We were free to do as we liked until we fell asleep late into the night.

The Salvage Project

April 2: It was a cloudless spring day. We were served breakfast facing a table on which a variety of foods had been placed. The amount was quite sufficient. Mr. Obayashi probably had gone out of his way to prepare this food for us.

Led by Mr. Obayashi, our group left the dormitory after breakfast and headed for the place where the ship had sunk. We walked from Ikeda, walked past Juso Station and went all the way to the Umeda subway station in Osaka. Wherever we looked, everything was in ashes. The only things standing were awkwardly twisted concrete frames.

At Umeda, we descended into an underground passage that led to the subway station. I wondered how deep were we descending. As I had never before been on a subway train, I was quite disoriented. Umeda Station was the starting point of the subway line we took. The train ran through Osaka's central districts of Shinsaibashi, Dotonbori and Namba before arriving at Taisho Bridge Station, where we got off. Mr. Obayashi explained to us that this subway line that ran between Umeda and Tennoji served as the main artery of Osaka. At Taisho Bridge, we climbed up to ground level and saw another scene of total devastation. Not far from the station, we could see the outline of an iron bridge, which we were told was Taisho Bridge. The ship in question had sunk somewhere downstream from the bridge. We were walking along a street that ran through the debris when I noticed that the marks left by the incendiary bombs marked a straight line. I wondered how many such bombs had rained down on the city that night. The terrifying destructive force of more than 90 B-29 bombers laden with incendiary bombs could be easily guessed from the vast expanse of the city that had been laid to waste.

America must be a country of nearly limitless material resources.

Bearing in mind America's wealth and power, it was laughable that we were on the way to salvaging a sunken ship to recover its cargo. I wondered how long it would take until whatever material we were able to salvage would be turned into weapons and be delivered to frontline soldiers.

Arriving at the bridge and walking along the bank downstream, we could see a wooden ship with part of its hull protruding from the water. "That's the ship," Mr. Obayashi said. He then called out in the direction of the ship. A man emerged from a small wooden craft and told us to get on. The craft took us to the middle of the river where a number of divers were waiting for us. We started to work as instructed by the divers. Our main tasks consisted of pumping air down to the divers and operating the block and tackle for pulling up the salvaged cargo. Because we had no previous experience with this kind of work, it took us a while to improve our teamwork. The cargo we were salvaging consisted of metal materials used in the manufacture of rifle parts and various factory supplies. At lunch, we ate the rice balls that we had brought, together with some canned fish and pickled radishes. The work was not that demanding, and we were eating a sufficiently filling meal. Sitting in the fresh breeze that blew in from the river, we felt we had been given a new lease on life.

During the break that followed lunch, we asked the divers about the Osaka air raid. They said mere words could not describe the experience. What was surprising was the large number of people who had died in the subway stations, which everyone thought would serve them well as a natural shelter. They explained the reason for the many deaths in the following way:

> The incendiary bombs were coming down like rain, and buildings were going up in flames everywhere. To escape the fires, people rushed into the subway stations, believing they were safe there. Almost all of the bombs dropped by the B-29 bombers were incendiary bombs. As a result, all structures that were above the ground burned to ashes, and the fires released a great deal of smoke and noxious gases. The bombing targeted tall structures standing along

the path of the subway line that runs from Umeda to Taisho Bridge, and this indiscriminate bombing continued for long hours. What happened was that the subway entrances and ventilation grills were full of smoke and noxious gas for many hours. Most of the people who had gone underground suffocated. That's why there were so many casualties. Everyone thought the subway stations were natural shelters where they would be safe from the devastation above ground, and no one even imagined that this would be the scene of many, many terrible deaths. If the bombing had not lasted so long, the subway system would have been the safest shelter. But you should think twice before going underground during a long air raid, especially if they are dropping incendiary bombs.

What they said must have been true, and their stories were chilling.

The day's work ended at around 6:00 p.m. It turned out that salvaging the cargo of a sunken ship was not easy. After a full day of work, the material that had been pulled out of the water did not amount to much. At this rate, it would take more than a couple of days to complete the task. Work efficiency would improve if we could coordinate more effectively with the divers. But our lack of diving experience made it difficult for us to assist the divers effectively. In any case, we needed to focus on remaining safe and carrying out the instructions given to us. All we needed to do was to follow the instructions.

We returned to our lodgings in Ikeda and had dinner. Some chose to go out after dinner, but I stayed home to write in my journal and let my imagination roam freely. Those who had gone out returned with some sake that they had managed to buy. It was a cloudy and unrefined home brew called *doburoku*, similar to Korean *makkori*. We opened a can of beef to accompany the alcohol. Mr. Obayashi was elated, saying he had not enjoyed unrefined sake for a long time. Up until that time, I neither drank nor smoked. But on this occasion, I had a couple of drinks with everyone egging me on. Yes, it did make me feel good. I asked my co-workers where they had been able to find such a precious stock of sake. I learned that a large number of Koreans were living in a certain section of Ikeda, and that most of them were from the Gyeongsang Provinces. My co-workers had traded their cigarettes for the alcohol. They explained that most of these Koreans were engaged in black marketing, and that anything could be obtained, including rice, meat and alcohol. (The term "black marketing" was a term widely used when Japan was officially known as the Empire of Japan.)

During the war, Osaka was home to a population of Koreans that was larger than anywhere else in Japan. Many of the Koreans in Osaka were said to be engaging in black marketing. One night, a few of my co-workers traded their cigarettes for white rice, which we cooked and ate together. As long as you had cigarettes, they could be traded to obtain almost anything, no matter how rare or valuable. That is to say, among all precious goods, cigarettes were the most precious. However, I do not know how valuable unrefined sake was in those days.

About a week after we had started working on the salvaging project, we found a dead body that belonged to an air raid victim. The body had become entangled in the sunken ship's ropes. As this was our first time to see a dead body, we were shocked and turned our faces away in fear. Being submerged in the river for so long, the body was terribly swollen and soggy.

The divers probably had come across many such bodies. They quickly untangled the rope and pushed the body back into the river saying, "Unlucky man. You're just another unclaimed body with nobody

to tend to your grave. Avenge yourself in the next world."
We realized this could, at any moment, become our own fate. The thought made us spit saliva. This was a ghastly scene that normally we would not see. We cannot allow ourselves to die. We have to survive and outlive this war. The Japanese divers had treated the death of their compatriot as if it were the death of a dog or a pig. How then would they treat the death of a Korean? They would not even bat an eye.

Osaka's Food Shortage

One day, we were given the day off due to rain, and decided to go into the city. We found a small restaurant on the banks of the Yodo River that flows through the city and went in to eat. The bowl that was placed before us did not contain rice, nor did it contain wheat. What the shop was serving as a substitute for rice was leftover soy pulp. This really had to be the worst substitute for rice. This was served with one slice of grilled fish and a few slices of pickled radish. The food shortage in Japan was serious enough, but the situation in Osaka after the air raid defied description.

The restaurant was serving soy pulp left over from the production of tofu. The severity of the food shortage could easily be imagined from this fare. As we chewed the dry pulp, we noticed a body floating down the river. How many had lost their lives on that fateful night? How did the sight of dead bodies in the river three weeks after the air raid affect the spirit of those who came upon these scenes? We earnestly hoped that this loathsome and hideous war would come to an end as soon as possible.

The food shortage affected everyone. Our dormitory in Ikeda was no exception. Although the fare was slightly better than the food at the training center, our meals on rainy days when we could not go to work was terrible. Food was the only thing that we thought about day and night. Naturally, our conversations quickly turned to the subject of food.

One night after dinner, we went to a far corner of the city looking for something to eat. As we walked, we found a sign hanging over a shop that advertised that it sold rice cakes. Any sight of food was a welcome sight for us. As we approached, we saw these delicious looking millet dumplings on display. What a rare sight! Our mouths were already watering. We went in and ordered some. The proprietor soon returned with a plate full of dumplings. We had not eaten anything sweet for such a long time. Each of us took a piece. The dumplings were dry and crumbled easily, and the taste was slightly bitter and difficult to describe. Maybe the taste of dumplings had changed, or maybe this is how Japanese dumplings always tasted. After taking a couple of pieces, we could not eat any more. At first, we thought our appetite for the dumplings would be limitless, but they turned out to be strangely filling. I began to wonder what they were made of, and noticed the others were similarly speculating on this same question with furrowed brows. Finally, we asked the proprietor. "I am so sorry," he responded. "This is made of rice bran." So, this was his secret. What we had been served was bran dumplings, not millet.

Many years ago, I had lived through a food shortage at home that had been brought on by a failed harvest. I remembered we used wheat bran to make dumplings, and wheat bran was ground down for the same purpose. But this was my first experience with rice bran. That is how serious the food shortage had become. Even in the worst of years back home, we had not been reduced to eating rice bran.

After we had feasted on the rice bran dumplings, all of us arrived home with stomachaches and then suffered violent diarrhea. Not having enough to eat is bad, but overeating comes with its own brand of retribution.

I had nothing to do the next day and decided to visit my wife's brother who was working in a munitions factory near Kobe. His name was Kwon Jin-dong. He had also been brought to Japan as a conscripted worker, and it seemed he too was suffering many hardships. I went to Osaka Station and took the Hanshin Express Railway line to Kobe. Getting off at Sannomiya Station, I began to walk toward the bus stop. Suddenly, I felt a pain in my stomach that was so excruciating that I could not take another step. Helpless with pain, I squatted down on the side of the street. I felt the onset of another bout of violent diarrhea. Some medicine could have been my salvation, but there was no pharmacy in sight.

As I continued to squat, the pain gradually diminished. Deciding it would be best to go back, I returned to Sannomiya Station. After a very long wait, I got on the express train bound for Osaka. The few passenger trains that were running were without exception crowded, with people packed tightly like sardines. The ride between Kobe and Osaka took an hour, but the pain returned after about 30 minutes. This time, I could hardly contain the pressure on my bowels. The train was too crowded for me to squat down. Worse still, the train did not have a toilet. How embarrassed I would be if the worse came to worst. I became covered in cold sweat as I twisted my body in pain. Anyone who has experienced a similarly desperate situation would know what I went through. As the saying goes, "The rope has become undone, the calf has escaped, and the summer afternoon thunderstorm is approaching." I could not contain myself anymore, but the next stop was still far off. Nowhere to sit, no way to find relief, I thought I would die. I jumped off the train as soon as it arrived at Osaka Station and ran for the toilet. I got there in time and avoided public embarrassment. Leaving the toilet, I felt light in both body and spirit. Never in my life will I forget the twenty minutes of extreme discomfort that I suffered between Kobe and Osaka. This too was part of the sad reality of war and the hunger that had driven me to eat those rice bran dumplings.

The salvaging work was soon over, and I missed the opportunity to see my wife's brother.

Return to the Factory in Hiroshima

April 10: It was a very pleasant spring day. Having completed our assignment in Osaka, we took the train for Shimonoseki to return to the factory in Hiroshima. Liberated from the tension that had accompanied the salvaging work, I suddenly felt exhausted, and my whole body seemed to melt away. Sinking deeply into the soft train seat and closing my eyes, various scenes from the past, as well as what was forthcoming, appeared and disappeared in my mind.

The train we took was an express train bound for Shimonoseki. From Shimonoseki, there was direct ferry service to Busan. All I had to do was to stay on this train to the final station and take the ferry from there, and I would be back in Busan by tomorrow evening. How satisfying that trip would have been!

Scenes from my homeland appeared before my eyes. In my mind's eye, I saw my wife and children anxiously awaiting my return. But what use was it to imagine something that was impossible to accomplish?

More than 40 days had passed since our departure from the No. 2 Dormitory in Hiroshima. I remembered the face of Kazue Okada, and wondered what she would say to see me so emaciated and wasted. Perhaps she had forgotten all about me during my 40 days of absence. This thought bothered me greatly, and I began to regret that I had not been more forward with her when I had the chance.

Suppose Miss Okada had moved on and now harbored special feelings for someone else. What could I do about it? After all, I had a wife who was waiting for me back home and worrying day and night for my safety. These thoughts went back and forth in my mind as the train made its clickety-clackety sounds. Before I knew it, I fell fast asleep, and it was already past noon when I awoke. The others were already awake. For lunch, we ate the rice balls that we had brought with us from our lodgings in Ikeda.

The passing scenery had not changed. The beautiful mountains and rivers, towns large and small, and villages and isolated hamlets remained safe and untouched. But all this could change in a single day, and these scenic towns and villages could suddenly be turned to ash. I shivered to think that this was indeed their inevitable and inescapable fate. What were the leaders of the Japanese nation doing? The day when that city or that factory outside the train window would be bombed out of existence was fast approaching. Are the leaders going to stand idly by, without even attempting to avert this tragic outcome? Was there no alternative to helplessly awaiting the day of destruction?

Japan had launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor early one Sunday morning, when people were still sound asleep. Where was Japan's boldness now? Japan had won one battle after another in all directions of the compass. Where was Japan's invincible power and recklessness now? Having lost all momentum and exhausted all their energies, the nation's leaders appeared to be utterly pathetic in their powerlessness, and I resented them.

Why do men engage in warfare? Why do they kill, in turn to be killed? Why do they launch wars when they know all too well the end result of savagery? Are wars fought for survival, or is war simply the law of the jungle where the weak become the victims of the strong? Everything that has been built with great care and at great cost is crushed, destroyed and set ablaze. War brings cruel death to both friend and foe. But who was it that started this war? Needless to say, it was Japan and the Japanese. Innocent people are made to suffer the most horrifying deaths when large cities and small towns are reduced to ash in an instant. But the Japanese had invited all of this upon themselves. They were reaping the lethal fruits of a war that they had started. They were responsible and were now tasting the bitter taste of retribution. As the saying goes, "When whales battle, shrimps split their shells." Is it not we Koreans who are the truly unfortunate victims of this war, made to lay down our lives in the crossfire between Japan and America?

Before I realized, the train had passed through the city of Kure and was nearing our own Mukainada Station. When I got off the train, it felt as though I had returned home. Exiting the station, I looked out in all directions. I had been absent for just a little over forty days, but for some reason I was overcome with emotion. Our co-workers who had just finished their day's work came to greet us. No one failed to express surprise when seeing how emaciated and weakened we had become. In particular, the dormitory master and other office staff were astonished to see our weakened state. But no one was more stunned and distressed than Miss Okada, whose eyes were glistening with tears. She took my hand to console me. "Why have you become so weak? I really can't believe my eyes. All the time you were away, I was looking forward to seeing you again." She then pulled her hand away,

as if she had suddenly realized what she was doing. She had probably unconsciously taken my hand and had candidly revealed the feelings that had dwelt inside her.

The more than 300 residents of the No. 2 Dormitory all idolized, Miss Okada and looked at this member of the office staff as a beautiful flower in full bloom. Most of these 300 men had dreamed of at least once plucking this flower to make it their own. This precious and beautiful being had brushed aside the 299 other men to approach me, who was no better than a tree or a stone. I felt deeply honored by her attention.

Four months had passed since arriving in Hiroshima. How could I forget my wife and children, even for a moment, when I knew how alone they were and how they worried for my health and safety in this alien and distant land?

I came to a firm decision in my heart. I would concentrate on safely completing the remaining eight months of my stay in Japan and returning home to my waiting wife with a clear conscience, unclouded by guilt.

After dinner, we gathered around to tell stories of our experiences in Nara, and I presented the gifts that I had bought at the gift shop in Kasuga Shrine to the platoon and squad leaders. The gifts made them very happy.

Chapter 5

Back in Hiroshima

Special Leave

April 11: Today is the first day of work back at the factory, which means operating the same machine that I had been assigned to before. Life at the Western Work Training Center was full of hardships, and I wonder how that training and education is going to help me. Others may have envied us, but all that it amounted to was a month of starvation and useless hardship.

Before I left for the factory, Miss Okada came to convey an order from Dormitory Master Noguchi. "Don't go to the factory today. Stay in the dormitory until further notice." I asked her what it was about, but all that she could say was, "I don't know the details." Around 10:00 a.m., I was told to come to the office. The other five were already there.

Dormitory Master Noguchi spoke:

> The director of the Weapons Department wants to meet those who were sent to the Western Work Training Center. You are ordered to present yourselves at the Weapons Department office.

Were we going to be given some special instructions? I was suddenly reminded of Mr. Obayashi of the Weapons Department. Perhaps he had submitted a report about us to the director.

Led by Dormitory Master Noguchi, we went to meet the director of the Weapons Department. On the way, Instructor Mochizuki joined our group. A female secretary greeted us when we arrived at the director's office. "He is waiting for you," she said as she led us in. The director was named Saito, an imposing and likeable man in his early fifties. He shook our hands one by one and consoled us:

> I am truly sorry for the hardships you suffered. I have heard the gist of what happened from Mr. Obayashi, but I really had no idea that you had been reduced to such a weakened state. I am very sorry for what happened and apologize to you.

He was particularly apologetic to Instructor Mochizuki. "Mr. Mochizuki," he said holding his hand, "you were made to suffer so much. Why didn't you immediately let me know how you were being treated?"

Prodded by Director Saito, Instructor Mochizuki gave a detailed account of what had transpired during our one month at the Nara training center. As he listened, Director Saito let out a long sigh and finally said, "Even if we are at war, what sense is there in starving you while putting you through such grueling training? It is wrong to reduce young men to this state." He was clearly upset by what he had heard.

"The purpose of training is to improve work performance. But was this training no more than a month of starvation and deprivation?" Tears were forming in Director Saito's eyes as he grew increasingly

agitated.

"If we had known about this state of affairs, we would have arranged for others to do the salvage work in Osaka." His expressions of sympathy were sincere, and before I knew it tears were running down my face. Instructor Mochizuki spoke up in response:

> Director Saito, allow me to recount a funny story. It was the night of March 18, when Osaka was bombed. I was so hungry that Chiyama and I volunteered for night watch duty. The reason was that during the day, I had seen that radishes were being dried behind the warehouse. Our plan was to steal some radishes to eat. When we went to the warehouse in the dead of night, we saw that a janitor was there to guard the radishes. My plan was a failure. We didn't get to eat anything and had to stand on duty throughout the night. We watched the skies over Osaka as the city burned, but we were so exhausted by the morning that we nearly collapsed. I later learned that Chiyama had rummaged through the garbage dump and eaten whatever he could find.

Director Saito let out another sigh. "All right, I understand how terrible it must have been that you were forced to go that far."

He then gave this order to Dormitory Master Noguchi:

> These men shall not be sent back to work in the factory until they have regained their health. You are instructed to pay special consideration to their nutritional needs to speed their recovery.

He then repeated his order.

We thanked Director Saito and left his office. As we left the offices of the Weapons Department, Mr. Obayashi came running toward us. Less than a day had passed since we had said our goodbyes at Mukainada Station on the previous evening, but there was something deeply emotional about being reunited with him. We told him:

> We just met the Director of the Weapons Department and he showered us with words of sympathy. If you had not told him about our condition, we would not have received this special treatment that goes well beyond what we deserve. Mr. Obayashi, we want to once again express our gratitude for your kind consideration.

On the way back to the dormitory, I stopped by at Factory No. 10. Everyone was working diligently. When they saw me, everyone came running to greet me. They were surprised to see how weak and emaciated I had become. "What kind of training did you receive? How could you change so much in just one month?" they asked. Among all the female workers, Miss Murakami and Miss Kihara in particular seemed to be interacting with me as one of their own. Everyone's heartfelt words and attitude made me exceedingly happy. I returned to the dormitory promising them that I would come to see them again tomorrow.

The dormitory was very quiet. Everyone was at work, with the exception of several sick people, our group of six and the office staff. I first went to the office to report that I was back, before returning to

my room.

A kaleidoscope of thoughts and images raced through my mind as I lay down to rest in the large room. That awful nightmare was now behind me. Just as Director Saito had said, all I had to do now was to eat well and rest until I regain my health.

While still drowsy, I heard a knock on the door. “Who is it? Come in.” It was Miss Okada.

“Excuse me,” she said as she entered.

She laughed as she sat down to say, “I was bored and came to amuse myself.” Now she smiled warmly as she continued. “Sorry to disturb your sleep. But are you going to spend this beautiful day sleeping in your room?” Her words were light and happy.

I told her all about my time in Nara and the bombing of Osaka in great detail. “Is that what happened to you,” she sighed. Then, I proceeded to tell her about the generosity of the director of the Weapons Department.

She said, “What a thoughtful person he is. And how wonderful this is for you.” She continued in the same sympathetic voice. “I will do everything I can do for you, and pray that you will be healthy and strong soon.”

She suddenly seemed to remember something:

> While you were away in Nara, someone came to see you from Korea. It was on March 13 or 14. His name was Fukumoto, and he was terribly disappointed that he was unable to meet you. I told him you were at the Western Work Training Center in Nara. Did he come to see you there? How wonderful that someone would come all the way to see you during these very difficult times.

I told her that I had indeed met him in Nara and gave her all the details. She replied:

> Is that what happened? And you had only ten minutes even though he had travelled such a long distance? This is really too much even for a training center. Someone travels all the way from Korea in wartime, and you are given only ten minutes to speak with him? Judging from this story, I can imagine the conditions at the training center.

She continued with her story:

> Toward the end of March, Dormitory Master Noguchi received a telephone call from the head office. I could hear that the company was ordering your group to join the salvage work in Osaka immediately after leaving the Nara training center at the end of the month. After the phone call, I asked Dormitory Master Noguchi, “Why are they being called to Osaka?” The answer was, “The director of the Weapons Department has requested them to be assigned to salvage work in Osaka,” and that “Their return to Hiroshima will be postponed for a number of days.” I felt a lump in my throat when I heard those words. I was counting the days and waiting for March 31, but now I would have to wait even longer with no idea how long the

delay would be.

I turned to her and said, “Miss Okada, let’s go outside and get some fresh air.” We passed by the cafeteria and walked to the beach. Several others were walking on the beaches. Seeing the two of us, they teased us saying, “Mr. Chiyama, the two of you make a nice couple. We wish you all the happiness in the world.”

It was now low tide, and the sandy tideland was exposed. The two of us walked out on the sand and enjoyed our time together picking clams, sea cucumbers and oysters.

In Hiroshima Bay, the difference in sea level between high and low tides is considerable. At low tide, Fuchizaki appears to be just a short distance away. On the other hand, at high tide, the beautiful fishing village at the base of Hijiyama—the low hill that protrudes out of the bay—looks like a perfectly painted picture.

At lunchtime, our group of six, now back from Nara, found that a special meal had been prepared for us. Responding to the special order issued by the director of the Weapons Department, they had gone all the way to make special preparations for us. Sure enough, there was a little bit of soybeans mixed in with the rice, but the serving of rice was more than the usual amount. The stew of bamboo shoots and meat that accompanied the rice was also quite plentiful. It was as if we were slowly coming back to life. With Miss Okada standing by to help at every turn, I felt happy enough to forget my status as a conscripted worker.

The women working in the kitchen belonged to the Women’s Voluntary Corps. One of them was a very pretty woman named Miss Doi. She too was especially kind to me. At mealtimes, she would fill my bowl with more rice than the others, to the degree that it was immediately obvious that I was receiving preferential treatment. She would also give me more than my share of meat. I felt bad for those around me, but I was thankful for the special care.

One day, the cafeteria had received a ration of candy, which was very unusual for that stage of the war. Each of us received one piece. The candy consisted of red sugar, and was placed in the side-dish portion of our aluminum lunch boxes. The next day, Miss Doi handed me something wrapped in a piece of paper. She did it furtively, as if she was delivering something precious. I chuckled and asked, “Miss Doi, what is this?”

She responded, “It’s something very rare and precious. I got it for you. I asked the people at the top for one extra piece just for you.” It was her special gift for me. It was just a single piece of candy, but I felt immensely grateful. After all, she had had to put in a special request with her supervisors to get this extra piece.

More than two-thirds of the factory workers were women. What’s more, they were young women, fresh as newly blooming flowers. Nevertheless, some young people at Toyo Kogyo Company didn’t even have a single close friend of the opposite sex. The affairs of the world seldom move forward as we desire.

Living an idle life turned out to be not as easy as imagined. For more than a week, I ate well and did nothing in particular. The tedium was becoming too much to bear. By now I had recovered some of

my strength, but my cheeks remained gaunt. I figured that I would sooner or later return to normal.

Our ten days of special leave came to an end.

April 20: This was my first day back at work in the factory. More than 50 days had passed since I had last worked the machines, and nothing seemed to go right. Once again, Miss Murakami instructed me in detail, just as she had done the first time. On the first day, I tried to shape a rifle bolt using a milling machine, but failed. From the second day, I was assigned to a drilling machine, which was supposed to be easier. But here again, I failed. Most of the parts that I made in a full day of work were rejects. The others were all performing like skilled workers. I too would have been as skilled as them if my work in the factory had not been interrupted. What did I accomplish during my 50 days at the Western Work Training Center? The parts that were being fed to me from previous processing stages were of good quality, but they would mostly be ruined by the time I was finished with them. I felt sorry and guilty. There was no choice but to continue trying until I got it right. No one here was pouring his heart into the production of weapons. All we had to do was to get to the end of the day and repeat the same process until we were demobilized. We were just waiting for that promised day.

There is a saying that rings true. "Spiritless prayers followed by spirited festival feasts." The men working in the factory certainly did not apply themselves to the production of weapons. Instead, their hearts turned to the young women who surrounded them. All the talk was of love and infatuation, to the degree that it would be difficult to express in words the charged atmosphere that prevailed inside the factory. In one of the workshops—I don't remember which—a press operator named Paek accidentally severed his thumb because he was lost in conversation with one of the female workers. This friend of mine named Paek became the first of many to sacrifice a thumb for love.

Air Raids

By the end of April, air raids had become more frequent. Sirens warning of approaching aircraft sounded several times a day, and work efficiency suffered because we would have to go to our shelters every time the alerts were sounded.

The fierceness of the war was exacting a heavy price. Many factories had been burned down or destroyed in the aerial bombings that continued across the country, and there were numerous casualties among factory workers. Under these deteriorating conditions, the production of munitions was decreasing at a rapid pace.

Working during the day had become so problematic that the decision was made to work at night. But it was imperative to maintain a total blackout throughout the cavernous factories and workshops to avoid being targeted. On the other hand, precision milling work on rifle parts required bright lights. These lights would have to be turned off with every wave of enemy bombers that approached the night skies over us. This had a terrible effect on output. The morning would dawn after a number of nighttime air-raid warnings. How could we work to produce anything of real value under circumstances like this? Ironically though, we looked forward to the next air-raid warning whenever we were feeling drowsy during work. This is because the blackouts allowed us time to lie down on a couch and get some sleep.

Most human affairs allow for some postponement and delays, but war is an exception. Allowances

cannot be made for human sentiments or physical conditions during wartime. The situation was deteriorating rapidly. Even to our eyes, it was clear that things were already beyond any hope of recovery. We could have worked ourselves to death without making any difference.

Mid-May: Osaka had been turned into ashes in mid-March. Now in mid-May, word came that Okayama had also been razed to the ground just a few days ago. On our way back to Hiroshima from Osaka, I had imagined that the same fate that I had witnessed in Osaka awaited Okayama. In a little more than a month, my dark prediction had come true. Under these conditions, it was only a matter of time before enemy bombers would rain their destruction on Hiroshima.

By mid-May, air-raid sirens were wailing at shorter and shorter intervals, night and day. It seemed the day of reckoning was now near at hand. The production of weapons was also hitting serious snags.

Behind Mukainada Station stood a low mountain that housed a very large and deep air-raid shelter. We had no idea when it had been constructed or by whom. More than just a simple air-raid shelter, it was ready to function as a massive underground factory. Important pieces of machinery had previously been transferred to this site. By the time we began to dismantle and transfer critical machinery from Factory No. 10, the underground site was already full of equipment. We assumed that the whole factory was going underground in preparation for the worst.

Moving important machinery to the underground factory seemed like a total waste of manpower to me, unless the idea was to save the machinery for use after being defeated in the war, which didn't make any sense. Work was carried out in shifts during both night and day, which meant that the dormitory was noisy at all hours. By now, we knew exactly who lived where, and where we could obtain what we wanted. People would return from their forays into town with all sorts of food and drinks to be cooked and consumed in parties for everyone. Things that could be rarely found in wartime were commonplace inside the dormitory. The Korean conscripts had figured out where to go to find what they wanted. Another thing that was commonplace wherever people gathered in large numbers was gambling. Groups of people huddled in one corner or another to play *yuppek* and *hwatu* card games. One frequently heard from a colleague that he had gambled away the equivalent of one to two months' pay.

It was strange that anyone would waste his hard-earned money on drinking, womanizing and gambling. We had left our parents, wives and children in our homeland, and had been brought here to work. It seemed to me that those who wasted the fruits of their labor instead of sending money back home were rotten to the core.

There is no denying that all of us lived under a dark cloud of despair. We had resigned ourselves to our fate and an attitude of "what will be, will be." We were living our lives one day at a time, and all that we had in mind was to survive the moment and to live another day.

June: With the start of June, Hiroshima was now getting closer to being bombed. Until now, air-raid sirens sounded several times a day, but not a single bomb or incendiary had been dropped on us. One day, a B-29 came flying on its regular course with a long, white contrail in its wake. As always, the sirens sounded their warning, and we hurried into our shelters. As we huddled in the shelter, we heard an eerily high-pitched screaming sound made by a falling bomb. Then came an ear-splitting explosion of incredible violence. Covering our eyes and ears, we lay flat on the floor, believing that

it was our turn to die today. We did as we had been taught in air-raid drills. "The force of a blast can puncture your eardrums and send your eyeballs flying out of their sockets," they had told us. But that was the last explosion we heard. We guessed that only one bomb had been dropped on us. Hiroshima had been a place where enemy bombers flew over on their way to other places, and I had come to think that perhaps we would be spared. But the destruction was finally upon us, and I now assumed that I was going to experience firsthand all the stories I had heard about bombings.

We exited the shelter when everything became quiet. There was no question in our mind that a bomb had fallen somewhere in Hiroshima City, but we could not determine where. After some time, the radio began to broadcast its emergency news:

> Hiroshima has become a target of bombers. Citizens must avoid rash and blind action, and should help in air defense at their assigned workplaces. In today's raid, a bomb was dropped on a power substation located outside the city. Fortunately, the substation was undamaged, while nearby homes suffered minor damage.

It was good to know that there were no casualties. But the question remained whether the radio broadcast could be believed. Perhaps the bomb had been timed to purposely miss its mark. While no one could provide a definitive answer to those questions, there was no doubt that a bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, which had been quiet up to now. People who had reacted lazily to sirens and lingered around to see what would happen underwent a sudden change after this day. A single bomb had awakened a powerful sense of fear and caution in the citizens of Hiroshima. As soon as a warning was sounded, people left everything behind and rushed to seek shelter. It was absolutely essential that Koreans such as us who had been brought here as conscripts survive the bombings.

At around this time, a shocking disaster had occurred at the naval port of Kure located not far from Hiroshima. American aircraft carriers in the Pacific were now coming closer to the coast of Japan. One day, Grumman fighter planes taking off from these aircraft carriers had attacked Kure in broad daylight, and wreaked unbelievable destruction on small and large warships moored in the harbor. In spite of the fierce response from the Japanese anti-aircraft artillery, the fighter planes had destroyed most of the ships in a blink of an eye. Eyewitnesses recounted this terrible scene of utter destruction and said that the port had proven to be completely defenseless. What were we to make of the fact that Japan's premier naval port had to sit idly by while being attacked and destroyed in broad daylight? How did the Japanese people react to this horrifying scene?

A few days after the attack on the naval port, the coastline around us turned pitch black at low tide from the heavy oil that had leaked from the sunken warships. Judging from the black oil that soon covered all of Hiroshima bay, we could easily see that many ships had been destroyed. [Translator's note: This probably refers to the May 5 attack on the Kure Naval Yards and related port facilities.]

Late June: This was just another summer day under perfectly clear skies. We were working in the factory when air-raid sirens began to wail. Every siren brings with it a wave of intense fear. Megaphones positioned throughout the plant suddenly came alive. "All workers must immediately take refuge in the deep mountainside shelter." This was an order never before heard and unmistakably conveyed a special urgency. There was something unusual in the voice that barked the orders. I felt that the time had finally come. Something terrible was about to happen. We all ran at top speed toward the mountain in front of us. There was a foreboding that bombs would come straight

down on our heads, and no one wanted to fall behind in the race to safety. The shelter was already full of people when we made our way in. Everyone was huddled closely together in fear and foreboding.

The tension was palpable as we all sensed that something horrific was going to happen that day. A few minutes later, we began to hear the roar of bombers coming in from the south. Would the enemy bombers come by the dozens or by the hundreds? No one knew. But it soon became terribly noisy inside the shelter. It was as if we were sinking into the bowels of the earth. The ground shook with the impact of every bomb. Mixed in with the low sound of exploding bombs was the sharp crackling noise of anti-aircraft artillery.

Judging from the distance of the sound, the target today did not seem to be Hiroshima. But with every blast, we were showered with a spray of sand and soil breaking free from the ceiling of the shelter. We began to fear that the ceiling would collapse at any moment. Those who were crouching lowered their heads in dread. The bombs seemed to be hitting other targets, but that was scant comfort when the ceiling was crumbling. Company officers looked up with concern. A few began to quietly leave the shelter, saying it was better to die in the open air than to be buried alive in the shelter.

As I was standing at the entrance of the shelter, I also exited the shelter and climbed up the mountain. For protection, I broke off some tree branches and covered myself. Lying sideways on the sloping mountain, I turned my eyes in the direction of Kure. The scene unfolding in the distance was absolutely horrific. The skies over Kure were black in parts and pure white in others. Scores of B-29 bombers were circling around the center of the city, taking turns in mounting wave after wave of bombing runs. I felt faint at the sight of death and destruction.

From my position on the mountain, it seemed as if I were watching a war movie. The circles formed by the huge formation of bombers stretched all the way to the skies directly above us, and they were taking turns to swoop in from these positions to rain their destruction on the city of Kure. Yet more formations of B-29s were circling at higher altitudes, an incredible number flying around at a leisurely pace as they waited their turn.

Kure is a critically important naval port. The enemy plan must be to start by destroying military facilities. Some blasts are strong enough to shake the earth and air around me. This must be the work of special high explosives. An uninterrupted stream of shells from anti-aircraft artillery is going up into the sky from positions encircling the naval port. But they serve no purpose. The shells burst midair, in a puff of white smoke, but come nowhere near the enemy bombers. No matter what the anti-aircraft guns send up into the sky, the enemy bombers continue to make lazy circles around their target and to drop their bombs unchallenged.

What is happening on the ground in Kure? The hellish scene is probably too much to bear. Even as we look on from our safe distance, innocent people are meeting their terrible deaths in Kure. Air attacks and explosions—we are observing with our own eyes exactly what is happening now. Here we are on this tall mountain, watching a cruel and inhumane bombing that is unmatched in recent history. At the same time, my mind jumps to another frequent and recurring thought. If Japan were to lose this war a day sooner, we would be able to return home a day sooner.

The B-29 bombers continued to circle their target at a leisurely pace, as if they were in their own backyard. But not a single Japanese fighter plane took to the skies to oppose them. Could this mean

that there are no fighter planes left inside Japan? Is there no way left to protect Japan's most important naval base from indiscriminate bombing? How were the Japanese people reacting to the unmistakable sight of enemy bombers carrying out their raid in broad daylight? Perhaps they had already come to terms with the hopelessness of the situation and resigned themselves to inevitable death.

It seemed the huge formation of enemy B-29 bombers continued to rain their destruction on Kure for hours. The military facilities were completely destroyed, and the bombers flew off into the southern skies without suffering a single casualty. There was no way to describe the situation other than to say that it was a scene of hellish fury and agony.

When I finally returned to the dormitory, everyone was talking about the bombing of Kure.

After dinner, Miss Okada came to see me. She was still shaking from the fearful sight of the noontime bombing, and said:

> I thought an air raid would be limited. Several enemy bombers, or perhaps a dozen or two, would show up in the sky and drop a couple of bombs before flying off. But the bombing of Kure today went on for so long, and I just don't have the words for describing the fearsome sight. They came in such large numbers that they filled the sky and stayed for hours. They did as they wished and flew home without suffering any losses. Are we still alive? I am still shaking with fear. By the way, Mr. Chiyama, where were you during the bombing? What would you do if that terrible scene had occurred here in Hiroshima? Probably neither of us would be alive now. I can't imagine how anyone can survive the sea of fire unleashed by several hundred B-29 bombers. I shudder just to think what that sea of fire can do. Is there anything that we can do? It feels as if bombs will be coming down on us at any moment now. Whatever happens, I must survive this war and you must survive. But especially you, Mr. Chiyama, you must survive this war.

Whatever happens, and there is no choice but to leave everything in the hands of fate. There is a saying, "A path opens up in a crisis." Even if the sky were to come tumbling down, what other way is there but to accept one's fate?

The next morning, the newspapers reported on the bombing of Kure. As usual, announcements issued by the Imperial Headquarters were the source of these reports:

> A fleet of 180 enemy planes (B-29 bombers) bombed the city of Kure. Scores of these bombers were brought down or damaged by fierce anti-aircraft fire. Damage on our side was minor. Due to heavy ground fire, the enemy bombers were forced to retreat south.

[Translator's note: On June 22, between 9:30 and 10:40 a.m., a formation of 180 B-29 bombers approaching the naval base at Kure from the southern reaches of Hiroshima Bay attacked military targets in the area. The bombers later traversed Shikoku and continued to fly in a southerly direction. (Announcement of the Kure Naval District Headquarters, as reported in the June 23, 1945 issue of the *Chugoku Shimbun* newspaper.)]

The daytime bombing of Kure was visible to all. Everyone, both near and far, had an unobstructed view of what was happening. It was as if the horrific scenes were being played out on a cinema screen.

After what we had all witnessed with our own eyes, I wondered whether anyone could be foolish enough to believe the announcements of the Imperial Headquarters. At the same time, I pitied the leaders of the nation who had no choice but to fabricate these fictitious announcements, knowing full well that they were lying.

The bombing of Osaka, Japan's second largest city, was carried out by 90 bombers. Kure was less than one-tenth the size of Osaka. Yet the enemy had sent 180 bombers, or twice the number that had been deployed in the bombing of Osaka.

The bombers returned to Kure one night in early July. This time, their incendiary bombs reduced the center of the city to ash. There were people in the factory that commuted every day from Kure, and these workers wept loudly and stamped their feet in anguish and frustration yelling, "My family is dead! Flames devoured the house and everything else that we owned." So discomforting was their moaning that it was too much to stand near them.

The first to come were the Grumman fighters, which disabled all the ships in the naval port. Next came the B-29 bombers, which completely destroyed the port facilities and the center of the city. The naval facilities, both on land and at sea, had been obliterated.

Kure, just a little more than 20 kilometers from Hiroshima, had been reduced to rubble. Who could say that Hiroshima was not going to be next? Hiroshima was a perfect target, with the Mitsubishi Shipyard at Ujina, large and small military facilities scattered around Hiroshima Bay, and so many munitions factories everywhere. Our claim to life was tenuous at best, and death seemed to lie in wait everywhere.

In early **July**, the forced relocation of houses and other structures began in Hiroshima. Every second building was razed as a measure against the total incineration of the city. A tremendous amount of effort was put into a totally wasted effort. What good is it to destroy a house to prevent it from burning down? In the cities that have been bombed, would it be possible to find a single building that remained standing? That would be in the realm of possibility if an air raid consisted of no more than one or two bombs or a couple of incendiary devices. But the reality of enemy air raids was far from that. B-29 bombers in the dozens and hundreds continue to drop their bombs for hours on end. People know that what they are doing won't make a difference, but they carry on. This is their last gasp. At Toyo Kogyo, workers were sent to Hiroshima during the day to help in tearing down houses. The principal mission of factory workers became moving the machinery and equipment to the underground shelter. The work was carried out in day and night shifts. I was assigned to the day shift and continued to work in the factory. The workforce was divided into three shifts. The day shift alternated between one week at the factory and one week in the city relocating houses, while the night shift was primarily engaged in moving the machinery to safety.

Miss Okada

One day after work, Kim Jae-moon, a colleague from my hometown, came to my room. He had been one year my junior at the Okdong Public Elementary School in Deoksan, Jincheon County. We had both been sent to Toyo Kogyo but did not see each other that much because we had been assigned to different workplaces. I greeted him saying, "How are you doing Kim? It's strange we work in the same place but almost never see each other. I guess the time of final reckoning has come. All we can

do now is to take care of ourselves the best we can."

Kim replied, "Bombs will be raining down on us very soon. And that is why I am here, to tell you something." He seemed to be having difficulty broaching the subject, but finally spoke with a sheepish smile. "I came to volunteer my services to you as a go-between."

I was taken aback and said, "You must be joking!" He laughed and said, "Why are you pretending?" He continued to laugh, but his demeanor had changed. "All right, then I will be frank with you. My mission is to act as the go-between for you and Miss Okada."

Now I was laughing as I retorted, "But I am a married man with children! Miss Okada probably said something to you. In any case, I will listen to what you have to say."

Kim Jae-moon took on a completely serious demeanor as he began to speak:

> Miss Okada knows that you and I are close and share the same hometown. And that is why she came to me begging me to tell you about her. And this is what she said to me. "I have fallen in love with him, but feel that this is unrequited love. Whenever I have time, I have visited his room to convey my feelings without putting them in words. But so far, he has been unresponsive. Seven months have passed since you arrived here, which means that I have been struggling with this one-sided love for more than half a year. Yes, I know that he has a wife and children. But he is a young man living in a foreign land, and this is wartime, when there is no guarantee we will be alive an hour from now. Yes, I know there are people back home who love him and anxiously await his return. A letter arrived for him from a woman named Ryoko Miyamoto. It was full of sweet words saying that her days have become unbearably long. I fell in love as I was delivering this letter to him. Fate can be so mischievous. Here I was delivering a love letter even as I was struggling to rob this woman of her love. I have been filled with such anxiety in recent days that I can't bear it any longer. Especially after the bombing of Kure, I have been feeling really desperate. I just can't sit still anymore. Mr. Kim, I know this is too much to ask, but please help me. He probably knows how I feel about him, but can't come close to me because he worries about what others may think."

Kim Jae-moon continued to make his case:

> Do you know the situation in this dormitory? Do you know how many men have their eyes on Miss Okada? Of course, I perfectly understand your situation as a married man. But remember the saying, "Even saints abide by the customs of the land." Moreover, we are in the middle of a war, and this is Japan! What reason is there for you to hesitate? You saw what happened to Kure. That vicious and merciless bombing will soon be re-enacted here. Destruction will rain down on us. It is only a matter of time, and there is no guarantee that we will survive that hell. Why are you so shy? You are a man who has been brought here against your will. What great crime is there in straying off the straight path? Here is a chance to make someone happy before dying. Make her happy and enjoy your remaining days on earth as you await your fate."

The arguments that Kim Jae-moon made did contain some sense. After all, we were already walking among the dead. No one could refute the fact that we were living and breathing this reality.

Kim Jae-moon was happy that he had succeeded in his mission and left the room saying, “I will go and tell Miss Okada right away.” He was smiling when he returned a few minutes later with a message from Miss Okada. “She will meet you at the corner of the fence facing the beach behind the cafeteria at nine o’clock tonight.” Having delivered the message, Kim Jae-moon continued laughing. “Go and enjoy yourself with her.”

Now that I had made up my mind, I could not wait and went to the office to see her. “Are there any letters for me,” I asked her.

She replied, “No letters for you today.” She looked up shyly, then quickly averted her eyes and looked down.

It was now 9:00 p.m. Hoping not to be seen, I hurried out of the dormitory and headed for the corner of the fence facing the beach. Miss Okada was standing there, looking out onto the distant sea. Pretending not to hear my footsteps, she kept her eyes fixed on the horizon. I approached her from behind and placed my hands on her shoulders. “Miss Okada,” I spoke her name in a low voice.

She was living in company housing located across the street from the dormitory. There was no one in the house, so I asked where her family was. “I live alone,” she replied. It was difficult to believe that she had the whole house to herself. “This took far too long to happen, but please come in.” She showed me to the living room and suggested that I take a bath. For me, this was a bother, but I consented. As I was taking my bath, she came in to wash my back. I guess this was the Japanese custom. After the bath, she told me to wear the cotton kimono that she had laid out for me. Returning to the living room, I saw that she had already set the table for dinner. There was a bowl of white rice that had long since become a rarity. She had also prepared stewed pumpkin and several other side dishes. She sat formally by my side and served me as I ate, repeating, “Please have your fill.” It was already quite late at night when she began, “You must be tired, but there is something that I want you to know.”

This was her story:

> You and everyone else in the dormitory must think that I am a single woman living alone and working in the office. But it’s not that I never married. The truth is that I am a widow. My husband was an employee of this company, and we moved into this house right after we were married. Our sweet life together lasted less than two months. His draft notice arrived, and he was sent off to war. I suppose this is the unavoidable fate of Japanese women during the war, but he died in battle a little over a month after he was sent to the frontlines. I was enveloped by total darkness, and I was only 21 years old. I had become a war widow with very little time to enjoy the pleasures of marriage. I became a widow at an age when most people are not even married. I didn’t know what to do. But the company offered to hire me to work in the office of the No. 2 Dormitory. So, I took my husband’s place as an employee of this company.

It was as though Miss Okada was pleading with me by telling this sad and tragic story. But it was a story that she shared with so many other Japanese women who had become war widows. How many women still in their prime years were weeping over their tragic fate of being widowed in this cruel war? But their husbands had fought and died for their own nation and people, and they had been widowed for this same cause. Where did that put us Koreans? For whom were we enduring these

terrible hardships, and what was to become of the wives that we had left back home? They were technically not widows, but they too had been separated from their husbands, and were weeping with fear and consternation for the safety of their spouses. The children also had been separated from their fathers. Miss Okada told her story in a imploring way, and for some reason, I found something revolting in what she said. On the other hand, her tale lessened the burden of responsibility that had previously given me pause.

Summer nights are short. She woke me up at five as the sun was rising, and sent me away saying, "Hurry back to the dormitory!" Returning to my dormitory room, I found the platoon leaders fast asleep in the large room. One of them woke up from the sound of the closing door. This was Yoo Kwan-hoon, leader of the third platoon, and he started to ask me questions: "Where were you? Did you just get back?"

I gave some vague answers and went under the covers. He didn't pry any further. There was some time left before we had to get up and I immediately fell asleep.

July 11, 1945: Seven months and three days had passed since I had left my home country. When I went down for breakfast, she was already there.

There had been no enemy bombers sighted over the past few days. All that flew over us were reconnaissance planes that came a few times in the mornings and again in the afternoons. By recent comparison, these were peaceful days. Conventional wisdom had it that a major air raid was usually preceded by a period of quiet. This calm was a bad omen.

July 20: One day, around July 20, I was assigned to the nightshift. After breakfast, everyone left for the factory or went to the city to help in tearing down houses and other structures. Coming back from my nightshift, I was resting in the dormitory.

It was around 10:00 a.m. that air raid sirens began to sound. Assuming that this was yet another reconnaissance flight, people began to make their way to the shelters in a perfunctory manner. I was sitting in the air raid shelter when suddenly, we heard an enormous blast from beyond the hill that stood behind the dormitory. Almost simultaneously, a bunch of fighter planes flew over the dormitory with a deafening noise. I was sure my time had come. Any moment now bombs would come raining down on our heads.

The high-pitched whistle of falling bombs seemed to be targeting naval vessels moored in the waters beyond the hill that separated us from the sea. The pattern of attack was the same as the one in the bombing of Kure. Grumman fighter planes were attacking their targets like a swarm of ferocious bees.

If I am going to die anyway, why not watch the terrible spectacle unfolding before me? With that thought in mind, I climbed the hill behind me, looking for a spot that was suitably covered by trees and branches. But many more had preceded me to the hill, and they had hidden themselves behind trees as they watched the attack. Several dozen Grumman fighter planes continued to fly around Hiroshima Bay for two or three hours, patiently searching every corner of the bay for large and small naval vessels to attack. It was as if the operation was being conducted over unoccupied land. With absolutely no opposition or hindrance in sight, the enemy fighters attacked and bombed as they

pleased. We were able to observe the spectacle only because we were not on their target list for that day.

Only a small hill separated our dormitory from the area that was under attack. A single errant bomb would have completely destroyed the dormitory. The agonizing scenes of destruction that were playing out before our eyes seemed to confirm my belief that the end of the war was near. All large and small vessels in Hiroshima Bay were wiped out in the attack. These included ships that were moored or being repaired in far-off corners of the bay. [Translator's note: Between July 24 and 28, camouflaged vessels moored between Kure Bay and Hiroshima Bay and in the waters surrounding Etajima were attacked during several air raids.]

This latest attack was focused solely on maritime targets, which meant that nothing remained to be seen of the extensive damage caused by the attack. At the end, everything was eerily quiet and serene. Here and there, the bow of a large ship jutted out of the water, but absolutely nothing remained of the smaller vessels. The loss of life must have been considerable.

It was like the calm after the storm. Once the enemy planes had flown home, a strange stillness ruled over the scene. Was this going to be the last attack on Hiroshima? That could not be, as demonstrated by what the naval port at Kure had undergone. It was clear to everyone that Hiroshima would soon be the victim of another major air attack.

Back in the dormitory at the end of the workday, all the talk was about the bombing. Somehow, we had escaped unharmed until now, but the moment that would separate the living from the dead was fast approaching.

Late at night, I went to see Miss Okada in her home. After the horrible events of the day, she was a completely changed person from the previous day.

She was glad to see me. "You and I have to survive this war no matter what happens. Yes, we have to stay alive no matter what." It seemed tears were forming in her eyes as she whispered these words.

A few peaceful days followed. Reconnaissance planes regularly flew over us, but there was no bombing. At the factory, the process of moving the machinery and equipment to safe shelters was winding down. Inside the city, the relocation of houses continued on alternate days.

It wasn't as if we were looking forward to the next attack, but there was definitely a sense that if a bombing were inevitable, it would be better to get it out of the way sooner.

July 28: Late during the night of July 28, the radio began an emergency broadcast, reporting that an unknown number of enemy airplanes (B-29 bombers) were unleashing a vicious aerial attack on the city of Tokuyama. So, that city was now being destroyed. Located halfway between Hiroshima and Shimonoseki, Tokuyama was home to many munitions factories. I was sure that Hiroshima was next on the list of bombing targets, and was surprised to hear that the air raids had skipped over Hiroshima and gone further west. Does this mean that Hiroshima is going to be spared? But the fighting is continuing. Not a single ant, let alone humans, stands a chance of surviving the enemy's onslaught unless Japan surrenders. All Japanese cities may soon be reduced to ashes, but I hope Hiroshima will remain the single exception to the destruction. This is a hope and prayer that I share with all the

Koreans who live in this city. No doubt the Japanese who have survived so far felt the same.

As we approached the end of July, the bombings had moved further west and were now destroying targets in Kyushu. The city of Moji was devastated, and Shimonoseki was reduced to ashes. The ports of Moji and Shimonoseki became watery graveyards for their ships. The end of the war was now definitely within sight. Let the fires burn faster, and let the day of fire and destruction come sooner, for that will shorten the time to our liberation!

Assistant Dormitory Master

July 31: I was resting in my room in the afternoon of July 31 when Miss Okada came to see me. She was smiling broadly as I had never seen before. "What is it," I asked, and she replied, "I think this is going to be very good for both of us. This is a very serious matter for you and me. Please listen to what I have to say, and please accept it." She was silent for a few moments before proceeding:

> An order has been issued from above to choose one person from each company to serve as assistants to the dormitory master. Those chosen will be transferred to work in the office. For the first company, you have been chosen as the top candidate. Please keep that in mind and accept the appointment when Dormitory Master Noguchi offers you the job. I beg you to keep this in mind and to accept the appointment.

She was very persistent, and continued:

> If for any reason you refuse, Dormitory Master Noguchi has a second candidate in mind. The second candidate is the leader of the second platoon, Mr. Kobayashi, a native of Chungmuro. Ever since you arrived here, Mr. Kobayashi has been interested in me, and has tried to approach me on numerous occasions. He is very unhappy to see how the relationship between you and me has developed. If he were to be assigned to office duty, that will make my life very difficult and uncomfortable. So, please accept the assignment.

She grew increasingly persistent as she made her case.

The problem was that I didn't want to work in the office. Being company leader was headache enough. An assistant dormitory master would be much worse, as it would involve managing people brought to Japan from all parts of Korea. The best and easiest job was that of a rank-and-file worker. It seemed the job of an assistant dormitory master consisted of helping the Japanese dormitory managers. It was a transparent ploy. They simply wanted to transfer the tough and dirty work to their Korean underlings. The dormitory housed more than 300 Korean workers. Throughout our stay, my compatriots had filed many complaints and demands pertaining to all imaginable matters—clothing, food, housing and everything else. I supposed the intent of the appointment was to have Koreans on their side to consult with on solving the thorniest of these problems. There would be nothing to worry about if such problems could be solved smoothly and amicably. But suppose an amicable solution was impossible. The Korean assistants would be exposed to criticism from all sides, and would be called incompetent and irresponsible.

The same evening, Miss Okada came to tell me that I was wanted in the office.

I stood in front of Dormitory Master Noguchi. We were working alternate shifts, so members of the other company were not back at this hour. Dormitory Master Noguchi addressed me with these words:

> The decision has been made to select one person each from each of the companies. The appointees will be charged with consulting with the office staff. From the first company, you have been appointed to perform this task. Your term of duty begins on the first of the coming month, in August.

He had issued an order leaving no room for discussion.

I was given no opportunity to refuse the appointment or even to state my case. Miss Okada was watching me with a satisfied smile.

The dormitory master continued:

> I have lived with this group for more than seven months. During this time, there have been many misunderstandings due to differences in language, customs and lifestyles. Based on what I had seen and felt, I submitted this proposal to management some time ago, and they have finally agreed to implement it. This should have been done much sooner. Be that as it may, try your best to do a good job.

This exchange gave me a chance to speak directly with Dormitory Master Noguchi, an opportunity that I had not had for quite a while. After the official part of our conversation ended, we began to talk about the current situation. Without any hesitation, he shared with me his extremely pessimistic outlook for the war:

> You have seen with your own eyes that the end of the war is near. Most of the mainland has been reduced to rubble, and how can anyone match the power of the Allied Forces with our homeland in this state?
>
> The horrible air raids are continuing without interruption, and all that we can do is to fiddle our thumbs. Our material resources were exhausted long ago, and now our human resources have been exhausted. It all comes down to the fact that our leaders made terrible miscalculations from the very start.

Miss Okada stood nearby with downcast eyes and an expression of anguish. There was nothing that I could say to him in response. Finally, the dormitory master said laughing, “You Koreans must take care of yourselves and try your best to outlive this crisis. So, Chiyama, you will be working with us in this office from the first of the month. Let’s do our best to enjoy our work.”

Miss Okada now approached me. “Mr. Chiyama, I am so happy for you. From tomorrow, we will be working next to each other in the office.” She was smiling sweetly.

The dormitory master saw her expression and said with a jovial laugh, “Oh, I see that Miss Okada likes Chiyama.” Miss Okada instantly turned red and replied, “What are you saying, sir!”

I figured it was all for the best. I had been given an easy job, and with any luck, I would go home alive. The greatest relief was that I no longer had to join those shifts that were sent into the city to tear down old houses. I had been spared of that treacherous and risky work, and I had been excused from having to help in the evacuation of the city that was scheduled to begin on August 6.

After I returned to my room, Miss Okada came calling. She was barely able to contain her glee and was very happy that all had gone according to her wishes:

> Beginning tomorrow, we will be spending the whole day together. You can't imagine how relieved I am. Air raids and bombs will no longer frighten me, as you will always be next to me in either life or death.

Stillness has a strange way of adding to one's sense of anxiety and foreboding. There is no way to predict when the next bomb will come falling on us. The result is a constant state of tension.

Nightshifts during the summer months can be tough. Because lights are dimmed to avoid aerial detection, it is distressingly dark inside the factory. But this will be my last factory shift. "I will start work in the office tomorrow and I don't think I will be able to come back here," I tell my co-workers, to which the female factory workers say they will miss me.

Miss Murakami, my instructor, bids me a special farewell. "Mr. Chiyama, you have to promise to take me with you when your tour of duty is over and you return home. I want to see all the sights in Keijo (Seoul) in Korea."

Working in the Office

August 1, 1945: Under cloudless skies, this was yet another hot summer day.

After breakfast, my colleagues picked up their lunch boxes and headed for the factory or to the city to help relocate houses and other structures. Watching them go to work suddenly made me feel lonely.

The office where I will be working is across the hallway from my dormitory room, and there is plenty of time before the workday starts in the office. To fill the time, I lay on the floor and stared at the ceiling while letting my mind roam freely. Soon, Miss Okada came to the door to say that it was time to go to work. Stepping into the office, I saw that no one else was there yet. I had been a frequent visitor to the office, but the feeling today was completely different. Miss Okada's desk was at the center of the room, and mine was to the side and next to the hallway. I was told the desks facing mine were for the second company's Kanemura and the third company's Miyata. (See the map in Chapter 2.) Everyone arrived before starting time. Although we all lived in the same dormitory, belonging to different companies and working in different parts of the factory meant that we seldom spent time together. I greeted my Korean colleagues and felt strangely nostalgic. It was as if I had been reunited with old friends in a distant and foreign land. I sat at my desk–the first time I had faced a desk in a very long time. To be exact, it had been eight months. All sorts of unexpected emotions welled up in me. Would I be able to safely complete my term of duty? Would I be lucky enough to return to my old desk at the Fukumoto Concrete Plant in Seoul?

The time was now eight o'clock. All staff members gathered in the office. But the total number of

staff was only five: three dormitory managers, Miss Okada and a janitor. With the addition of the three newly appointed assistant dormitory masters, the office staff now amounted to eight persons. Dormitory Master Noguchi gave the following instructions to the three new appointees:

> The three of you are charged with a heavy responsibility. Your role in the office is to give advice and to promote harmony so that your 300 compatriots in the No. 2 Dormitory will be able to lead a more comfortable life.
>
> We want to hear them say that food, board, clothing and everything else have improved. Such improvements must be achieved. The responsibility of the office is not so much to strive for harmony, but to devise plans for improving the life of residents and to work for their execution. Your duty is to make clear what is good and what is not, and to strive to achieve what is good.

In other words, an extremely important responsibility had been assigned to the three of us. First and foremost was the issue of food. It was difficult to determine whether the staple food that we were fed three times a day consisted of rice or beans. The food could be accurately described as consisting of beans with stray grains of rice stuck to them. If you were to pour some water into the bowl, the grains of rice would immediately disappear, with only the beans remaining. Going to prison is commonly referred to as "going on a diet of beans." That would mean that we were being fed the food of prison inmates. This was the problem that had to be corrected first. When we submitted a proposal for improving the quality of the food in the dormitory, the answer came back quickly. "This has already been proposed to management and we have been waiting for a favorable response. We will bring the subject up again and make a positive effort to improve the situation."

Looking back on the experiences of the last seven months, all the dormitory managers had the same thing to say:

> The No. 2 Dormitory has been housing more than 300 Korean conscripted workers who speak a different language and have very different customs and habits. You could never imagine how difficult it has been. After much discussion, the solution we came up with was the appointment of Korean dormitory assistants. The proposal was submitted a long time ago, but for various reasons no decision was made until recently. Things will go forward more smoothly now.

It was easy to sympathize with the dormitory managers once I heard their stories. During the training period, the Korean conscripts were as meek as sheep. Nabbed and brought to Japan, they were totally obedient. But they changed dramatically when they started to work in the factory. Suddenly they were self-centered and stubborn. But what could you expect! People from various strata of society and various professions were forcibly brought to Japan and ordered to do the work they were given. How could you expect them to perform their work with enthusiasm? All they wanted was to enjoy themselves and to eat their fill. There was no way to fire them for insubordination. In any case, the greatest problem was food. At every meal, any number of Korean conscripts would be raising a ruckus. Given the food shortage, it was understood that a demand for more or better rice simply could not be met. But perhaps it would be possible to improve the side dishes and adjust the menu to Korean tastes and habits. Anyway, all we could do was to perform our duties to the best of our abilities. The first day of work in the office ended without anything for us to do.

With all the workers returning from their day at the factory, the dormitory suddenly became crowded and noisy. After a little while, all the platoon and squad leaders gathered around us. “What are the responsibilities of the assistant dormitory masters? What are you going to do for us?”

I repeated what I had heard from Dormitory Master Noguchi, to which they all implored us, “Please do everything you can do to improve our conditions.” Everyone felt these appointments should have been made much earlier, but were happy that a change had finally been made.

Next, they explained a number of ideas and proposals they had put together and urged, “You have to do your best to convey our wishes to management and get them to act on them.” The proposals did not stop with matters related to the dormitory, and included issues related to the situation at the factory.

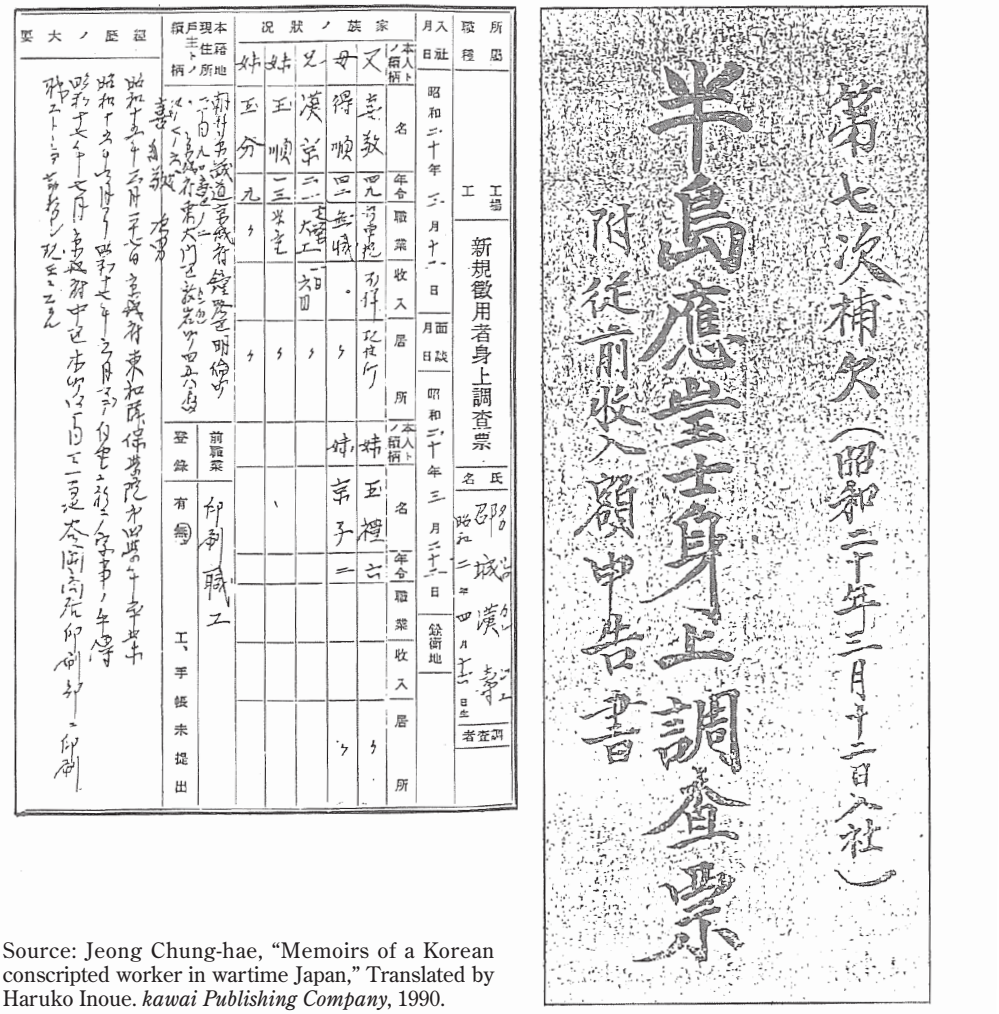
It was easy to see that most of the proposals would be impossible to implement. Putting aside the question of whether they were feasible, we promised we would take their proposals to management. It was immediately clear that the job of assistant dormitory master was not going to be easy.

No job is easy, and with people brought here from all corners of Korea, it was unmistakably true that the dormitory was caught in a maelstrom of noisy complaints. Some of the residents came to us with legitimate concerns, but others had something different on their mind. Maybe they were jealous of us for landing the job of assistant to the dormitory master. But they came to us with nonsensical demands and ridiculous claims that were simply designed to cause trouble for us.

August 2: I went to the office on time, but there was nothing to do. Our title was Assistant to the Dormitory Master, but our principal function was to discuss any issue that came up among the three of us and to produce a memo for submission to the dormitory master. Other than that, we passed the time reading the newspaper, eating our three meals a day and walking on the beach to watch the sunset. Our day’s work was done once the sun disappeared below the horizon. The three of us were simply idling our time away. It was a terribly boring existence. Just eating three meals a day and watching the time go by was itself a form of drudgery of the highest order. How much longer would we be here? If the original promise were to be kept, we would be going back home in four or five months. In some ways, it was enjoyable working in the factory. By comparison, I was now leading the life of a bird trapped in a cage. My new environment was unbearably stifling. I missed life in the factory where the work was not particularly demanding, and I could pass the time chatting with the young female workers.

The few days that I spent in the office were terribly boring. Sitting next to Miss Okada was of course pleasant and calming, but the strong sense of longing and desire began to cool gradually.

Calm and tranquil days continued. But could this be the calm before the storm and a prelude to new bombings? Uneasy premonitions were gnawing at me.



第七次補欠（昭和二十年三月十二日入社）

半島應召士身上調査票

附従前收入額申告書

Source: Jeong Chung-hae, "Memoirs of a Korean conscripted worker in wartime Japan," Translated by Haruko Inoue. *kawai Publishing Company*, 1990.

Record of Korean Conscript Workers

Personnel Files of "Conscripted Workers" Discovered after 40 Years

The above headline article reports on a document entitled "Personnel Files of Korean Conscripted Workers: Seventh Draft of Substitute Workers joining the company on March 12, 1945. (Subtitle: Income Report)," which was found in the possession of a resident of Funabashi City, Chiba Prefecture. In publishing this document, the newspaper said the document was a rare historical record. The document was drawn up when Toyo Kogyo Company was hiring conscripted workers from Korea, and consists of the personnel files on 58 Korean conscripted workers. The files contain information on workers' family status, legal domicile, occupation, personal history, and monthly income at the time of hiring. The article states that all of the 58 individuals were from Keijo (Seoul) and surrounding areas, and that their ages ranged between 18 and 40.

Chapter 6

The Atomic Bomb and August 15

The Bomb Is Dropped

August 6, 1945: It is yet another summer day with bright blue skies. The August sun shines bright from early in the morning. After breakfast, as always, everyone leaves to go to the factory or to work in the city. [Translator's note: On this day, about 200 Toyo Kogyo workers were sent to clear buildings in the Tsurumi-cho and Showa-cho districts of Hiroshima City.] I was scheduled to work in the city on this day, but had been re-assigned to office work beginning on August 1. I had it easy at my new assignment. I probably owed all of this to Miss Okada. When I go to work in the morning, she is already there and greets me with a smile.

No one imagined that this day, August 6, would live forever in history.

As always, I was sitting at my desk and reading the morning paper. Miss Okada who sits next to me asks, "Mr. Chiyama, did you find any interesting articles in the paper today?" Office work was terribly boring because there was nothing in particular to do. My colleagues are already toiling under the blistering summer sun. Either in the factory or in the city, by now they are drenched in sweat. And here I am reading the paper. I feel guilty when I remember the hardships of my colleagues.

The old janitor approaches with a broom to clean under my desk. I push my chair back and stand to make room for him. Standing, I look beyond the fence outside. I can clearly see the mountains that rise behind Fuchizaki. The summit of Hijiyama is especially beautiful with its deep green cover.

It was around 8:10 a.m. As I stood gazing at the summit of Hijiyama, I saw a bright flash of light. It was not lightning, but as bright as a flare parachuting through a pitch-black night sky. The moment I saw the flash, everything before my eyes turned black. My face felt hot, and all that I could hear was a violent ripping sound. I lose consciousness and fall on the floor. I can't tell how much time has elapsed, but I awake with someone shaking me. I get up and see that it is Miss Okada.

Chaos ensued at the office. All the windows have been blown out, and nothing was left standing upright. Shards of glass covered the floor, and all the chairs and desks had been toppled. There were no words to describe the destruction. Miss Okada tugged at me and took my hand into hers as she pulled me away toward the air-raid shelter in the back. No one inside the office had sustained any serious injuries, but it looks like everyone had been thrown to the ground by the power of the blast. It seemed the injuries were less serious because all the windows had been opened in the summer heat. Once inside the shelter, everything sounded quiet, except a low rumbling noise that seemed to be coming from enemy airplanes that were continuing their attack on the city.

After a while, I went outside and turned in the direction of the rumbling noise. A black cloud loomed over the city of Hiroshima in the shape of an inverted umbrella, and was billowing rapidly into the sky. This black cloud was the source of that rumbling noise that continued unabated. I turned toward the shelter and yelled, "Come out and see this." Everyone came walking out of the shelter. There were about twenty of us, including the kitchen staff. Stunned by the haunting sight and sound, all of us

huddled in the office.

Nothing that we had seen or heard in past air raids could explain what we now saw. What kind of explosion was this? What type of bomb was it, and where had it been dropped? How could it have had such an effect on us, even though it had not been dropped directly on us? The eaves on the second floor of the dormitory were bent out of shape, and were ready to fall any minute. Part of the second-floor hallway had collapsed, and was hanging in mid-air. Windows and doors had been blasted away and were nowhere to be seen. What we later learned was that the ominous rumbling noise that came from inside the mushroom cloud was the sound of thunder.

Inside the dormitory was total pandemonium. Some of the workers who were resting in the dormitory after their nightshift had been injured. One worker who was having a late breakfast in his room was thrown into the air. He broke a leg and fractured his head coming down. Another was walking to the bathroom and was hit in the head by a flying door. The dormitory mother was also injured by a flying door. A few of the women working in the kitchen were injured by flying doors and shards of glass. Things were chaotic, but fortunately, the people working in the office were not hurt.

The injured, crying out in agony, heaped the harshest criticism on the dormitory master: “Both night and day, we were ordered to take shelter even when there was no air raid. But the one time when we were bombed, there was no siren and here we are injured. How could you let this happen?”

The dormitory master’s desk in the office was next to a window that opened to the hallway. When he saw the flash, he got up from his desk and was immediately blown through the window by the force of the blast. As a result, he had injured his arm.

What kind of bomb had been dropped, and where? Nobody could answer these questions. All we could do was speculate.

The dormitory had sustained heavy damage, even though it was shielded by the slopes of Hijiyama. We wondered how the open and unprotected spaces of the city had fared. Strangely enough, air-raid sirens had not gone off this morning. Or had we just missed hearing their warning? Some speculated that the B-29 was flying too high to be detected. One person claimed that special high explosives had scored direct hits on gas tanks throughout the city, setting off a huge series of explosions. He said this explained the incredible force of the blast. Many theories were floated that morning, but none of them were good enough to solve the mystery. No matter how big the bomb was and how effective its explosives, how could a single bomb do so much damage at so great a distance? We shuddered with fear.

About an hour after the blast, we were made to witness the most horrifying scenes. Our colleagues who had been working in the city that morning began to return to the dormitory in groups of one and two. They were being ferried over from Fuchizaki on small boats, and as they approached, we could tell they belonged to the No. 2 Dormitory, but there was absolutely no way to determine who was who. Their faces and all other exposed parts of their bodies were seriously burned and swollen, to the extent that we could not identify anyone. Any hair that had strayed out from under their hats was shriveled and burned, and their clothes were in tatters. We asked each one, “Who are you? Give me your name!” Only then could we know who stood before us. It was an absolute nightmare. The injured were immediately taken for treatment to a makeshift first-aid station at a nearby primary school (Aosaki

Primary School). But this was a medical facility in name only, with little if any medical supplies. Serious burns were dabbed with some type of oil and hurriedly bandaged.

As I was taking an injured person to the first-aid station, I came across a woman struggling to walk with her umbrella held over her head. I asked her where she came from.

Ashen and frail, she barely managed to speak. “I was at Hiroshima Station with my sister waiting for the train when I saw a flash of light. I was thrown several dozen meters into the air, and have been walking with no idea where I am.”

She said her sister was missing. “I think this umbrella saved my life. I don’t know what happened to my sister. What was that bomb they dropped on us today, and where did it fall? How could a single bomb do this to us?”

Staring at the injured person that I was helping, she asked, “Where did he suffer these terrible wounds?” I noticed the hair on one side of her head had turned a different color. It seemed her umbrella had indeed saved her life. I thought to myself that this woman would never part with this umbrella for the rest of her life.

As I entered the school grounds, I saw that the first-aid station was already full of people who had been carried in on trucks from all over the city. In every direction you looked, you could see people in the most atrocious state imaginable. It was impossible to determine the sex of people who were covered with burns and sagging skin. A mother holding her cold, dead child to her chest was screaming, “Water! Please, some water!” A fat woman was bleeding from the arm, which looked like it had simply burst open. Someone applied medicine to her arm and bandaged it, but she sat listless, totally oblivious to what was happening around her. A child was calling to her mother, “Please give me water!” All the faces were burned beyond recognition, and it was not possible to tell apart men from women. When you saw an exposed breast, you knew it was a woman.

The school playground and all the classrooms were lined with people lying down and groaning in pain. There was hardly any way to tell who was a man and who was a woman, and who was alive and who was dead. Who had done this to these innocent people? As a fellow human being, I could not bear looking at them. How many of these unfortunate people were compatriots of mine who had been forcibly brought to this land? They had bled from every pore of their bodies to do the bidding of those who had whisked them away from their homeland. Having toiled so hard for days on end, they now lay dying in great pain, covered with the most atrocious wounds. Was this the last gasp of a people that had been driven to madness?

Late that night, many of the wounded and ailing were carried away to a number of other sites and facilities. More than 200 people were brought to our No. 2 Dormitory. Among the most seriously wounded, there were about 60 Korean conscript workers and several dozen Japanese. Most of our co-workers who had been assigned to work inside Hiroshima that morning had sustained very serious burns, and most those who were working in the factory were severely bruised from being hit by flying objects. On that horrible day, broken or crushed arms and legs were considered to be minor injuries. But we felt very fortunate that not one among our colleagues in the No. 2 Dormitory had lost his life.

As darkness enveloped us late into the night, the massive fires raging inside the city revealed themselves. The entire city seemed to be on fire, and the skies above Hiroshima were as bright as day. It was an awesome sight to behold. I remembered a scene from a movie I had seen about the Opium Wars where the Chinese city of Canton was shown submerged in a sea of fire. The Japanese people had invited upon themselves the hellish fires that were burning in Hiroshima tonight. These flames were the ultimate result of the Pacific War that they had triggered.

I was witnessing the final moments of the city of Hiroshima, once home to more than 400,000 people. Within the span of a day and a night, Hiroshima had been reduced to ash by a single bomb that no one could even name.

Much of Hiroshima had been evacuated long ago. Women, children, the weak and the old had been relocated to the countryside, leaving behind a population of only 190,000 people. We learned that most of those left in the city were dead or wounded, with only an infinitesimal number emerging relatively unscathed. If so, then I would have to count myself among this small group of fortunate ones. It was nothing short of miraculous. I had been spared by the unfathomable workings of divine grace. As for the Japanese people, they had been struggling to delay an inevitable defeat, and had brought down this cruel fate on themselves.

Several days later, the newspapers came out with huge headlines, in the largest typeface, reporting that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. The newspapers explained this was a completely new weapon that emitted fearsome death rays. Soon after these reports, a strange rumor began to make its way through the dazed population of survivors. According to the rumor, Japan was also developing this new weapon called the atomic bomb, and was only a week away from completing it. Upon completion, Japan had planned to drop the atomic bomb on American cities such as New York and the capital of Washington DC. Sadly, the rumor concluded, Japan had been inched out by the United States in the race to acquire this weapon. What a ridiculous boast! I couldn't stop laughing at the idiocy of this claim. How could they earnestly believe this when they stood so utterly vanquished?

Suppose the rumors were true and Japan was actually capable of building an atomic bomb. How did Japan intend to carry this weapon all the way across the Pacific Ocean and deliver it to the heart of America? Japan didn't have any aircraft left. It had totally lost naval and air supremacy, and the country's mainland had been reduced to ashes. What were these people thinking?

Savior of My Life

The savior of my life was Miss Kazue Okada. If it had not been for her, I would have been in the center of Hiroshima that morning working to remove and relocate items from the city. There is no question that I would have suffered horrendous burns. I would not be writing this memoir today if it had not been for her. She was truly the savior of my life and the savior of my family.

Today, August 6, 1970, marks the 25th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. This year, as in all previous years, the newspapers published articles on the victims of the bombing. Even 25 years after the event, the issue of health care for atomic victims remains a topic of ongoing discussion between South Korea and Japan. I hear that the problem of nuclear radiation is not limited to the people who lived through the bombing, because it also affects the children of the bombing victims. Looking back 25 years later to the events of that day to write my memoirs, I shudder with

horror and feel a sharp pain in my heart.

Caring for Dying Colleagues

The blast had almost totally destroyed the dormitory, the factory, and company housing. Her house was no exception. Stepping into the house, you had an unobstructed view of the sky. Vegetables growing in the garden had turned red. They were all burned, as if they had been hit by lightning.

If it had not been for Hijiyama, the hill that stood beyond Fuchizaki, this area of Mukainada would have been much more seriously damaged. Indeed, Hijiyama had played a critically important role in preserving life and property in Mukainada. This hill had shaded us from direct exposure to deadly heat rays, and protected us from serious injury. In every way, I was extremely lucky.

Our dormitory was transformed overnight into a hospital where incessant moans filled every room. But in reality, this was no better than a camp for the wounded with no doctors in attendance and no medical supplies to dispense.

About 60 female factory workers were brought in from their dormitory to care for the wounded. We knew these female workers well because we had been working in the same factory. They would come to our dormitory in the morning to nurse the wounded and return to their own dormitory at night.

The work assigned to us consisted of removing the debris inside the factory, clearing the company housing, and caring for the wounded.

As there were no doctors and no medicine on hand, there was no medical treatment to give to the wounded. All we could do was to stand at a distance and watch their wounds fester and wait for them to die. Those with less serious injuries concocted their own salves and covered their bodies with it. At the time, we had no idea that they were suffering the deadly effects of radiation sickness. Consequently, all that was being done was to treat the burns. Some patients were mixing ocher with water to create a paste for covering their burns. It was doubtful whether this ocher paste did any good. On the other hand, in the complete absence of medical treatment, what else could they have done? It was a remedy born of desperation.

The daily reconnaissance flights that had become an integral part of the rhythm of our daily lives went away, and a haunting stillness now surrounded us. Could it be that those numerous reconnaissance flights had been carefully mapping Hiroshima as a test site for the atomic bomb? Was it that Hiroshima had the optimal topography for dropping an atomic bomb? For those who had survived the bomb, maybe this had been a fortunate turn of events. Perhaps it would have been more difficult to survive the long hours of indiscriminate conventional bombing that massive fleets of B-29 bombers had visited upon cities such as Tokyo, Osaka and Kure. In any case, there was no doubt in my mind that I had been extremely lucky.

The leaders of the nation were claiming that Japan would continue to fight until the last moment and the last man. How strange these empty boasts were! There was no way left to victory, and the people were absolutely exhausted and devastated. Faced with certain defeat, would it not be better to surrender as soon as possible? Who among the people could have wished for anything other than a speedy surrender? Even Japanese people around us were openly admitting that the war had been lost.

The situation inside our dormitory grew increasingly dire. Cries of pain arose from all of the rooms, and festering wounds filled the dormitory with the stench of rotting flesh. It smelled as though dead bodies had been left out to rot. We covered our faces with thick masks, but the stench soon became too much to bear. One patient had a finger that was rotting away, to the extent that the bone was fully exposed. Another patient had a collapsed throat, leaving nothing but a gaping hole in his neck. The stench that arose from the 200 people cannot be adequately described. After four or five days, the seriously wounded began to die one after another. Every day, a dozen or so people died in the No. 1, No. 2 and Women's Dormitories. With what eternal bitterness were they leaving this world?

Among people with the same severity of injuries, the death rate was conspicuously higher among the Japanese. The story was that the Koreans were stronger and more resilient than the Japanese because Koreans consumed large amounts of garlic and red pepper. How fortunate that was for us.

The dead bodies were immediately carried out and burned in ten pits that had been dug in a far corner of the factory's athletic field. There was a lot of lumber on hand because a construction company called Shimizu Gumi had brought in wood for adding a new wing to the factory. This made the cremation much easier. What went through the minds of men who day after day placed the bodies of their colleagues on those funeral pyres and wept as their friends turned to ash? I don't have the words to describe their sorrow.

I too may have been marked for those pyres, but for some reason I was destined instead to feed the bodies of persons I had worked with to those angry flames. How cruel can fate be! But the war was not over yet, and tomorrow I could be joining my colleagues in death.

Perhaps the choice of dying for their own people and own nation made sense for the Japanese. But what sense did it make for the Koreans? For whom were we supposed to lay down our lives? Once again, I felt helpless and sorry about the fate of a weak and small nation. The Japanese people were voicing many divergent views. Some advocated that Japan should file a formal protest against the United States for having unleashed a genocidal death ray upon humanity. But what good could that do in the middle of a war? No form of protest would sway the Americans.

Rumors were rife during those days, and people were lost in confusion. Not a single complaint had been heard while the entire country from Tokyo down to the southern tip of Kyushu was being turned to ash. But now it was different. Everyone was morbidly afraid of a second and third Hiroshima. Faced with the present danger of a gruesome death, people were openly and loudly asking why the government was hesitating, and arguing that the best available choice now was to surrender, not tomorrow, but at this very moment. They saw this to be the wisest path to minimizing any additional suffering and loss of life. They feared that any further obstinacy could lead to the complete extinction of the Japanese people.

The B-29 bombers that had flown over us almost every day had now disappeared from the skies. Instead, the skies were abuzz with the Lockheed P-38, a strange looking fighter plane with two tails. While they made threatening runs, these planes never carried out an attack. It seemed they were there to urge Japan to haste its decision to surrender.

The seriously injured continued to die as the days went by. The news was by now ominously predictable. Someone from so-and-so company, so-and-so platoon had died, and so had someone else.

The number of dead mounted with each passing day. The dead bodies were too decomposed to be touched, and few people could summon the courage to look at the decayed flesh around the victims' burns. When someone died, he was rolled up in the bedding he had been using and put in a coffin. For this reason, the coffins were made larger than normal.

One of the female factory workers who was nursing the wounded was Miss Kihara, whom I knew from our time together in Factory No. 10. When she saw me, she said wistfully, "Mr. Chiyama, you were safe. It's so good to know." Then she continued with a sad face, "Miss Murakami and Miss Kato were injured and are resting in the women's dormitory." They had suffered bruises inside the factory, but it was a relief to learn that their injuries were minor. I felt sorry for these women who had been so helpful to me in the factory. I prayed for their early recovery.

The majority of the factory workers were women. As a result, the majority of those wounded in the factory were also women.

When cremating the dead, our practice was to place a dead woman between two dead men. These young people had died in the prime years of their life even before they had reached full bloom. We prayed for the dead, hoping that they would be given a chance to form couples and consummate their love in the next world. [Translator's note: There is a Korean belief in "posthumous marriage" among the dead.] After the embers died down, we collected some of the bones and placed them in a box. The boxes were wrapped in white cloth with the names of the dead written and placed in a mausoleum.

Some of those who were suffering with the most horrendous wounds would not die, while some with relatively minor external injuries would cough blood and expire. I came to think that perhaps this had something to do with their breathing. Those who were inhaling at the moment of the blast suffered injuries that caused their internal organs to rot away. I speculated this was why they died coughing blood. But this was simply my own guess. What no one could fail to notice was the growing number of ossuaries in the mausoleum.

Public opinion notwithstanding, the war went on, which meant that the bombings continued. Large and small towns in Kyushu—the southern extreme of the Japanese mainland—were being systematically destroyed, and the same fate awaited most of the ports and harbors of Kyushu as well. Everything had burned down and was reduced to rubble. Now the Japanese people stood alone, abandoned and with no one to come to their assistance. The nation was now no better than a helpless rat caught in a trap. What did the Japanese believe in that allowed them to be so obstinate in their final hours? As if to respond to a challenge from Japan, the second atomic bomb was dropped three days later, a few minutes past 11:00 a.m., on August 9. This time, it was the turn of Nagasaki in Kyushu. Nagasaki had become the second Hiroshima. Having come this far, would even the crazed Japanese military that had sworn to fight to the last moment and the last man have the courage to continue any further?

Did mankind have the means to protect itself from the death rays that rained down from the skies like the rays of the sun?

Defeat and Liberation

August 15, 1945: After breakfast, everyone headed out to work. The female factory workers went

to their assigned rooms to tend to the sick and dying. An intolerable stench filled the entire dormitory. Though we felt sorry for the patients, we had no choice but to cover our faces with thick masks. The stench that emanated from the wounded in the sweltering heat of August defies description.

All the members of the office staff came to work every day, but an eerie silence reigned over the room. No one had anything special to say, and no one wanted to say anything. We all sat looking at each other in silence. Actually, the three of us Koreans who were assistants to the dormitory master had much to talk about. We wanted to talk about the baptism by fire that the atomic bomb had brought down on us, and about Japan's declaration of defeat that we knew was imminent. We could barely stifle our cries of exhilaration. But the situation did not permit us to express our true feelings. All we could do was to look around furtively and act as though we too shared in the suffering and sorrow that enveloped us.

Dormitory Master Noguchi broke the silence. "The Emperor will be making a very important announcement at noon today," he said with a pained expression. He instructed us to listen to the radio broadcast.

What important announcement would be coming from the imperial court? I felt quite certain that this was going to be an announcement of Japan's surrender. Maybe I was jumping to this conclusion only because that is what I wanted to hear. Nevertheless, I was almost positive that Japan was going to surrender. This was still nine o'clock, meaning that considerable time remained until noon. Each second now felt like an hour, and I could hardly wait for the appointed time. There was no change in the dark expression that Dormitory Master Noguchi wore on his face. Miss Okada, who was sitting next to me, stared silently into the space with sadness written all over her face. My two colleagues who sat across from me were also keeping quiet, though it was obvious they were itching to open their mouths. Instead, they signaled silently with their eyes.

The noon announcement had to be a surrender announcement. This should have been obvious even to a child. Dormitory Master Noguchi, Miss Okada and everyone else in the office looked as though they knew that the unavoidable was now just a couple of hours away. Miss Okada broke her silence to ask me, "What do you think this great announcement is about? What do they have to say that is so important? But I have this very ominous feeling." She too had guessed what the announcement was going to be about, but could not bring herself to utter it.

How to respond, I thought to myself. "You're right, I wonder what could be so important. There have been many announcements from the Imperial Headquarters, but they say the Emperor himself is making this announcement. I also have a bad premonition. But I'm guessing it's this." I furtively raised my hands to signal what I meant.

"I think you're right. That's what I was thinking too. So, you have the same idea. In any case, no doubt this is a very big announcement," she replied and nodded.

I left the office to visit the wounded. The female factory workers who were now serving as nurses were whispering among themselves in small groups here and there. Everyone was waiting anxiously for the appointed hour.

With the exception of those who were unconscious, by now, the sick and wounded also knew about

the coming announcement. Many were crying as they reflected on the sacrifice they had paid.

A crowd began to form in front of the radio before noon, as everyone waited with bated breath. The radio sounded the time signal, and everyone leaned in to listen, trying to make sure they missed nothing.

An announcer broke the silence in a dark and listless voice. “The Emperor will now speak directly to the nation. We request that you observe silence.” What followed were the words of the Emperor of Japan, spoken in a pained and solemn tone. The Emperor admitted his sins in front of the entire nation in a teary address. “We can no longer bear to see our good subjects felled so cruelly. We shall bear the unbearable and accept surrendering unconditionally to the Allied Powers,” he said.

For us, this was the long awaited moment of absolute elation. Though it came late, Japan’s Emperor Hirohito had finally made the momentous decision and admitted his sins. It seemed he had regained his senses. This was a very dramatic moment—how else could it be described? And this was also the moment when that bloodcurdlingly cruel Pacific War (which they called the Greater East Asia War) came to an end. While listening to the broadcast, I let out a very long sigh. Of course, it was an emotion-filled sigh of relief and elation. This was the moment of liberation for a small and weak nation that had been oppressed for years.

The thought that I had survived that terrible bomb shed a ray of light on me in an otherwise dark world. We had just heard the Emperor announce Japan’s unconditional surrender. In our hearts, the Koreans who had assembled around the radio were jumping up in joy. But this was not the place for us to express our elation. On the other hand, we were not about to feign sorrow and disappointment. It was a delicate situation for us.

We closed our eyes and allowed our imaginations to roam freely. What appeared before us were the mountains and rivers of our homeland, and the faces of our parents, brothers and sisters and wives and children—the faces that had visited us so regularly in our dreams. We called out to them in our hearts, “We have survived in this horrendous world! We have held on to our precious lives! So, please don’t worry anymore.” We wanted to leave right away so that we could come running home. Our time had finally arrived, and we now have the liberty to live in a free world. The heavy chains that had tied us down for so long had suddenly melted away. I simply do not have the words to describe the elation that we felt. Everyone who had been born in our small and weak nation must have experienced the same uncontrollable joy. Who could get in the way of our emotions? But we had to control the uncontrollable emotions that were rushing through us, and quietly observe what was going on around us. After all, this was their land, and they until just moments ago had been acting in the most fanatical and overbearing manner. While we wanted to jump with joy, they had fallen to the ground and the skies had collapsed upon them. How else could they be described as they cowered in the abyss of despair and sorrow? No one was prepared to break the silence. Finally, Dormitory Master Noguchi raised his bowed head, and with averted eyes spoke to us Koreans on what was going through his mind:

> We have just heard the Emperor announce Japan’s unconditional surrender to the Allied Powers. This ends this merciless and hated war. From this moment on, you are the free and liberated citizens of an independent nation. For many months and years, you have endured hardships for the sake of Japan, but Japan has now been defeated in war. We have met our

destiny. It is my earnest hope that you will be able to return to your homeland as soon as possible, and that you will make a valuable contribution to rebuilding your country.

He was sobbing as he spoke. It was becoming increasingly noisy, inside and outside the dormitory, as people who had been out working returned. But remembering the time and place, everyone was stifling his true emotions and cautiously looking around to see what would happen. In the late afternoon, an official directive came from the top ranks of the company:

Unconditional surrender has been accepted for the sake of the nation and the people. Therefore, effective immediately, all operations of the factory shall be suspended, and measures shall be taken for the repatriation of all Koreans residing in the No. 2 Dormitory.

How happy this announcement made us. The directive went on to say that measures would be taken to facilitate the repatriation of the Koreans at the No. 2 Dormitory, and that the company would continue to provide meals until our departure. But other than food, we were informed that we would be completely on our own, and the company would not intervene or interfere in our affairs. In other words, we were being told to do as we wished. The sense of liberation was overwhelming and cannot be put in words. Listening to the Emperor's broadcast, I had understood the general principle of unconditional surrender, but no details had been given on what would come next. The company directive made me realize what exactly awaited us. What I really wanted to do was to hoist the flag of Korea skyward and to shout, "Long live Korea!"

Our world had suddenly been turned upside down. But yet, there was a gnawing sense of anxiety that dampened our joy. What were we to do with the wounded and sick? Until now, the female factory workers had wholeheartedly cared for them, and the able-bodied had watched over their co-workers. But the end of the war and our liberation radically changed the situation.

The Japanese women who had been brought to the factory as conscripted members of the Women's Volunteer Corps would also be liberated from their service. Freed of their ties to the company, they would soon be returning to their own towns and villages. As for the Korean conscripted workers, they were already making preparations for the journey home, and seemed to have lost interest in attending to the needs of their ailing compatriots. This was terribly sad and unfortunate. It was sad enough that they had suffered the horrendous effects of the bomb and had no prospects for returning home, but now the injured and dying were going to be left behind with no one to care for them.

The ailing cried inconsolably. Their skin was rotting away, and they had no means to make it back home. The young women who had cared for them so kindly in their hour of need were packing their things and returning home one after another. They could hardly disguise their relief and glee as they headed home. Hadn't we all worked together and shared both our hardships and pleasures? Some were now noisily getting their things together for the long trip home. And how about the others? What was going to happen to the unfortunate ones who were reduced to this pitiable state? When would they recover, and who was going to nurse them back to strength? The end of the war had placed us in a terrible quandary.

On this very day, when we were noisily celebrating our long awaited freedom, three more breathed their last in the dormitory. Two were Japanese and one was a compatriot who never knew that he had been liberated. Many more would die soon. Who was going to see them through to the end, and who

was going to lay them to rest?

Some of our compatriots who had been brought to Hiroshima knew nothing about the Korean national flag. On the other hand, many were well informed. They recognized the flag and knew of the patriots who were struggling for the birth of an independent Korea and who had shed their blood battling the forces of Japanese imperialism. Among these patriots were Dr. Syngman Rhee in faraway America, and Kim Gu, who was fighting in Chongqing in China. The exploits of these patriots were whispered from one compatriot to another, so that almost all residents of the No. 2 Dormitory knew about the independence movement. After the atomic bomb was dropped on August 6, some began working secretly to make crude versions of the Korean national flag by altering the Japanese flag. They carefully hid away what they had produced to avoid detection.

Among us, there was a fellow named Chan (from Jongno), a member of the Third Platoon of the First Company. He was the one who had expertly served as the master of ceremonies in the talent show held on the first day of the year. In those days, almost all men—both young and old—shaved their heads. Chan was the sole exception. He wore his hair in a fashionable pompadour style. After arriving in Hiroshima, he did not spend a single day in the factory. He claimed he was sick, and spent all his days in the dormitory. For this, he was roundly hated by the dormitory managers. As it turns out, he was what was then referred to as a "philosopher." Somehow, he had managed to acquire a shortwave radio—an extremely rare possession in those days. Chan used to secretly listen to American radio broadcasts, and would from time to time share some major news items with us. Given the situation that we were in, the information was whispered only to a trusted few. But somehow, important news had a way of making its way through the entire population of the No. 2 Dormitory.

Until yesterday, the Japanese were lording it over us. Standing at the pinnacle of power, their fury knew no bounds, and their rage could not be contained. But now, they stood bent and wilted like a blade of grass hit by a severe frost. Their demeanor was that of a mouse transfixed by the menacing stare of a feral cat. All they could do was to look around furtively, fearing that the cat could pounce any moment. The long oppressed Koreans were now jumping in joy, and walking the streets as if the whole world belonged to them. The contrast was too painful to watch.

The sun finally set on the long summer day of excitement and liberation. The dormitory that had been filled with noise during the day was now back to its normal quiet. Setting aside all the emotions that were welling up inside me, I closed my eyes to meditate on what was about to begin. As the old saying goes, "Suffering and pleasure come hand in hand." Certainly, there would be much to rejoice in. But yet, pain and sorrow were unavoidable. I fell asleep imagining my new life back in my homeland.

I awoke with someone shaking me softly. It was Miss Okada. She had been waiting for me in her house but had grown impatient. It hurt me to see her sitting so listlessly beside me with an ashen face. "Miss Okada, you must not allow this to destroy your spirit. This was the inevitable outcome that arrived more suddenly than expected. You came to see me for a reason. You must be strong."

She had nothing to say in response, and all she could do was to bury her face in my lap and sob. I did not know how to handle her sorrow. She finally stopped crying. She raised her head slowly, wiped her tears and struggled to speak:

Today, the curtain was lowered on our drama of love. I truly intended to swear my eternal love

and live happily with you forever. But the end came so suddenly, and the swiftness adds to my sorrow. How I wish this was only a bad dream. You have to go back home, don't you? Your wife and children are waiting. But I cannot leave you and I cannot live apart from you. I don't have to be reminded that you are the head of another household and that you have a wife and children. You have no choice but to return, and it is my responsibility to return you to your wife and children. But for me, there is no one who can take your place. What am I supposed to do? I don't have the strength to send you away and I don't have the means to keep you here. Say something, please!

She was crying again, but it was clear to both of us that our fate had already been determined.

She cried until she was exhausted, then stared vacantly at the ceiling like a soulless body. But she could not wield any power over me. Nothing could make me turn my back on my liberated homeland and on my parents, my wife and my children. What's more, all deliveries of mail had come to a complete stop since August 6. Back home, they had no way of knowing whether I was alive or dead. My family and relatives must have been aware that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima because it was all over the newspapers and radio. In all likelihood, they could not even imagine that I was still alive. Thinking how my wife and children were torn by anxiety, I felt that I could not waste even a day here.

Miss Okada was completely unresponsive. I took her out to the shore behind the cafeteria, and we walked with no destination in mind. Both our hearts were in turmoil. We came to a broad street that was completely abandoned, but kept walking as if in a daze. Before we knew it, we had arrived at the edge of Mukainada, a good three kilometers from the dormitory. This path would soon lead us into the heart of Hiroshima, the doomed city. We turned back and returned the way we had come. We walked and walked, but nothing that sorrowful night could drive away the melancholy that filled our hearts. Eventually, we arrived back at the dormitory. Like two demons of the night, we had covered a distance of six kilometers in total darkness.

Dawn was approaching, and I said we should go home. She refused, saying she didn't want to go home, and would keep walking until daylight to calm her mind. She then pointed to a hill in front of us and said we should climb to the top. A thick bamboo forest covered the entire hill, making it cooler than the surrounding air. At the top of the hill, there was a Shinto shrine (Ohara Shrine) that stood in a quiet and abandoned corner. We could barely make out the outline of the shrine in the total darkness, but we felt our way inside and sat on a bench. Seated in total seclusion, we continued to talk and talk.

Looking down from the hill, the No. 2 Dormitory appeared to be rising straight out of the sea. Lights were burning brightly in all the rooms, giving the building the appearance of a ferryboat at sea. One day very soon, I would be boarding a ferryboat like that on my journey home. My heart began to pound just to think of that day.

We climbed down the hill and went directly to her house. As I sat thinking about the many little things that awaited me, my heart sank back into turmoil. What was I to do? If I stayed here for the sake of love, my wife and children would be reduced to tears. If I returned to my wife and children, my love would be devastated. On August 6, I had survived the atomic bomb. Didn't I owe my life to Miss Okada? If it had not been for her, I certainly would not be here. There was no denying that she was

my savior. But until just a few days ago, I did not even dream of returning home alive and well. The shadow of death always lurked over us. If we did not die today, maybe tomorrow was the appointed day. In those darksome days, had we not entered into an unspoken pact that if one of us outlived the other, the survivor would put the other to rest? Yes, time and again we had affirmed our vow in silence, and in that sense, we were as close as any couple could hope to be.

She came to see me again after breakfast. She sat next to me and spoke in a whisper. “I want to apologize for last night. I know that it is all finished. You have to return home. I had prepared myself for this day, so please don’t worry about me. All that happened was destined to happen.” She began to cry.

Miss Okada had been set free yesterday by the company’s order to disband. She could now do as she pleased. Obviously, she also was going to go back to her hometown as there was nothing left in Hiroshima to keep her back. I turned to her with a question, “Don’t you have to return home? Your parents must be waiting, especially because of the atomic bomb. When will you go back?”

She replied in a sorrowful voice:

> Those are the saddest words for me to hear. I will remain with you as long as you are here, even if that means staying for a month or two months. Who do you think is waiting for me back home? It will only add to my mother’s sorrow to see that I have returned as a widow.

After August 15, the company provided us with three meals a day consisting of rice balls. There was nothing else other than that. Our days consisted of eating three meals a day and hoping to go home as soon as possible.

We, the young men of Korea, now had a very heavy burden to bear, as it would be our responsibility to reconstruct our fallen and lost nation, and to reclaim the birthright of our people. All of us shared a common thought during those days, and all of us gained sustenance from a common hope. About nine months had passed since we had been separated from our parents, our brothers and sisters and our wives, and had bid farewell to the mountains and rivers of our homeland. At long last, we stood liberated. We felt such a strong urge to return home as soon as possible that every second seemed as if it were a year.

Hiroshima City Around August 20

A few days had passed since August 15, and our compatriots were leaving the dormitory every day. Those with relatives in Japan left to visit them, and some of the young ones who had no family (wife and children) back home also departed. Several dozen workers had left the dormitory by now. Once as noisy as a marketplace, the dormitory was now quiet. The women who had been nursing the wounded had also gone home. All that remained were the ailing, whose moaning voices continued to fill the rooms they occupied.

One day, I accompanied a number of colleagues to the heart of Hiroshima to see what the atomic bomb had done. As we looked down on the center of the city from a slight elevation, we could see the horrendous devastation that had transformed the city into flattened fields. A large city that had been home to more than 400,000 people had been reduced to this condition in the blink of an eye. How

could this be allowed? (Seoul was also home to more than 400,000 residents.)

The wooden structures that covered most of the city had been burned to a crisp, and all that remained were the empty plots where they once stood. Occasional brick and ferro-concrete buildings had been stripped of their exterior, and stood pitifully as mere skeletons. From our vantage point, we counted 14 or 15 such structures. Turning in the direction of Hiroshima Station, we could make out the burned out remains of locomotives that were scattered about like the broken teeth of a comb. The streets were similarly littered with the burned out skeletal structures of buses, streetcars and trucks. The trees and electric poles that once lined the streets had been blown down or simply uprooted. Here and there on the streets, we could see unclaimed bodies that resembled charred logs left to rot in the intense August heat. How could such a hellish sight exist on this earth? We could not stomach such sights anymore, and turned around and went back. On the way, we came upon a large crowd of people and approached to see what they were doing. Someone was standing in the middle of the crowd, and was feverishly recounting what had happened when the atomic bomb was dropped. We stopped to listen to what to he had to say.

When the bomb exploded on the morning of August 6, persons who were riding a bus or streetcar in the center of the city were instantaneously immolated inside their vehicles. As this was around 8:30 in the morning, buses and streetcars were filled with passengers. Those on bicycles or pulling carts were blown away by the blast. Needless to say, pedestrians were also blown away like fallen leaves and fell to their death. When the atomic bomb exploded in the sky above the city, fires instantly broke out all over the city, and pillars of angry flames rose high into the sky. The crowds of people who were on the way to work that morning were thrown into total pandemonium. The person claimed that no one could bear to keep his eyes trained on the horrific sights that unfolded. So, this is what the atomic bomb had brought down on Hiroshima on August 6.

The person continued with his tale of the dead bodies that had filled the streets. Some were claimed by family members, but most were left unattended and nothing proper could be done. Most of the bodies were too badly burned to be distinguishable, even if they had family members to come looking for them. Finally, the corpses had been stacked up like trash in various corners of the city and on an island (Ninoshima) in Hiroshima Bay. The remains did not resemble human bodies, and looked more like some wretched thing that a dog had dragged home. These bodies were now rotting in the August heat and had enveloped the city with an unbearable stench. What was even more unbearable was the sight of family members sifting through these mountains of rotting bodies in search of their loved ones.

One of the dormitory managers at the No. 2 Dormitory had gone to this island to search for his family. He was inconsolable in his grief. Because the bodies were too badly burned to be identified, the only available clues were traces of the clothes and shoes that the person was wearing when he or she left home on that fateful morning. Perhaps family members who had died together and were now rotting away together were the fortunate ones. What was one to make of the survivors who were walking through this hellish scene in search of loved ones?

I knew a man named Shimizu, a former manager of the No. 2 Dormitory, who had changed jobs to work at the Hiroshima Higher Normal School. He commuted to work by bicycle, and was riding his bicycle that fateful morning of August 6. The blast had thrown him tens of meters into the air and dropped him to the ground. He had suffered serious injuries. As Shimizu lived near the dormitory,

we went to see him one day to find that he had sustained very serious burns all over his body. As I had so often seen by now, his wounds were festering. He was moaning in pain and said sorrowfully, “I wish I could die sooner. But death evades me and leaves me to live on with this terrible pain.” Notwithstanding his unbearable discomfort, Shimizu managed to voice an apology. “We Japanese invited this death upon ourselves. But you are innocent and have been made to bear this cruelty.” He then asked, “Were any of your compatriots injured?”

We answered him saying, “How could we have been spared? More than 60 were seriously injured, and many more have less severe injuries. A dozen or so have died since that day.”

Shimizu sighed deeply and said, “I am deeply ashamed.” He apologized as if he himself were to blame. It saddened him to think that we had not yet been able to leave for Korea and tried to console us, wishing all of us a speedy recovery and an early return home. Among the Japanese, there were people like Shimizu who sincerely apologized to us.

Everywhere we looked, white plumes of smoke were rising to the sky as tearful family members cremated their dead. Inside the dormitory, where the ailing were slowly rotting away, a handful of people died every day. The bodies were taken to shallow pits that had been dug in the corner of the athletic field for cremation. The hellish stench that rose out of those pits defied all description.

The atomic bomb was a new weapon, the likes of which had never been seen before, for it had taken a few lives to liberate millions of citizens of a weak and small nation. For 36 long years, we had been bound by heavy chains that no one was able to unlock or sever. But this new weapon had melted away those chains in a flash. The atomic bomb that had accomplished such an impossible feat was certainly a fearsome weapon, but at the same time it deserved our gratitude. I apologize to its victims for thinking of the bomb in this way.

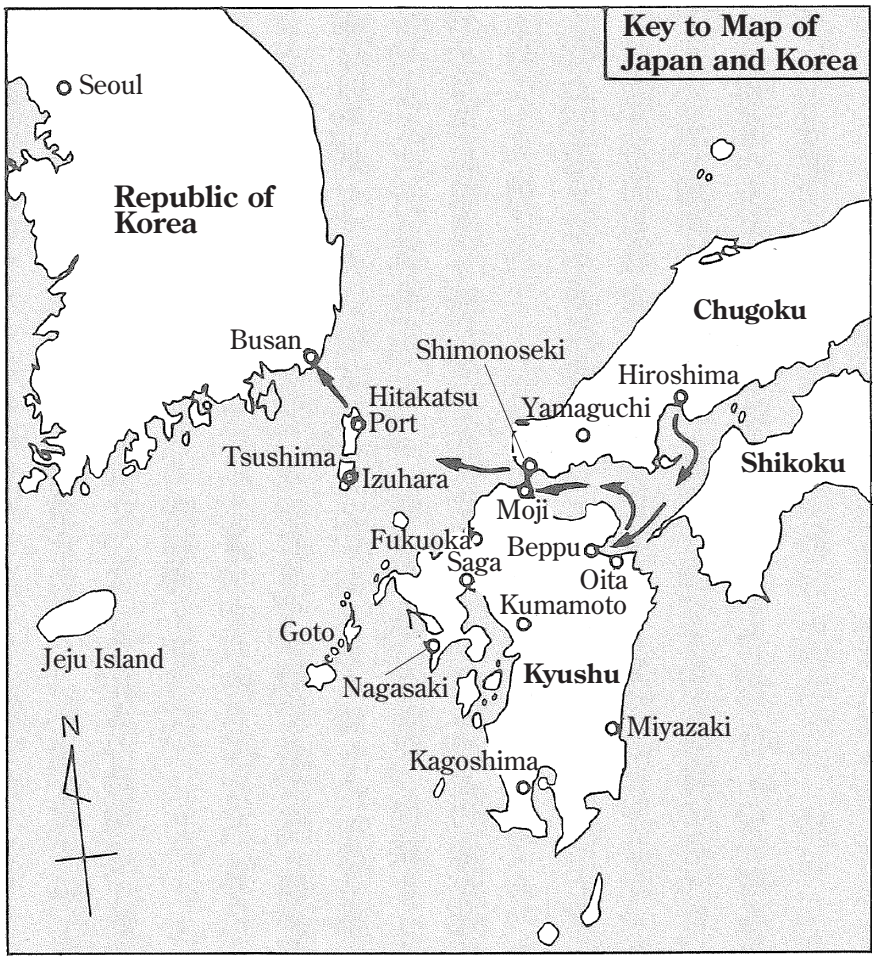
Those who had survived made every possible effort to speed up their return to the homeland. Our daily schedule included a visit to the company, where we would ask when a ship would arrive to carry us home. Today, once again, we receive the same vague answer as yesterday: “You will probably have to wait a month longer.”

Some of our colleagues were growing impatient, and they went out in search of a ship that would take us home. But they always came back empty handed. Under the present conditions, where would you find a Japanese person willing to sail to Korea? Finding a ship seemed impossible.

Inside the dormitory, every night was a feast. People would go out looking for beef, sake, and rice, and return to treat everyone to sumptuous food and drink. Our colleagues were dying in the rooms next door, but this did not seem to bother them in the least. It was as if they were saying, “You die. You suffer. But we who have survived will eat, drink and be merry.” How cruel and unfeeling human society can be! And how could this be happening among colleagues and compatriots? In the early days, we had all cried and suffered together and sent off too many friends to the grave. But sorrow-filled days had continued for so long that we had no more tears to shed, and the last drop of sympathy had long ago been squeezed from our hearts. There was nothing more that we could do for the dying, and the general feeling was “Let the dying die sooner, and let those who want to leave, leave. Those who want to stay, stay.”

Everything ceased functioning after August 15, and there was nothing left to do. We waited for the food that was brought to us three times a day, and spent the rest of our time going to the mountains and the sea. The boredom made life difficult.

Miss Okada had stayed to be with me. She would not leave my side for even a moment, and followed me like my shadow.



Source: Jeong Chung-hae, "Memoirs of a Korean conscripted worker in wartime Japan," Translated by Haruko Inoue. *kawai Publishing Company*, 1990.

Voyage Home

September 8, 1945:

Departed from Mukainada in Hiroshima → September 9: Arrived at Beppu Port → September 10: Ship runs aground → September 10 evening: Arrived at Moji Port → September 11 early morning: Departed from Moji → September 12: Arrived at Tsushima Port → September 13, 2:00 p.m.: Arrived at Busan Port

Chapter 7

Hardships on the Voyage Back Home

Giving Back My Name

The morning of August 22: Miss Okada suddenly spoke out. “Mr. Chiyama, let’s go to Fuchizaki today. Remember, you wanted to taste the peaches. Let’s go to Fuchizaki and have some peaches.” She was inviting me to the orchards in Fuchizaki, saying that the peaches there are delicious.

I cautiously asked, “Haven’t the orchards been affected by the atomic bomb?”

But she wouldn’t take no for an answer. “Let’s just suppose we are going for a walk.” Agreeing that this would be a welcome escape from the daily boredom, I accepted her invitation. To avoid the heat, we left immediately after breakfast and boarded a small boat that would take us to Fuchizaki.

The morning hours in a fishing village are pleasant, and Fuchizaki showed no evidence of damage from the bomb. It was just a beautiful fishing village that had remained untouched, thanks to the protective slopes of Hijiyama. We passed through the village and continued to walk along the river toward the west. After a brief climb, we came to an orchard located at the base of the hill. My mouth began to water as we saw delicious-looking peaches hanging from the branches. A number of people were already there when we entered the orchard. Someone yelled out in a loud voice, “Chiyama, over here!” It was Bokumoto, or rather Pak as he was known in Korea. He had taken his Korean name, Pak, and changed it to Bokumoto to comply with the forced adoption of Japanese names. I called back to him loudly.

As we approached, he said, “Jeong, are you still using Chiyama as your name? You were Chiyama only until noon on August 15, when you gave back the name to the Japanese emperor. Why don’t you go back to Jeong Chung-hae?” He was completely right.

We had regained our nation and people, as well as the three Chinese characters of our names. Our parents, brothers and sisters and wives remained for us to take back. We were all waiting impatiently for that long-awaited day of reunion. It seemed Miss Okada had not fully understood our conversation, but she had guessed what was going on with the repetition of the names Chiyama and Jeong. “Your true family name is Jeong? I didn’t know that. I will have to call you Mr. Jeong from now on,” she said, as she lowered her eyes. Our outing to eat peaches had taken an unexpected turn.

The owner of the orchard came to speak to us. “The early-ripening peaches fell to the ground due to the blast of the atomic bomb, and I was hardly able to harvest any. All that’s left are some late-ripening peaches that are now ready for picking.” We filled our stomachs with delicious peaches and had some fun before returning to the dormitory.

Looking back from what I know now, I would not have touched the peaches even if I had been paid. I remember the days when the major powers of the world were rushing to test their newly developed atomic and hydrogen bombs. We were taught the dangers of radioactive dust, told to cover our wells, and instructed not to walk in the rain. The peaches we ate that day had been showered with atomic

bomb radiation just two weeks earlier. I shudder to think of those peaches that I ate that day.

Someone who had gone to the company today to ask about the ship that would take us home relayed the same old story that we had been hearing every day. “Nothing has been scheduled yet.” Those who had gone out searching for a ship also came back disappointed. There were many people around who owned a ship, but they would bluntly refuse, saying nobody would be foolhardy enough to attempt to go to Korea at this time of total confusion. We were beginning to hear stories of hardships suffered by Japanese people who were returning from Korea. In particular, rumors were rife that those returning from the northern parts of the Korean peninsula had undergone experiences similar to those of escapees from prisoner-of-war camps.

Let me now go back to the early days of June, when the situation in Japan was still relatively calm. One day, one of our co-workers who belonged to the Third Company (a fellow from Incheon) was killed when he fell off a truck. Toyo Kogyo held a proper funeral and returned his ashes to his family back in Korea. The company had gone to all this trouble to prop up the morale of the Korean conscript workers. Be that as it may, we were grateful. And yet, we realized that the company had responded to the death of a conscripted worker with full and solemn ceremony merely as a means to facilitate Japan’s victory in the war.

Toward the end of July, a dormitory manager named Fujii travelled to Korea to deliver the remains of the dead worker to his family. He was accompanied on this trip with our co-worker, who was also from Incheon.

The war had ended before Fujii and his companion could return to Japan. Before departing, Fujii had said, “This is my first trip to Korea. So, after our mission is accomplished, I’m going to see the sights around Keijo (Seoul) before returning home.” He had also made a promise to me. “When I reach Keijo, I will stop by to visit your family in Yeongdeungpo.” He had taken my address and even a simple map to make sure he could find my home. But his sightseeing plans had all been swept away and he had narrowly escaped death to return to Hiroshima. He recounted for us the scenes that he had witnessed in Korea at the end of the war.

Towns and cities were overflowing with people waving the Korean flag and crying, “Long live independent Korea!” The atmosphere was that of a wild harvest festival. Young men armed with clubs and sticks prowled the streets and alleys, attacking and looting Japanese homes. Some were being beaten to a pulp. It seemed these were Japanese who had always been hated by their neighbors. Fujii spoke of the lawlessness that reigned in Keijo. There was a strict limit on the amount of money and goods that the Japanese were permitted to carry with them on the voyage back to Japan. They could not leave with anything other than what they were permitted to carry. Fujii originally wanted to board a ship for Japan in Incheon, but nothing was sailing. With no other choice, he had returned to Keijo to take the train south to Busan, where he was finally able to board a ship bound for Japan.

The situation in Japan was not any better. The streets at night were too dangerous to walk. Young Japanese men armed with daggers were roaming about, committing acts of violence, pilfering goods, and occasionally stabbing people. These street gangs targeted the Koreans in particular. What they should have done was to press their foreheads to the ground and apologize to the Koreans. But instead they were attacking and victimizing us. How could this be?

What were the Japanese people thinking? Those returning from the Korean peninsula, particularly from the northern parts of the peninsula, were spreading bad reports of how terribly they had been treated. This had led the Japanese to seek revenge on us.

Those who remained in the No. 2 Dormitory avoided going beyond the factory grounds until their day of departure. Going out at night was completely banned because young Japanese were acting like rabid dogs. It frightened us to think that our lives, which we had so preciously preserved through the worst part of the war, could now be taken away from us by these savage gangs. We warned each other to act prudently and avoid any rash behavior. Our mission until the day we boarded the ship home would be to be extremely careful and keep our heads low.

A few more days passed. On this day, Miss Okada's younger sister came to visit her, and Miss Okada came to see me with her sister. After introducing her sister, she turned to her sister and said, "Harue, say hello. This is Mr. Jeong who came here from Korea. He was working with me in this office, and I am very much indebted to him."

Harue bowed and greeted me politely. She was a very cheerful and pretty young woman. I responded, "No, I am the one who is indebted."

She smiled and said, "You are welcome," and looked up to her sister. Both of us were saying that we were indebted to the other, which created a suspicious atmosphere.

I continued:

> I have heard much about you from Miss Okada, who is always bragging that her younger sister is very beautiful. Now that I have seen you, I know that she was telling the truth. I remember seeing your picture and commenting that you looked like the actress Mitsuko Mito. I was right, there is a strong resemblance. Perhaps you are really Mitsuko Mito herself?

She giggled as she replied, "I am very honored to be compared to a first-rate movie star like Mitsuko Mito."

Kazue, who was listening to our exchange, interrupted to say, "Harue, you will have to treat him to many nice things today. Mr. Jeong said that you are beautiful, but he has never said anything like that to me." She was acting jealous.

After these jokes had gone back and forth, Harue began to speak up:

> After my sister was married, I was drafted into the Women's Volunteer Corps, and was sent to work in a munitions factory in Okayama. Everything was suspended when the war ended on August 15, and I returned home around August 20. When I arrived back home, I learned that my sister was not back yet. We waited and waited, but she didn't return. My mother became very worried and was afraid that there had been an accident. She asked me to go find her, and that is why I am here.

The heart of the mother harbors the same fears and emotions in all lands.

"Kazue, your mother is worried. Why don't you return home tomorrow with your sister?" This was my suggestion to her, to which she replied:

> I didn't want to say this in front of my sister, but here I am a young widow who after going through so many hardships finally found you. And with the end of the war, our love is being smashed to pieces. I feel so bitter. I can't leave you here and go home. I will do as I chose after I have seen you off. So, please don't worry about me.

Turning next to her sister, she said, "You should go home tomorrow. Tell Mother that I will return after I see Mr. Jeong off, and that she should not worry."

Harue looked very surprised. After a few moments of silence she addressed me plaintively. "Please take my sister back with you. Love knows no borders. Please take her back with you and make her happy."

But she became quiet when Kazue told her that my wife and children were waiting back home. When she was departing, Harue repeatedly pleaded with me to take care of her sister.

The next day came and went with no good news. All that happened was the death of two more of our compatriots. There were now remains of 15 people in the mausoleum, and they were all our compatriots.

A Ship is Found

It was now early September.

Today again, we went to the company to ask about our passage home, but we were told that it was not yet our turn. When will it be our turn? There was nothing promising in the news that came from Tokyo. When I returned to the dormitory, the whole building was in an uproar. People were saying that a wooden ship had been located that would take us back to Busan. This was a 25-ton cargo ship that could carry about a hundred people. The voyage to Busan would cost 40,000 yen, and the captain had promised he would depart as soon as he had enough passengers. With a hundred people on board, the cost would come to 400 yen per person, which was not a small amount. My monthly wage was 140 yen. Passage home had at last been secured, but how many would be willing to risk the voyage on a small, wooden cargo ship? After some thought, I decided I would take my chances on this ship. Once my mind was made up, I could not wait a moment longer. I would have to find others to join me, but how many would be willing to sail across the Genkai Sea on this small wooden ship?

Originally, there were 300 people in the No. 2 Dormitory. Those that had suffered injuries in the atomic bomb blast came to about a hundred, and a dozen or so of them had already died. The number of dead would later rise to nearly 20. Several dozen others had by now departed the dormitory, which left only 150 or 160 people who could leave immediately to go home. Some of these could not afford to pay 400 yen, even if they wanted to go home. Finally, some felt the risk of taking a small wooden ship was too great. They argued that they had been lucky enough to survive so far, and preferred to wait until a safer ship became available. There was no denying that testing the rough waves of the Genkai Sea with a 25-ton wooden ship was more foolhardy than brave. Moreover, we had heard that our turn to take the passenger ship to Korea would come in about 20 days.

We were fed three times a day, had nothing in particular to do and no longer had to fear dying in war. On the other hand, we felt driven to return home as soon as possible. The other consideration was the miserable state of our colleagues who were fighting for their lives in the rooms next to us. Almost every day, someone would cross over to the netherworld, eternally robbed of the chance to set foot on his liberated homeland. Who would choose to remain in this wretched and sorrowful environment if he had a way out? The same thoughts were going through everyone's mind. After squeaking by many life-and-death crises, we had survived the hateful effects of the death ray that had rained down on us from the atomic bomb. Having come this far, few were willing to tempt fate and risk going to a watery grave. We were all lost in thought as we tried to weigh the odds. At the same time, we shared a desperate need to return home as quickly as possible. I could not explain even to myself why this instinct was so strong.

September 7: By the first week of September, we somehow had managed to find almost a hundred people who were willing to board the wooden ship, and we were to depart tomorrow. Everyone was running around, preparing for the voyage. At first, it seemed that finding a hundred passengers would be difficult, but many were won over through patient persuasion. A farewell party was held with those who had chosen to stay behind, and we went to visit the wounded and ailing. Many tearful goodbyes were exchanged with the people we had grown close to.

Feelings of joy intermingled with heartbreak in the dormitory. Those who were heading home were happy and excited beyond words. Then there were those who couldn't afford the 400-yen price of the passage. For various reasons, there were those who had decided they would not return to Korea and would remain in Japan. The healthy ones had the choice of leaving immediately or waiting for a safer passage home. But what about the wounded and ailing? The question they faced was not when they could go home but whether they could escape the grips of death. With heartbreak and anguish in their weakened voices, they begged us not to tell their families about their miserable state.

After packing my old clothes, I headed off to say farewell to all those I felt indebted to. A good part of the day was spent saying goodbye. Late at night, I received word that Miss Okada had come to the dormitory mother's room. She had rushed over to the dormitory when she heard that I was leaving the next day. I had not told her anything about my decision to board the wooden ship bound for Korea.

Farewell

I was afraid of coming face-to-face with her. Hence, it was with a heavy heart that I walked to the dormitory mother's room. I opened the door and went inside. Miss Okada was sitting there laughing happily. What an unexpected surprise. I knew the anguish in her heart too well. But her laughter eased the tension and lifted the dark cloud that hung over me:

> I heard you were leaving. How wonderful that you are going home so soon! You and I are both very important and precious people for our families. I hope you will be back home soon to your parents and wife so that you can free them of their worries.

I felt immensely grateful to her and expressed my thanks again and again. Sitting there in the dormitory mother's room, we continued to talk until dawn.

Although my heart was filled with the excitement of going home, a dark feeling lingered with me. I could not free myself from the thought of my wounded compatriots who were fighting desperately for their lives. We had visited them every morning and evening and done all that we could do to console and encourage them. What would happen to them after our departure? We were now abandoning them in an alien land with no one to look after them and no place for them to go. It was heartrending to think what we were doing to them. On the other hand, some of our compatriots would remain in the dormitory, and the company would continue to help.

The nights are short in early September. The sun dawned on our day of departure.

Miss Okada got up early in the morning to cross the river to Fuchizaki and was back in an hour. She was holding a bamboo basket full of figs. This was a rare fruit that I had never before seen or even heard of. As the Japanese name *ichijiku* implied, the fig tree bears fruit without forming flowers. Was this fruit meant to convey a hidden message?

She smiled and said:

> You are departing so suddenly that I had no time to prepare a gift. So please enjoy these fruits. Figs are a specialty of this region. This is a strange fruit that opens before the sun rises and begins to spoil once the sun is in the sky. Please eat them on your passage home. These are a small token of my feeling.

Her eyes were glistening with tears, as were mine. We sat together and shared this rare fruit.

September 8, 1945: This was the long-awaited day of my return home. Ten months, or more than nine full months, had passed since I had walked out of my home with a heavy heart on that cold and snowy day—December 8, 1944. Finally I was going home, drenched with sweat in the lingering summer heat of early September. It had been ten months of excruciating hardship and constant fear.

All of us boarding the ship that day gathered in front of the cafeteria. We numbered exactly one hundred. Each person was carrying some large and small baggage, and had radiant faces. By contrast, those who were staying behind looked sullen as they sent us off. Some people in the neighborhood had also congregated to bid us farewell. Most of the wounded and sick had managed to make it to the front door of the dormitory, and I could see that they were crying as we prepared to leave. A number of people were also there from the company. An employee was there on behalf of the director of the Weapons Department, as was Dormitory Master Noguchi and all the dormitory managers. The women who were still working in the kitchen were also standing by. Among them I spotted Miss Okada looking stunned, and standing like a soulless body.

A brief farewell ceremony ensued. Dormitory Master Noguchi gave an address:

> You came to Japan, leaving behind your homeland, your parents, your wives and children, and you were made to bear many hardships against your will. But ultimately Japan was defeated. You have now been given heavy responsibilities as the citizens of an independent nation. I pray from my heart that you will return home safely, contribute to rebuilding your nation and do a great job in the process. We will concentrate on treating the wounded and ailing to speed their recovery. For those who are not leaving today, we will find a ship so that they can return

home soon.

As he spoke, Dormitory Master Noguchi had tears in his eyes. Finally, he lowered his head and said with a choked voice, “I pray for your safety as you embark on your long and dangerous voyage home. Goodbye!”

We were bidding eternal farewells to people who we had lived with for ten months. We had grown close and shared our joys and sorrows. But now we were people of two different countries. Following Dormitory Master Noguchi, I spoke briefly on behalf of those who were leaving. This ended the farewell ceremony. Everyone ran to say goodbye to the friends they were leaving behind and the townspeople they had come to know.

Miss Okada was standing next to the fence crying and watching us as we prepared to leave the compound. I went to her and held her hand in mine. “Please take care of yourself. If it is our fate, we will meet again. Don’t let yourself become depressed. Be well and healthy.” I was not able to look at her face as I left for the ship. I was leaving the person who had saved my life in Hiroshima. I had survived the atomic bomb thanks to her. But it was unlikely that I would ever again see my savior in this life.

Looking back at the ten months I spent in Japan, it all seems to have been a long and surreal dream. Miss Okada was wiping her tears and waving her handkerchief as she called out to us. “Take good care of yourselves. You too, Mr. Jeong. Please be careful on your long and arduous voyage home!” She was struggling to see us off with a smile, and a smile of friendship was the best she could do.

We were taking the remains of 20 compatriots who had been killed by the atomic bomb. It was our duty to take home our compatriots who had been silenced. Some of us were returning home alive, and there were those who had breathed their last in a foreign land. We boarded the 25-ton ship with these remains and documents that we would hand over to the next of kin.

It depressed me to think of meeting the families and handing them the documents and the box of remains. But I had been given this responsibility. Once everyone was aboard, the ship’s engine began making a loud put-put noise.

Departure

The 25-ton wooden ship that we boarded was named *Ujina Maru*. It blew its whistle as it slid away from the pier. Hiroshima, the city of sorrowful memories, and Mukainada, the town that we had been home to us, gradually began to recede in the distance. I was leaving friends and loved ones behind. The engine roared as the ship carrying 100 Koreans bound for home headed for deeper waters. The dormitory faded away in the distance, and all that we could see now were the handkerchiefs that people who had come to see us off were waving. As if refreshed by the ocean breeze, the young men began to sing the Korean folksong “Arirang.” No doubt, each man was harboring his own hopes and plans for the future.

The dormitory finally disappeared from sight.

The ship sailed the calm waters of the Seto Inland Sea with its engine continuing to make that

rhythmic put-put noise. The coastal scenes were beautiful indeed, and it was exhilarating to watch the passing scenery from our small ship.

The captain was a shabby looking man in his 50s. For a Japanese, he seemed to be unusually dull and unreliable. I was worried whether this small ship could make it across the rough waters of the Genkai Sea. As the leader of the group, I felt responsible for questioning the captain.

“How long will this 25-ton wooden ship take to cover the distance to Busan?”

“We should be there tomorrow (September 9) before noon,” the captain replied.

I continued with my questions, “You are carrying 100 men on this ship, plus quite a bit of cargo. Are you sure that you can cross the rough waters of the Genkai Sea?”

“Why would I be making this trip if I had doubts? Of course, I am sure! I have made my living on the seas for decades. There is nothing to worry about.”

“Are you carrying any nautical charts?”

The captain barked back, “No nautical charts!”

“How do you plan to sail the open sea without charts?”

“I don’t need any charts. I know these waters like the back of my hand. You don’t have to worry about anything. If we die, I will be the first one to go. Why would I be taking any dangerous risks? Just sit down and relax.”

Unconvinced, I continued to quiz the captain. “Who is your engineer and how old is he?”

“The engineer is the son of the ship’s owner. He is still young but skilled.”

I made this request to the captain. “Please, captain, deliver us safely to Busan. I am begging you on behalf of 100 men who are heading home.”

The captain responded with his own request:

> I am the one that should be making an appeal to you. I know that this voyage is going to be quite an adventure, but many Japanese people are stranded in Korea with no way to get home. They say the stranded Japanese have suffered much hardship and are anxious. When we cross the Korea Straits and arrive at Busan, please don’t treat us badly. This is my appeal to you.”

I replied:

> You don’t have to worry. I am sure this ship is going to be welcomed for bringing us home. The crowds will come out to greet us. And imagine how happy the Japanese will be to see a ship sailing under the Japanese flag! The crowds will welcome the ship for bringing

Koreans back home, and the Japanese waiting for a passage home will also be happy. There is absolutely nothing to worry about. You are doing us a service by taking us home, plus you will have a chance to make more money on the voyage back to Japan.

The captain nodded in agreement. “I suppose you are right and that is exactly why I have agreed to embark on this adventure.” But the captain could not hide his anxiety. Yes, he was doing this for money. But that didn’t make the voyage any safer, particularly when you considered the lawlessness that prevailed after the end of the war.

The 100 passengers were noisy with excitement. Everyone’s baggage was piled up in a corner, and the boxes containing the remains of our 20 compatriots were stacked up in one place. Everyone was crammed together in the narrow remaining space, pressed together like sardines, and unable to stretch out our legs. As lunchtime approached, we cooked the rice and vegetables that we had brought with us. Rice balls were distributed, which we ate with salt. It was barely enough to quell our hunger, but no one complained. After all, we were scheduled to set foot in our homeland tomorrow morning. The hope and excitement of going home drowned out any sense of dissatisfaction or discomfort. A day or two of little or no food would not make a difference.

The sun was beginning to set in the western skies when the ship passed a narrow channel off the coast of Yamaguchi Prefecture. To the right, there was a stony cliff with a clear warning that directed passing ships to turn right. We had no idea where a right-turn would take us.

The captain turned left and revved the engine as he headed for the open sea. Within a short time, we were surrounded by total darkness. The sun had set, and no light remained in the sky. Dinner consisted of a single rice ball. The sea breeze turned chilly, compelling people who remained on deck to go down below. The cabin was now extremely crowded and noisy.

Let this night pass and tomorrow morning we will be in Busan. Once on land, the train would take me back to Keijo (Seoul) in no time. The excitement was too much to bear. Sitting in a corner and closing my eyes, many scenes from the past rushed through my mind like a kaleidoscope. I become sleepy as I close my eyes, but the ship begins to sway as the night grows late. It was my guess that the ship was now crossing the Genkai Sea. The ship was making very good speed. If what the captain had said was accurate, we would now be in the Genkai Sea. Even as we suffered from seasickness, it seemed that everyone managed to fall asleep. The cabin that had been noisy as a marketplace was now silent.

Adrift

As the sun began to rise, I was uncertain how much sleep I actually got. The ship had continued to sway throughout the night, but now as I looked out on the sea, I was surprised by the calmness of the surrounding waters. I wondered if were we already closing in on Busan. Suddenly, my heart began to beat fast and hard. But it was still dawn, and the captain had predicted that we would arrive in Busan before noon. We were running well ahead of schedule and it seemed there was something wrong in the timing.

People rushed up to the deck as they began to wake. But there was something strange in the sight that was unfolding before us. It was as though the ship had wandered into a sheltered bay that was as calm and quiet as a lake. This certainly was not the sea leading to Busan. Could this be Moji or

perhaps Shimonoseki? But no, the waters of those two ports are not so calm. Then, where could this be? In the far distance, we could make out the outlines of a town with rooftops glistening beautifully in the morning sun. Where were we? This was a mystery we could not solve.

I went to the captain's cabin to ask for an explanation, but the captain's answer simply deepened the mystery. "I don't know where we are." But how could a Japanese captain not know where his ship was? He was playing dumb.

I pressed him for an answer:

> Who is supposed to know if the captain doesn't? This ship was bound for Busan. How can we be lost in a place whose name you even don't know? Have you done this on purpose to make trouble for us? Captain, you have to tell us the truth!

The captain looked despondent. "I'm sorry." This was all he would say.

I was growing increasingly angry and frightened when a fishing boat began to approach us. "Where are we here?" I yelled out to the fishing boat. The fisherman yelled back, "This is Beppu. Where are you headed?" As Beppu was a town of hot springs located on the eastern tip of Kyushu, this meant that the ship had strayed far off course. Actually, this was in the opposite direction from the port of Shimonoseki. I was totally flabbergasted. How could a captain who claimed that he had spent decades at sea make such a stupid mistake?

The mistake had been made the previous evening as the ship exited the narrow channel off the coast of Yamaguchi Prefecture. We had gone off course at that sign that said, "Turn Right." If we had turned right, the ship would have stayed on course and headed toward Shimonoseki. In hindsight, the ship was traversing the narrow mouth of the Bungo Channel when it was swaying violently the previous night.

I went back to speak to the captain. "It's no use talking about what went wrong last night. I want to know whether we can make it to Busan from here. Let me have your honest opinion."

The captain replied contritely, "I am sorry. A small miscalculation led to a big mistake. I'll be more careful." The captain continued, "From here, it will take two days to get to Shimonoseki." I couldn't believe what he was saying. The captain had boasted that he would deliver us to Busan before noon today, but was now saying that he needed two days to get to Shimonoseki. What use would it be to ask how long it would take from Shimonoseki to Busan? He obviously had no idea.

Stranded off distant shores, how could we expect to find another ship? Or, how could we expect to find another captain to replace this one? We were caught between the devil and the deep sea. There were no good choices before us, so I said to the captain, "We have no time to lose. Immediately turn the ship around and head for Shimonoseki." The captain was totally lost and walked aimlessly around the deck. What an amazing difference from when he was speaking with such confidence!

Finally, the captain turned the ship around and headed north. We were now sailing with heavy hearts. We had come here by mistake, and it was unlikely that we would ever again see these waters. "Look at it this way. We are getting a free tour of Kyushu, which isn't all that bad. Let's enjoy this in the

spirit of turning misfortune into a blessing." My words seemed to have a soothing effect on my fellow passengers. Their tense expressions gave way to a sense of relief. How strange human psychology can be!

But we were sailing without nautical charts, and it was worrisome to think that we had no idea of the challenges ahead. The ship sailed northward while closely hugging the zigzagging coastline of eastern Kyushu. The sun was beginning to sink below the horizon, and it was soon dark again. With nothing to see from the deck, everyone went below deck and crowded into the cabin. Fortunately, no one was seasick. Vomiting and groaning in this crowded space would have made things unbearable. With little to eat and nothing to do, we were becoming increasingly bored. Combined with the gnawing sense of anxiety, the passengers were looking haggard and exhausted.

The captain was trying his best to act responsibly and make up for his mistake. He stayed awake all night and remained at the helm without rest. I could hear the put-put of the engine in my half-asleep and half-awake state.

I don't know how far we had gone when suddenly the ship hit something with a loud thud and shook violently. Everyone jumped up from sleep. The ship had come to a complete stop. What now? I ran to the captain's cabin and pushed the door open to find the captain looking totally lost and despondent. "Captain, what happened? What was that loud noise, and why has the ship stopped?"

The captain replied listlessly, "The ship ran aground." We were stranded on a sandbar. Bad things just kept happening. I tried to console the captain. "Don't worry so much. We will find a way out of this when the sun rises." The captain had the same idea. What if we had hit a submerged rock? I took a deep breath, thinking that we still had some luck left. Things could have been much worse. We would have all drowned if this had been a rocky reef. Knowing that the passengers were sneering at him as a "stupid captain," my words of consolation seemed to have brought some relief to him.

For now, there was nothing we could do. Going below deck, I immediately fell asleep.

September 10: We could not believe what we saw as the sun lit up the skies. A ship is meant to float on water, but ours was sitting high on a sandbar. This was because the sea had receded far into the distance as the tide had ebbed. We were at a loss for words. We asked the captain what he intended to do, to which he answered that we would wait for high tide and try to push the ship off the sandbar. He added that he could not guarantee that this strategy would work.

We were sitting on a sandbar far off the coast. Looking in all four directions, there was no hint or hope of a passing ship. We were stuck in no man's land with no inkling of where we were. I thought I would go mad as I realized how bleak our prospects were. Why did we have to choose a captain like this? Or was it just that was the only one who was foolish enough to risk the trip to Korea under current conditions? Did this mean that we were fated to experience more bad luck and hardship?

The tide began to turn. All we could do was wait. At high tide, the water was just deep enough to cover the bottom of the ship. Everyone got off to push. After much pushing, the ship was finally fully afloat. Our 25-ton wooden vessel was back in its element. I shuddered to think what our fate would have been if this had been winter.

Many people had gathered to send us off as we left Hiroshima on September 8, but there was no one to wish us well as we pulled away from this deserted sandbar. I could imagine how our friends would be holding their sides with laughter if they could see us now. Fortunately, no one in our hapless group was openly criticizing the captain. The ship was moving again. Bound for Shimonoseki, we continued our voyage along the northern coast of Kyushu.

The ship made its way through the Kanmon Straits off Shimonoseki at sunset on September 10. The current was extremely strong in the narrows, and our small wooden ship struggled to follow the current into what we thought was Shimonoseki harbor. It was easy to picture Busan Port awaiting our arrival to the north. But then we learned that we had been swept toward Moji Port. The harbor was littered with the remains of sunken ships jutting up from the water. It was as though we were navigating through a half-submerged forest of trees.

The atomic bomb was certainly dreadful and ghastly, but what choice did a nation have but to surrender when its cities and ports had been devastated like this? Our small wooden vessel slipped by the remains of the sunken ships as it finally made its way out of the harbor. We were now back on track, fully resigned to whatever our fate held in store for us.

The captain was yelling instructions. “I want everyone to remain below deck until we leave Moji harbor.” We all noisily scurried back below, not knowing why we were being told to do this.

I went to the captain’s cabin to ask, “What’s happening?”

Burrowing his brow, the captain turned around to point to a speedboat that was approaching us from behind. “That’s a patrol boat and it’s been following us. I have no idea why.” It seemed the captain had a premonition. Within a few minutes, the patrol boat cut us off and ordered us to stop.

It was the harbor police. A police officer boarded our ship and began to interrogate the captain. “Where is this ship going?”

The captain gave a confident and straightforward answer. “The ship is repatriating people to Korea.”

The officer asked another question: “Who is the leader of the group?” I stepped forward to say, “I am responsible.” Turning to me, the officer bowed and greeted me, saying:

> You are responsible? Thank you for your services. I wanted to warn you that Allied warships are on patrol in the waters beyond, and you will not be able to pass without flying a white flag. They will unconditionally fire on any ship that does not show the white flag. You have experienced many terrible hardships and have emerged alive from the vortex of war. Why then would you take such a risk to attempt this dangerous voyage? Why not wait until you can return safely on a proper passenger ship?

His kindness and concern were touching. He then continued:

> Do you know that you are exposing yourself to extreme risk by attempting to cross the Genkai Sea on this wooden ship with 100 passengers during these difficult times? Come with us to the harbor police headquarters and we will discuss what you can do.

The officer's advice was logical and convincing. Even if the Allied warships were to spare us their fire, that would hardly diminish the real danger of the voyage. In any case, we could not disobey the order of the officer to follow him to the harbor police headquarters. Japan may have been defeated in war, but we were still in Japan's territorial waters. Towed by the patrol boat, our ship headed back into the harbor. I felt greatly relieved, as if I had chanced upon a savior. After securing the ship at a pier located in a far corner of the port, the captain, the engineer and I (as the person responsible for the group) landed and set off toward the harbor police headquarters. The three of us were handed over to a security officer who was the supervisor. The officer was very respectful and began to speak in a courteous manner:

> The officer in charge has given me his report on your group. I fully appreciate your wish to return home as soon as possible, but it is very dangerous to attempt this voyage on your small vessel. In particular, the waters of the Korean Straits are very rough, and this is the wrong time of the year to attempt this passage. Weather conditions can change very rapidly and dramatically. Therefore, I suggest that you return to the company where you were working and wait for a safer opportunity to return home.

His words sounded more like an order than a mere suggestion.

This was a tough problem. I spoke up:

> Sir, our group cannot return to where we were. We have already completed all procedures for returning home and there is no way that we can go back to the company. And there is the problem of the shortage of food at the company.

The officer replied:

> You won't have to worry about that. We will contact the company to explain the situation and ask them to take all necessary measures. Don't worry about anything, and go straight back to where you came from.

The officer was now speaking in a much stronger tone. Because of their official duties, the police simply could not look the other way and send travelers into harm's way.

I felt there was no way out of this quandary and said, "Yes, we will return to the company." Having made this promise, I returned to the ship where everyone naturally was anxious to know what had happened. The group was divided in its opinion after hearing my detailed account of what had transpired. Some wanted to go back to the company, while others wanted to brave the high seas and head directly for Korea. It proved difficult to reach a consensus, as each side had arguments in its favor. Those who wanted to go back to Hiroshima were extremely anxious, after all that we had experienced during the voyage thus far, and feared that a deadly accident awaited us if we were to continue. They argued that we should go back to the company and wait for a passenger ship to take us to Korea safely. This argument made good sense. Considering the capabilities of the captain, it seemed obvious to me that it was extremely risky to attempt crossing the raging waves of the Korean Strait on our small wooden ship. On the other side were those who wanted to continue the voyage. They argued that we had suffered so many hardships to get to where we were now, and it would

be heartbreaking to return to Hiroshima with the homeland nearly in sight. Moreover, they could not bear to return to the nightmarish scenes of the dormitory where every day, people were dying terrible deaths. They argued they could not step back into a dormitory that had become the abode of ghosts with an overpowering stench of rotting flesh. Finally, they claimed we had all prepared for the worst when we boarded this ship and should not back down.

The discussion could not go on forever. We had to reach a final decision and take immediate action. The only way out was to opt for a democratic solution and abide by the will of the majority. Both sides agreed, and a vote was taken by a show of hands. Those voting to continue our voyage to Korea accounted for an absolute majority. The die had been cast and we would press on toward our homeland.

Hiring a Pilot Boat

Our problem was the captain. He simply could not be relied upon to take us safely to Korea. The decision was made to look for another captain. Several people went ashore to ask around in Moji Port. Luckily, they found a boat that had just returned from Korea with a full load of fish. After some negotiation, the captain of this fish-transporting boat agreed to tow us all the way to Busan for 9,000 yen. We demanded the captain of the first boat repay us 9,000 yen, which we then used to make our payment. Arrangements were made for sneaking quietly out of Moji Port next day at dawn. We were going to smuggle ourselves out of Japan.

If the harbor police were to spot us, we would be brought back to port. This meant that we would have to prepare for a very early getaway. The captain of the fish-transporting boat was a man in his 40s who hailed from Gyeongsang Province in southern Korea.

September 11: We rushed to eat breakfast as sunlight began to push aside the darkness that enveloped us. We hurried to connect the two vessels together with a thick rope. The fish-transporting boat would lead the way and pull our wooden ship all the way to Busan.

A troublesome question arose as we readied for departure. What would we do if the captain of the fish-transporting boat cut the rope on the high seas and sped away? Who could guarantee that this would not happen? In these confused and lawless times, we had prepaid a captain that we had never before met. Some form of countermeasure had to be taken to ensure our safety.

After some discussion, the decision was made to place two of us on the other boat. I asked for volunteers, but no one stepped forward. How could you blame them? The fish-transporting boat was small and had no width to speak of. The long and narrow deck featured three, square boxes for storing fish. But that was all, and there was no room for carrying passengers. Open any of these boxes and the putrid odor of fish would assault the senses. This was an extremely filthy boat.

As the September sun was becoming hotter, the captain from Gyeongsang Province grew increasingly anxious to start out. There was no solution to our dilemma, so I finally spoke up. “I will go, but I need one more person to come with me.”

A fellow named Kim Thae-sik from Jongno volunteered to join me saying, “I am prepared to ride with you.” I left my baggage where it was and changed into working clothes.

The boat's captain began to grumble when he saw us boarding his vessel:

> What are you doing here? This boat has no room to carry passengers. So I see that you don't trust me. Are we not compatriots on foreign land, and have you not just been liberated? Are you saying that you have no faith in me? I would be happy to pilot a ship of people returning to Korea for free, but you are paying me a handsome reward. Under these conditions, who would betray his compatriots and run?

The captain continued his diatribe, speaking so fast it was difficult to follow what he was saying:

> We have long lived under Japanese oppression, but now our country has been liberated and stands as an independent nation. Forget all the distrust and suspicion that marked how we lived until yesterday, and let's come to each other's assistance as true compatriots. You have already boarded by boat, so you can stay if you want. But let me warn you. This being summer, you can sit on the deck while the sea is calm. But you won't be able to stay on top in the raging waves of the Genkai Sea. What will you do? We don't have any time to waste, so maybe you can climb into the fish boxes if it comes to that.

The two, small wooden ships made their way out of Moji Port shortly after dawn on September 11. To avoid being detected by the harbor police, the captains muffled their engines and slipped very, very slowly out of the harbor. Once outside the harbor, the captains picked up speed with the now familiar put-put sound of their engines. The cities of Wakamatsu and Fukuoka on the northern edge of Kyushu came into sight as we made our way into the open sea. By now, the waves were growing increasingly taller. Tethered together, the two boats resembled a small gourd that was helplessly bopping up and down on the sea. We hardly seemed to be making any progress.

Around 2:00 p.m., the sea rose to a higher level of fury. The waves that swept our boat seemed deranged in their wrath, and threatened to capsize the small fish-transporting boat. The wood and water bottles that had been placed on the roof of the captain's cabin were swept away, and were being carried away like dead leaves in the blue sea. Would we arrive safely in Busan? They say bees rush to sting a tearful face, but were we all going to perish in an accident at sea?

The captain called out to say that his boat was in trouble. Buffeted by wild waves, the engine had died in the middle of the ocean. Kim and I climbed down to the engine room where a young engineer drenched in sweat was trying to fix the engine. It did not look like an easy fix. The two vessels, one towing and the other being pulled, came to a complete stop as the angry waves continued their unabated assault. Considerable time had elapsed by now. It seemed that the roles would have to be reversed with the mother ship towing the smaller fish-transporting boat. I approached the captain with a suggestion. "If the repairs are going to take more time, why don't you try to fix the engine while the other ship pulls you along?"

My suggestion was rejected. "The repairs will be finished soon, so just wait a little longer," the captain assured me.

The mother ship and its passengers continued to wait for the repairs to be finished. Then suddenly, they began to untie the rope that bound us together and signaled that they were going ahead without us. The put-put sound of the engine came back to life as the mother ship pulled away from us. To

me, this seemed to be a terribly risky choice. With every wave that swept its bow, the ship looked like it was being drawn to the bottom of the sea. Yet it continued to grow more distant. What is going to happen to us? I felt infinite rage and resentment for our colleagues that had abandoned us in the middle of the sea. How was this even possible? The two of us had boarded the smaller boat on behalf of the 100 passengers because everyone else had refused. Now that the boat was in trouble, they chose to abandon us without even extending a helping hand. As colleagues, had we not shared all our joys and tribulations? Had we not shared both life and death? I deeply resented what they had done.

Farewell to Colleagues

The captain announced that the repairs were finally done. The time spent drifting on the open sea had been terribly nerve-wracking. I called back to the captain, "Let's hurry and catch up with the other ship. We have to tow them."

The captain's reply was terribly distressing: "The two ships are similar. No matter how fast we go, we won't be able to catch up with them. Given today's high winds and waves, catching up is impossible."

I countered with a fevered plea, "But that ship cannot make it on its own to Busan. Isn't that why we hired you to tow the ship in the first place?"

The captain was unruffled:

> That's true, but what am I supposed to do? It was their decision to untie the rope and go ahead of us. It was their decision to take the risk. But don't worry too much. Believe me, that ship will definitely get to Busan safely. That captain grew up on the sea and trusts his own skills. Otherwise, he would not have left us behind. I am willing to bet that they will arrive at Busan before we do.

This was a strange situation. Only the two of us—Kim and I—were fated to suffer the stench of the fish boxes. I was close to losing my mind. Kim was also grumbling:

> Why did this have to happen to us? The more I think of it, the greater the resentment I feel for the 98 that left us behind. Even if they had to go ahead, why didn't they take us with them? How could they leave us stranded on this boat from who knows where? Do they expect us to catch up and start towing them again?

In the final analysis, we had paid 9,000 yen for the passage of two of us. This was equivalent to the cost of passage on a luxury passenger ship, but we had paid this in exchange for the privilege of sitting among boxes that reeked of fish. Yes, the passage had cost us 4,500 yen per head. Kim and I had paid an exorbitant price for cowering inside these wretched fish boxes. How strange our fate!

The wind grew even stronger as the small boat continued to be buffeted by angry waves. The Genkai Sea is known for its rough waters even in the best of times, but today, we were being treated to strong winds and rain as well. It seemed the winds had carried in the rain. One moment the boat was lifted to the summit of a mountain, and the next moment it would hurtle down into the abyss. The small boat was at the complete mercy of the enraged sea as it was tossed up and down by the waves. The two of us could no longer remain on deck and there was no choice but to open one of the fish boxes and

climb into it. Inside the box was as dark as the inside of the fish. With no light shining in, we could not see anything in the box. Yes, we had been forewarned, but this did not make the ordeal any easier to bear. All that we could do was to sigh.

We were truly on the brink of life and death. I never imagined that the boat could be so violently tossed by the sea. I concluded that our decision to find our own passage to Korea was a mistake. The wise thing to do would have been to wait for the arrival of a passenger ship to ferry us over. It did not matter that we were in a hurry to return home, and it did not matter that the wait in Hiroshima would be fraught with hardship. I admitted to myself that we had seriously miscalculated the situation. The square-shaped fish box was too small to lie down in and too low to stand up in. It was no better than being placed in a dark grave, where our bodies were thrown about with each wave that hit the boat. I rolled around in the box, sometimes curled up on my stomach and sometimes curled up on my back. In either case, I had lost control of my own body. To make matters worse, seawater began to seep into the box from gaps in the cover and soon covered the bottom of the box. Perhaps we were lucky that it was pitch black inside the box. But the whole situation was becoming unbearable. Finally, we opened the cover with a great deal of trouble and crawled outside. To keep from being swept overboard, we lay down on our stomachs with the mast between us and held on to each other with all our strength.

The sun had already set, but the wind and rain continued to pummel the boat mercilessly. The roof over the captain's cabin had been blown away, exposing the captain to the full fury of the storm. Holding the ship's wheel with both hands, the captain stood almost motionless as he navigated the vessel. He then saw us cowering on the deck and yelled out in a thunderous voice, "Go back into the boat! You're going to be swept overboard. Hurry, hurry!"

Prompted by the captain's angry voice and no longer able to withstand the fury of the storm and the waves, we returned inside the hellish fish box. Once again, we were being tossed about in total darkness, unable to determine which side was up and which side was down. I felt more dead than alive. The only proof that I had that I was still alive was the sense of consciousness that remained with me.

Kim began to sob as he bemoaned his fate. Imagine a grown man locked into a tight box and complaining and grumbling non-stop. The sobbing only made matters worse. What was his complaint? "Did I survive the atomic bomb just to drown in the Genkai Sea and become food for the fish? Who is responsible for this?" he wanted to know.

I yelled at him in a stern voice:

> Get a hold of yourself, Kim! Did you see the captain standing there with no roof over his head? He is fighting the waves and the storm with all his might to steer the boat to safety. He is struggling against the elements to save his own life and ours. We have to stay strong. Instead of complaining let's pray for the captain.

We could not see each other's face in the dark box, but we knelt to pray and tried to encourage each other the best we could.

As I was wandering between life and death, the image of the mother ship that had gone ahead of us appeared before me. How far had they gone, and were they also battling this vicious storm? Had they

been shipwrecked or were they adrift with no power. An uneasy premonition crept into my mind. Would that incompetent captain be able to safely navigate his ship in this wild storm that had gripped the Genkai Sea? Suppose we were to drown and die. Our small boat had no more than five souls aboard, but the mother ship was carrying nearly 100 people. In addition, the remains of 20 of our compatriots were also on board. The thought of disaster made me shudder.

We were having difficulty breathing in the box and could not stand it any longer. In great distress, we climbed out of the box a second time.

The captain would surely assail us with explosive anger if he were to spot us.

Swept by both ocean spray and rain, we were soaked to the skin and shivered uncontrollably due to a combination of cold and fear. Once again, we lay flat on our stomach and held on to the mast with all our might. It was then that something seemed to hit the bow of the boat. The collisions were repeated, and we saw that the boat had run into a large collection of baggage floating on the sea. We were soon surrounded by baggage and debris. It seemed the storm had overturned some unfortunate ship in our vicinity. Our hearts sank when we saw the baggage. Were these the remains of the mother ship that had gone before us? But that was unlikely, given the time that had elapsed. One of the crewmembers spotted the baggage and cried out, “A ship must have gone down around here!” He then reached over the edge of the boat and fished a sample out of the sea. It was heavy with water, and turned out to be a wicker suitcase with a nametag. Judging from its appearance, it did not belong to anyone in our group, which was a great relief. The suitcase belonged to some Japanese person who had been living in Korea until the end of the war, and who had now been forced to return home. The suitcase contained the valuables of someone who had perhaps lived in Korea for a dozen years in total comfort and relative affluence. But now he had been forced to leave everything behind and flee with the bare minimum that he could carry in this small wicker suitcase. It was my guess that defeat in the war had devastated his spirit to the point where he could not wait for safe passage home. Stripped of the power of rational thought, he had risked his life on a small boat to flee to the safety he so desperately longed for. But that boat had gone down and taken him with it.

If the boat had gone down in the dark sea at night, no one could have survived the disaster. But perhaps somewhere hidden in the dark waves surrounding us, someone was still struggling to live. I wondered how many people had lost their lives in this disaster. A deep sense of pity washed over me.

The Japanese had come to our land and lived there in comfort and affluence for 36 years. Much like a crow that usurps the magpie’s nest, they had seized all of our land and committed every form of evil deed. And now that the war had been lost, they were being evicted from the land they had expropriated.

What a stark contrast with our fate! We Koreans had been forcibly taken from our homes as conscripted workers and members of the Women’s Volunteer Corps, and had been forced to work as slaves in the land of our captivity. But now we had been liberated and were homeward bound as free men.

People returning home from two countries bound together by destiny were now crossing the vast expanse of the same stormy sea in opposite directions. Defeated in war, the Japanese were driven from the land of their occupation and fleeing for the safety of their homeland. But this group had

drowned at sea before they could ever set foot in their homeland. How sad it was to contemplate their misfortune, but perhaps this was the retributive force of karma at work.

We had witnessed the sad demise of others caught in the raging billows, but the force of the storm was too real for us to pass it off as someone else's misfortune. Who could guarantee that we would be able to reach our destination safely? We were lost in gloomy thoughts.

We were hungry, but there was nothing to eat, and there was nothing we could do because of the storm and fear. Finally, we had no choice but to return to the dark box where there was not enough room to sit or to stand. The box was filling up with water, and with every jostle of the boat, we were treated to the putrid smell of rotting fish. As the water kept on rising, soon each jostle would fill our mouth and nose with filthy seawater. The box had become a living hell. This small fish-transporting boat was being tossed about by the waves like a worn out wooden clog. It felt as though it could capsize at any moment, but strangely enough it continued to weave its way through the stormy sea.

I could not tell how much time had elapsed, but again it was becoming difficult to breathe. It no longer mattered to us whether we would live or die, so we climbed out of the box again and hugged the mast. The wind and rain were as strong as ever.

Since departing Hiroshima on September 8, we had eaten one rice ball for each meal, but today we had missed two meals. The hunger made things only worse. We had come to the point where it did not matter whether we would live or die. All that we wanted to know was how this ordeal would end. We should have waited a little longer in Hiroshima to make this voyage safely on a big passenger ship. What's more, we could have gone home without paying a cent for the passage. But it was too late now for regrets.

It was before sunrise that we heard the captain conferring with his crew in a low voice. Because of all the wind and rain, all that we could make out was that they were talking about a harbor.

"There should be a harbor around here, but it's too dark to tell. Just keep looking." The captain was walking around the deck and peering nervously into the darkness. We had no idea how far we had come and what harbor the captain was looking for. In any case, it seemed that we had survived the storm. It did not matter whether we were approaching a port or just an uninhabited island. So long as there was land to stand on, we would live. These men had spent all their lives at sea, and the most violent storms could not defeat them or break their will. Finally, the crew spotted a small port on the northern tip of Tsushima Island. [Translator's note: This may have been Hitakatsu Port.] In total darkness, we slowly approached a black object, which turned out to be an island.

On Tsushima Island

The waves became calmer as we approached, and the captain carefully maneuvered his boat past a narrow inlet and into an expansive harbor. In the dim light, we could see that a large number of small boats were moored throughout the harbor. The captain finally looked up to speak. "We're safe! All of us, the crew and the two of you, have survived the storm. There is nothing more to worry about." For a change, the captain looked bright and cheerful.
Kim Thae-sik and I jumped up and hugged the captain. "Thank you!" Both of us were crying tears of joy. Joined by the two crew members, the five of us held each other overwhelmed in ecstasy.

The captain started to speak in a muted voice:

> We are all safe. The Genkai Sea, with its tall waves, is difficult to cross even under normal conditions. To that was added the fury of a powerful typhoon. It is nothing less than a miracle that we made it across. I have to say that we were all extremely lucky. We could not have survived without divine protection.

I totally agreed with what the captain had said. We owed our lives to divine grace and intervention. I realized that my path had crossed with that of yet another savior.

The captain piloted his boat as close as possible to land and dropped anchor. The five of us then gathered on the deck and sat together. There was no cabin to protect us from the wind and rain, and the roof covering the small captain's cabin had been blown off. There we sat exposed to the driving rain. The captain spoke again, struggling to control the emotions that were welling up in him:

> I have made my living as a sailor for a couple of decades, but have never before experienced such a dangerous voyage. I guess no one among the five of us was fated to die last night. We were extremely lucky. I believe we made it through only because we stopped to fully repair the engine when it was giving us trouble at the start of our voyage yesterday. If the engine had died on us in the storm, we would have either gone adrift in the wide expanse of the sea or capsized. It was a very close call. All of us were very lucky.

The captain was beaming with joy, and the others shared in his elation as we listened. Dawn was approaching, and we could finally see each other. We all looked strange, especially Kim and I. Having spent the night in the filthy fish box, we looked like two torn pieces of rags that had been pulled out of a dirty garbage dump. We were aware that we looked pathetic. Kim and I had no other choice but to take off our filthy work clothes, wash them in the sea and put them back on.

September 12: Kim and I had survived the storm to arrive safely on Tsushima Island. But what about the others? What had become of the mother ship that had gone ahead of us? I questioned the captain. He replied:

> I'm quite sure they are safe. The probability of being shipwrecked or sinking is actually quite low if you have an experienced captain. If they are safe, chances are that they are somewhere inside this harbor. We will wait for full daylight and search the harbor.

For a brief moment, I felt relieved. But then I remembered the face of that incompetent Japanese captain who we had hired in Hiroshima and began to worry again. In any case, we would have to search the harbor. When I prodded the captain to hurry up and start the search, Kim started to grumble. "Don't forget they left the two of us on a stalled boat and went on ahead without us. They were only thinking about their own safety."

Kim was still angry and could not forgive the others for abandoning us. I tried to calm him saying, "I can't say that what they did was right. But maybe the situation was out of their control and they left against their will. In any case, we survived and are alive. So, let's put all resentment aside and search for them."

Kim let out a small laugh and said, "I just wanted to say that and get it off my chest. Yes, let's start the search."

The captain turned to us with a suggestion. "You must be very hungry. Go on land and find something to eat." He then gave us 100 yen. We had changed into our old work clothes before boarding the boat and were carrying no money with us. With 100 yen in our pocket, we walked to the town. It was still raining lightly. The town was totally surrounded by tall mountains, and the harbor marked the only break in the mountain range. This was an excellent natural harbor protected on all sides by mountains that ensured that nothing more than a breeze would touch the surface of the harbor's calm waters. This was a port with many fishing vessels that chased their catch in either the shallow coastal waters or the deeper waters of the open sea. The small harbor was filled with many fishing vessels and cargo ships that had sought refuge from the typhoon in these guarded waters. Kim and I walked the pier to check the moored ships one by one, looking with hope to find our mother ship. But we could not find the ship we were looking for. What had happened to the mother ship and all our colleagues?

On the other hand, if the mother ship had made it to this harbor, there was no need for us to go looking for it. By now, our colleagues would be noisily searching the town for something to eat. Who could expect 100 young men to go about looking for food in silence? Did that Japanese captain lose his ship in the storm? Was it possible that they had found refuge in some other harbor, or were they still at sea? What in the world had happened to them?

Kim turned to me saying listlessly, "I guess the other ship has gone down. That Japanese captain probably lost his ship and all its passengers. Just remember how incompetent and accident prone he was from the start." Kim let out a long and troubled sigh.

We looked for a place to eat and satisfy our hunger. This was a small fishing village with many diners that opened early in the morning to serve the crew of ships that stopped by. We ate and decided to walk about the town. This island was Japanese territory, but had none of the scars of war that marred the mainland. Where were the razed homes and the burnt corpses? Where had the atomic bomb been dropped? Who here knew or had even heard of the bomb? The war had not in any way touched this peaceful fishing village.

This quiet and romantic little port town was inhabited by warmhearted people. All that this town had were inns and eating and drinking establishments serving the many sailors and fishermen that stopped by. Returning to the boat, we reported to the captain that our search for the other ship had been unsuccessful. The captain looked perplexed:

> If the ship hasn't made it to this harbor, there is an 80 to 90 percent chance that it has gone down. Any captain who has sailed between Shimonoseki and Busan would head directly for Busan under normal conditions, but would stop at this port in case of a typhoon and would wait out the storm in the safety of this harbor. There is another port on the southern tip of Tsushima, which is called Izuhara. If they are not here, I hope they made it safely to Izuhara.

The captain looked concerned. He continued:

> Do you realize how important weather forecasts and meteorological information are for navigators? I would have never embarked on this voyage if I had known that a typhoon was

approaching. When a typhoon warning is issued, all ships are supposed to seek refuge in a nearby harbor. Sadly, we have been operating in a state of complete confusion since the end of the war. All functions have become paralyzed, and there is no meteorological information available. That is why this happened to us.

He continued in a bragging tone, "I know you suffered a lot in the fish boxes, but you must realize how lucky you were to survive this storm." We repeatedly thanked the captain for having transported us safely.

The rain stopped by noon, and the wind began to die down. The captain invited us to go back on land to have a drink of sake. We found a drinking establishment and went in. The women greeted us as if they had been waiting for our arrival. A long time had passed since I had enjoyed sake served by a woman. This was a special treat indeed.

All of Japan suffered the effects of food shortages, and this small town was no exception. The drinks we had were a local brew of Tsushima Island made using sweet potatoes. In effect, it was the same as Korean makkori. A few drinks helped chase away our exhaustion.

We thanked the captain for the treat and went outside. The captain had told us that we would stay on this island until after the typhoon had completely passed. Kim and I went for a walk on the beach. Most of the homes were single-story structures. Sweet potatoes seemed to be the local specialty of this natural harbor and town surrounded on all sides by mountains. Shops here and there were selling cut and steamed sweet potatoes. My guess was that this was a substitute for snacks. Women were sitting on the streets and were hawking sea cucumbers, clams and abalone to people passing by. The two of us bought an assortment of foods and passed the time eating. I had previously heard that Tsushima Island was located between Japan and Korea. The island was closer to Korea than Japan, and they say that Busan could be seen from here on a clear day. I felt that I had come within a step or two of my home, and convinced myself that it would not hurt to spend a day of rest on this beautiful island before continuing my voyage home.

We had not had a decent meal for five days since leaving Hiroshima on September 8 and had become totally exhausted and stressed out in the storm. After filling our stomachs, we suddenly felt sleepy. Unable to stay awake, we fell asleep in the cabin, which of course was the roofless captain's cabin. The captain and his crew had not returned to the ship, and we guessed that they had taken a room in one of the inns. As for us, we could not afford to rent a room. All we had was 100 yen the captain had given us. The money we had left would have to pay for our passage from Busan to Keijo (Seoul).

To Busan

September 13: The sun was rising on a new day under perfectly clear skies. The typhoon had passed, and the winds and rain were gone. What they say about clear weather after a typhoon was true.

The captain was back and was apologetic. "I feel bad we spent the night in the inn and left you out here." He then gave his orders, "The sky is clear, and we will leave immediately. Hurry and eat something before we start out." It seems this will be the long-awaited day of setting foot in the homeland.

It seemed all the ships moored in the harbor were simultaneously leaving, each for its own destination. The narrow outlet to the open sea was crowded with ships revving their engines and raring to be on their way. These were all people who had survived a life-and-death crisis. Some were returning to Korea, and others were returning to Japan. Some were happy and hopeful, and others were gloomy and downcast. Our boat left the harbor slowly. The sea was still a little choppy, but otherwise, conditions were ideal for crossing over to Korea. Most of the ships that left the harbor with us were either fishing boats or cargo ships. There were no passenger ships in sight. Nonetheless, our small, fish-transporting boat was laughably small and battered compared to the vessels that surrounded us. The stark contrast made me realize anew how lucky we had been to survive the storm and take refuge in the harbor. Yes, it was a miracle we were still alive. I began to appreciate why our captain from Gyeongsang Province had spoken so boastfully.

The island of Tsushima was now behind us. Just about when Tsushima was no more than a faint blur on the horizon, we spotted a passenger ship that was coming from the direction of Japan. It was surprisingly big. I felt jealous as I gazed at it. I too would have been travelling in perfect safety and comfort on a ship like that if I had waited a little longer. It was too late to rue the choice I had made. In any case, my homeland was now within reach.

The rough waves and winds of yesterday were back to greet us once we reached the open sea. Of course, it was not as wild as yesterday, but still we could see how the big passenger ship was being buffeted by the waves. The crew said that on a clear day, Busan was visible from this spot. We trained our eyes on the horizon hoping to catch a glimpse of home, but nothing could be seen.

Kim and I again sat holding each other with the mast between us. The waves came over the side of the small boat with a loud splash. Soon we were completely drenched and shivering like two drowning rats. Yet, we considered ourselves fortunate because the captain did not order us into the fish boxes. When would we reach Busan? It made me nervous and impatient to think how close we were now. Kim, who was watching the horizon, suddenly let out a cry. “Jeong, isn’t that Busan in the distance? Look in that direction!” He was right. There was a city slowly emerging on the horizon. Knowing that we had finally arrived home, I sighed a huge sigh of relief. Why is Busan so far? Is this boat making any progress? Home was in sight, but it did not seem that we were getting any closer.

It was a little after 2 p.m. when we finally arrived at Busan Port of our beloved homeland. So many vessels, both large and small, were moored in the harbor. The crew tethered our small boat at the end of the pier.

The captain was beaming with a sense of accomplishment:

> Here we are in Busan, the destination that you were praying to see. Take care and travel safely to your hometowns where your families await you. I don’t think you have any money with you. Please use this for your travel.

The captain held out another 100 yen. How grateful we were to the captain. Kim and I thanked him again in the most courteous way that we knew. The captain then repeated what he had said before. “The five of us were extremely lucky. If it is our fate, I am sure we will meet again. Goodbye for now!”

The two of us walked up to the street that ran above the pier. It was as if we were in paradise, and all

that we saw was part of a dream. We came to a wide street and took time to look at ourselves. There we stood like two haggard beggars in filthy clothes. The stormy day and night that we had spent in the putrid fish box had taken its toll on us. We looked at each other and smiled wryly. But we were not ashamed, nor were we sad. The only emotions we felt were joy and elation. Our first task was to fill our stomachs. As we searched, we came to a major street to find many well-stocked food stalls on both sides of the street. They were selling foods and drinks that we were familiar with from the past. Yes, this was what we were eating until ten months ago! White rice and kimchi, pickled radish, mixed vegetables and stewed fish. My mouth watered at the sight of these delicious foods. We paid 5 yen each for a bowl of rice and ate to our heart's content. We felt revived. An old woman watching us eat said, "You are not people coming home. You look like you just got off a fishing boat. How did you manage to come across in the typhoon?" We could not blame her for what she was saying because our bodies reeked of fish.

After some discussion, we decided to head back to the port. The *Ujina Maru* should be moored somewhere in the port. We had to find that ship. We needed to confirm that our colleagues were safe and alive, and also pick up our baggage. Our clothes and what little money we had were in our baggage.

But the *Ujina Maru*, the Japanese ship that was carrying our colleagues, was nowhere to be seen. Could it be that the ship left Busan while we were waiting for fair weather on Tsushima Island? Otherwise, had they been shipwrecked? The anxiety was becoming too much to bear. As our captain had suggested, suppose they had taken refuge in some other port on Tsushima. Even then, they should have arrived by now.

I said to Kim that probably the others had already left for Seoul and suggested that we also hurry on to Seoul. So, we headed off to Busan Station. On the way, we passed No. 1 Pier (the terminus for passenger ships), where large crowds had gathered to welcome our compatriots returning from various foreign ports. With speakers and megaphones in hand, the people who were on hand to welcome travelers were rushing those coming off ships and taking their hands to greet them. "We know what you have suffered, but you are finally home now!" It was as if they were welcoming their own family members as they showered those who were returning with kindness. It pained us to watch this scene unfold before us. There we stood as two beggars in tattered clothes and full of regret.

Why was this happening? The two of us had lived through the same hardships as these people coming home, and walked the same tightrope of life and death. No, we had tasted much more suffering and pain than most people. Then why the difference in how we were being treated? We had paid for our own passage and experienced incredible suffering on our voyage home and had finally arrived alive, but in tatters. We too were coming back to our homeland!

The people who were being welcomed so grandly had made the passage on a big passenger ship. They had crossed in comfort and safety, and didn't even have to pay! Standing there like two hapless beggars, no one on the pier bothered to even look at us, let alone welcome us. People who didn't know the truth were probably sneering at us, thinking that we were taking advantage of the occasion to beg on the crowded pier.

But we could not blame or hate anyone. This was the outcome of our own decision and we had invited this upon ourselves. A little more patience and we would have been able to return in comfort as they

had done. What was our hurry that we had to return home in this terrible state? There was nothing we could do but to lament our misfortune. Even so, it dawned on us that we had managed to return home alive.

Chapter 8

Back Home and Afterwards

From Busan to Seoul

When we arrived at Busan Station, a train was waiting to leave for Seoul (Keijo). As we were buying our tickets, someone called out to us with a quizzical look, "Are you two returning from abroad?" We answered that we were, and gave him a brief version of our story. "You have been through so much, so much!" Saying this, he held out two tickets and told us to hurry and board the train. This was a great help because we had so little money.

On the train, we were lucky enough to find a seat. Everyone on the train was warmhearted and kind to each other. The train was filled with joyous laughter because the majority of the passengers were returning home from foreign lands. Very soon, people were treating each other as if they were old friends, and exchanging stories of where they had been and the hardships they had endured. Passengers shared the food that they had bought in Busan, and everyone ate with no thought to what belonged to whom. How beautiful the world would be if our community and our society were always kindhearted and considerate like this. It was good to be treated to food, but sadly we had nothing to share with the others, as we were no better than two destitute beggars.

The train finally pulled out of Busan Station. We were not returning home dressed in silk and brocade, but nevertheless this was a joyful homecoming. The train was a local train that made numerous stops. It would run for a little while and stop. At this pace, there was no telling when we would arrive in Seoul.

It was already dark when the train came to a long mountain pass. I did not know where we were, but it seemed the train was losing speed and was going to slip back down the hill. After a long struggle, the train finally made it over the pass. The old locomotive running on an inferior grade of fuel was fighting with all its might to pull an overloaded train. I gathered that we had just made it over the Chupungnyeong Pass, which meant we were near the halfway mark. It was downhill after the Chupungnyeong Pass, and the train thereafter began to pick up speed.

September 14, 1945: The sun dawned on a new day, the long-awaited day when I would return home. We became nostalgic as we neared home, but it was not as though there were no worries our minds.

What has happened to our colleagues who went ahead of us? What am I to do if their ship did not make it? How about my baggage? If my colleagues had not arrived safely, my baggage would also be missing. Do I have to return home looking so miserable and ragged?

Why was I worrying about my baggage when the fate of our 98 colleagues was in the balance? As the saying goes, "Save a drowning man and he begins to ask about his possessions." I guess I was no exception.

The train finally arrived at Yeongdeungpo Station at around 1:00 p.m. This was my second home,

the home that I had left ten months ago. Fond memories filled my mind. But as I looked around, everything looked sad and out of place. Nothing had changed since the day I left, but for some reason, an awkward cloud of desolation hung over the town. I was trying to understand what had changed. I started walking faster toward my home located near the ward office. The door to my house was locked. Thinking perhaps my wife had gone to her aunt's home, I went to the landlord to inquire about my family's whereabouts. I was taken aback by his answer. "An evacuation order was issued in this area shortly before the war ended. Your wife loaded all her belongings on a bullock cart and went back to her hometown with the two children." How happy I would have been if they were there to greet me!

All alone in this city with two small children, my wife had nowhere to go but to her hometown. Maybe she thought I had died in Hiroshima. I could not afford to waste any time. I had to let everyone know that I was back in Korea alive and well. I could not wait to be reunited with all those who were worried for me—my parents, my siblings, and my wife and children.

I went to see my former employer who lived next door. His Korean name was Lee Su-bok, and his adopted Japanese name was Koichi Fukumoto. While all the members of his family were very happy to see me, his wife's sister, Ryoko Miyamoto, was particularly happy to see me and could not hide her excitement. I could sense that they were disturbed by my appearance and the putrid smell of fish that I had carried in with me. They observed me with a puzzled look, obviously wanting to ask what had happened to me. But I left after briefly exchanging greetings because Kim Thae-shuk, my companion on the voyage from Japan, was waiting outside.

Seeing me emerge from my neighbor's house, Kim said, "The family must have been very happy to see you. I want to join my family as soon as possible." He sounded impatient and distracted. How could he be blamed?

I begged him to be patient. "There is a family named Lim in this neighborhood and that is the home of one of our co-workers. Let's go to his house and see whether the others are back or not. If they are not back, let's return to Busan to look for them." He rejected my proposal outright:

> If they are not dead, they will come home alive. If they are dead, they will not come back to life even if we go to Busan. They abandoned us on a stalled boat because they were only interested in saving themselves. Think about what they did to us. They are the ones that should be looking for us. It was a miracle that we survived and now we are back in Seoul. What reason do you have for going back to Busan? Would they come looking for us? No, I don't think anyone would come looking for us. But I appreciate that you feel responsible as the person in charge of the group. That's understandable.

Kim and I said farewell to each other, promising to meet again. "Jeong, I am sure the others will come back by today or tomorrow. Let's just go home and wait for them." I watched him walk away, staring at his back with an empty feeling. I decided that Busan could wait for now. Instead, I went immediately to Lim's house to find out what I could.

I headed toward the Asahi Warehouse located close to Lim's house. Hoping and praying that he was already home, I knocked at the door with my heart beating wildly. "Is Lim home?"

After a few moments, a woman came to the door. I assumed she was his wife. “My husband is not here. Who are you and what can I do for you,” she asked. When I heard those words, it was as though I had been hit in the back of the head with full force. I didn’t know how to answer her question. “I knew him well in the past, and I was wondering whether he had returned from Japan.” She took on a dark and worried look, and said:

> Not only has he not returned, but I have not received any news from him for quite a while. I don’t even know whether he is alive or dead. Rumors have it that a terrible bomb called the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and the whole city has been laid waste. I have no idea whether my husband was lucky enough to survive the fire that enveloped the city.

Tears were welling up in her eyes as she sighed. This was not someone else’s problem that I could ignore. It was the darksome fear and anxiety that had gripped the homes of all conscript workers sent to Japan.

I could not help myself from saying, “I believe he is alive and I’m sure he will come home soon. So, don’t be anxious and be patient.” I wasn’t thinking what effect my words may have. “I met someone who came back from Hiroshima and he said that he had just recently seen your husband in Mukainada. What I heard was that he was returning on the first available ship.”

These words completely changed her countenance. “Please tell me, is this true? What is the name of the person who told you this, and where does he live? I will go right away to meet him myself.” She begged me to tell her his name.

I had backed myself into an awkward dilemma. I could not tell her the whole truth, nor could I say that I didn’t know the name of this fictional man. My only choice was to make up a story on the spot.

“I met this man several days ago in Jongno and he told me about your husband. I don’t know where he lives. I am so sorry that I can’t help you find him.” She answered, “No, it is such a relief just to know that he is alive. Thank you so much for coming to see me to share this wonderful news.”

I left the house, promising to visit her again. I felt that I had no choice but to look for a train to Busan. I had to continue the search. Kim had no responsibility hanging over him. He was not the leader of the group who was responsible for 100 co-workers. If they are alive, they will eventually return to their homes. But how about the remains of our fallen co-workers? How about the documents that came with the remains? I was responsible for all of that, and I was responsible for bringing closure to their families.

As Kim Thae-shuk had said, our 98 colleagues had abandoned us in the middle of the sea. We two had boarded the decrepit fish-transporting boat because no one else was prepared to do so. Our helpless boat was being repaired when they left us. They not only failed to extend a helping hand, but they simply abandoned us. Yes, it was foolish to be driven by a sense of responsibility for the very people who had coldly abandoned us. Assuming that they arrive home safely, who among them would take care of the responsibilities to our co-workers’ bereaved families? Where would they keep the remains of the 20 deceased until they had been all handed them over to the families? What would be done with the remains of those whose families could not be located? Perhaps the documents could be forgotten, but the remains could not be dismissed so easily. It made me feel terrible to think of these things. The

remains we were bringing back were not just for one or two people. In any case, I decided to at least go to the station where I could check the schedule for trains going to Busan.

Miracle at Yeongdeungpo Station

I could not believe my eyes when I arrived at the station. My colleagues were standing there before my eyes. Were these the ghosts of my friends? But the people exiting the station were my colleagues! There was no mistake. It was as if I had arrived at the station in time to welcome them home. When I was sure it was them, I yelled out and ran straight to them. We hugged and cried uncontrollably. Those who came out of the station later said, "It's you, Chiyama! We were wondering who it was. So you came back safely too!" Everyone was overcome with emotion, shedding tears of joy and tears of relief.

It was my conviction that I had already returned the name Chiyama to the Emperor of Japan at noon on August 15. It was a name that had been forced on me, and I had given it back for good. Now back in my liberated homeland, it saddened me to be called Chiyama. The three Chinese characters of my name that had been handed down to me from my forbearers had been locked away in a box stowed away in the attic together with our genealogy book. Chiyama was the name by which I had been called. How could I allow a name to affect me at such a time as this? Chiyama or Jeong Chung-hae—what difference could it make in the overwhelming happiness of this moment!

Those who were from Yeongdeungpo were now exiting the station. There were many of them, and one person brought my trunk and rucksack to me. How grateful I felt. But I didn't spot anyone carrying the boxes containing the remains of our co-workers.

We all gathered in the square facing the station, and I told my story of how I had come to the station. Hearing my story, they said, "Who can believe this coincidence! Thank you Chiyama. This is all like a beautiful dream."

I continued with my story:

> Kim and I looked for you, first at Tsushima Island and next at Busan. But there was absolutely no hint of you anywhere, and we decided to take the train to Seoul. Kim went ahead to see his family. His feelings were really hurt. I don't need to repeat this, but the two of us boarded that boat when no one else was willing to go. We did it for everyone else, but you ultimately abandoned us. But what's important is that we all survived, and we are all alive. Could there be any greater joy than meeting each other again?

Each person then went his own way laughing and saying, "There is no end to the stories of the hardships we endured. We can share the details later, but for now let's hurry back home to our families."

I called out to Lim and explained the conversation that I had just had with his wife and joined him in his return home. Coming to the door of his house, Lim called out to his wife in a loud voice, "Hey, I'm home!" She came running and was so surprised that I thought she was going to faint. Seeing me standing next to her husband only added to her surprise. She embraced her husband and cried and screamed with joy. She had given up on her husband, believing him to be dead. But here he was

standing safe and sound before her. The two seemed to have forgotten that I was standing there as they shared their joy.

Watching Lim and his wife, I was suddenly swept away by a longing to be reunited with my own family members who were waiting for my return. But I had responsibilities to take care of. It was my duty to find the bereaved families of my co-workers. First, I had to apologize to Lim's wife for telling her a lie. Together with my apology, I gave a full account of what had happened. All that she could do was to thank me repeatedly.

I too wanted a full account of what had happened to the other ship. Lim sat up and began to tell his story:

> First of all, I want to apologize from the depth of my heart to you for making a sacrifice for the remaining 98. I am so sorry and deeply ashamed for what happened. It was for the remaining 98 that you boarded the fish-transporting boat that no one else was willing to board. While your boat was being repaired, some of the people on our ship became increasingly nervous and went to the captain and asked him whether he could cross the sea without the help of the fish-transporting boat. The Japanese captain was already feeling aggrieved that he had been forced to repay the 9,000 yen that was handed to the Korean captain for leading the way. So he boasted that he could make it alone. Although the war had been lost, the Japanese captain still wallowed in a false sense of superiority that made him feel, "Why would I need the help of a Korean?" With this response, some of our co-workers started to argue that we should go ahead at low speed so that the other boat could catch up as soon as its repairs were completed. Without clearly thinking the situation through, this argument carried the day and the ship went ahead, leaving your stalled boat on the open sea.
>
> Later when we looked back, the fish-transporting boat was nowhere in sight, and the storm was steadily gaining force. The ship began to dance wildly on the waves, and we all became very disturbed. Some said that this was happening to us because we had abandoned two of our colleagues on the stalled boat. We all realized that we had made a terrible mistake. But the regrets came too late and there was nothing left for us to do but to worry. We began to feel that the situation for the small, stalled boat was hopeless. Jeong, I don't know how to apologize to you. Please forgive us.

Lim repeated his apology again and again. He then continued his story:

> One of our colleagues began to say that no human being would do what we had done. The point he was making was that if our two friends were lucky enough to survive the storm, how would we show our faces to them? Even worse, he asked, what would happen if our friends have perished in the storm? How could we with clear conscience pray for their souls? How would we face their bereaved families? These were deeply disturbing questions that drowned us in fresh waves of remorse and anxiety. How surprised and happy we were to see you at Yeongdeungpo Station. In truth, it was our duty to go looking for you and Kim, but no one among us was prepared to take the initiative. As we approached home, people even stopped talking about it. But you did the exact opposite and went out to look for us. I am so ashamed that our reunion came about in this way.

It was my turn to speak. “I believe we were all able to return home safely through divine protection and assistance. Let me now tell you about my experience at sea.” I briefly recounted my side of the story, to which he responded with a long sigh, “You experienced the same hardships as we did.”

As she listened to our two stories, Lim’s wife interjected with occasional sighs and joyful refrains, “It was all the will of Heaven and made possible through divine intervention and assistance.” Lim smoked a cigarette before continuing with his story of hardships:

> As I said before, our ship was divided between those who wanted to go ahead and those who argued in favor of waiting. There were those who strongly opposed sailing away and abandoning the two of you on that battered boat. In the end, we took a vote and the majority favored sailing ahead. Very soon after that, the storm began to batter the ship and we thought the ship would capsize at any moment. We were all resigned to the prospect of dying at sea. The ship sailed ahead in total darkness. Deafening thunder and blinding flashes of lightning surrounded us. We were convinced each wave that assailed the ship would swallow us whole and take us down to the abyss. Both people and baggage were thrown about widely, and even the boxes of remains were turned upside down. It was a terrible scene from hell, and we felt more dead than alive. This went on for such a long time that the passengers each retreated into his own state of insanity.
>
> In total darkness there was nothing that we could do to counter the stunning violence of waves. At about this time, someone began to shout, “Doesn’t anyone have any ideas for getting us out of this mess? Someone, hurry up and do something!” Others began to repeat the same cry, yelling and begging for some way to save the 100 lives on the ship. Someone yelled back, “Remember the saying—A cure if you don’t know, and a disease if you know. What I say is plainly counter to all principles of morality, but do we have any choice other than to throw the remains overboard and give our dead colleagues a burial at sea?” He was saying that the human bones we were carrying had earned the wrath of heaven as proven by the frightening thunder and lightning. It was an extreme argument, but he claimed the remains would ultimately sink the ship. When they heard this, the captain and his crew turned pale with fear and began asking whether this was true, and demanded to know who had brought the remains on board. The captain was furious, and said he would have never allowed the bones on his ship if he had been told in advance, and proclaimed he would have never left port if he knew he was carrying human remains. “I have made a living at sea for decades, and have never before had any accidents before this voyage. But this voyage with all its misfortune has been haunted from the start. The spirits of dead young men are obstructing our voyage because they are angry that a Japanese captain is steering the ship!” Finally, the captain called out to all of us. “If you want to survive this storm, you must immediately throw the remains overboard.”

The Japanese are superstitious and believe in the powers of the gods more than anyone else. This captain was no exception. The human heart can be deceptive, and they say drowning men clutch at straws. Seen from this perspective, Lim’s story and its outcome were very believable:

> The remains of our colleagues will cost us our lives! We are on the brink of shipwreck and drowning. Let’s give them a burial at sea so that we ourselves can live. What good will it do the bereaved families if we die? We need to live to be able to report to the bereaved. Everyone

agreed with this conclusion, and the decision was made to give our 20 colleagues a burial at sea. These were colleagues with whom we had shared all our joys and sorrows. On the other hand, it was their lifeless bones that we were carrying. We would have been uncomfortable to be with these remains even if they belonged to our own parents and brothers. In the end, the truth was that everyone was spooked and scared by the remains we were taking back. Once the fear had been brought out into the open by one of the passengers, the others hurriedly agreed.

One of the passengers was a priest from Jongno, and he stood in front of the remains and began to say a Buddhist prayer. "O ye colleagues that have sadly gone before us and fallen in a foreign land. We beg your understanding of our terrible predicament and the sorrow that besets us at the thought that we are unable to deliver your remains to the bosom of your families. We stand before you in prayer, asking for your assistance so that we may safely return to our homeland. We solemnly pray that you will all be reborn in paradise." After these words by the priest, the remains were one by one thrown to the waves as all of us stood weeping.

This was the second farewell between colleagues that had shared ten months of joy, hardship and sorrow. We had walked together on the bitter edge of life and death, but one group was now making a joyful return home while the other group, making the same trip in total silence, was being entrusted to the care of the raging sea. Lim continued his narrative:

Immediately after the last set of remains was consigned to the furious billows, the ship was hit by lightning, which broke the mast in two. Was this a mere coincidence? It certainly was a mysterious occurrence. The Japanese captain battled the raging sea until he was finally able to bring the ship to the vicinity of our homeland.

It seemed that this woeful episode had taken place on the same day that we were resting on Tsushima Island. While we rested and waited for the storm to pass, the other ship had remained at sea through the entire night and the following day without taking refuge. The captain had not been able to find a safe harbor. The captain had finally navigated the ship to where land could be seen on the horizon when it experienced yet another misfortune. It had run aground on a rocky reef. Fortunately, the damage was minor. They could see a port in the distance, but it was still too far to signal for help. The ship started up but immediately stalled. So with land finally in sight, the ship could not go forward nor go in reverse. The mast was destroyed. The engine was working but the ship was not moving. It was complete bedlam inside the ship because seawater was beginning to seep into the ship from the damaged hull. There was no mast to raise the sails and the screw was no longer turning. The accident-prone captain turned pale, became totally mum and began to shiver uncontrollably. The passengers questioned the engineer who replied, "There is no problem with the engine, and I can't figure out what's wrong."

Pandemonium broke out on the small ship. Someone eventually came up with an idea. "We can't just sit here and wait. Somebody should dive under the ship and see what the problem is and try to repair it." One of the passengers who had previously worked on a fishing boat in Incheon stepped forward. "I will go under the ship and take a look," he said. A rope was tied around his waist and he jumped into the sea. He came back to report that one of the bolts on the screw was loose and the propeller was not turning. He took a monkey wrench, jumped back in and tightened the bolt. The engine was restarted,

and the ship finally began to move again. The captain and engineer were overjoyed, and thanked the man profusely. As the ship approached the harbor, a group of fishermen standing on the wharf gave a warm welcome to the group and sent out a fishing boat to meet the ship. Most of the passengers boarded this boat, and finally everyone was able to go on land safely.

Lim continued:

> As we climbed up on the wharf, everyone was saying that our narrow escape from disaster was divine retribution for having abandoned our two companions in the middle of the sea. We were all full of regret, but these were empty words. Our relatively large ship had barely made it out of the storm. How then could that much smaller fish-transporting boat emerge safely from this vicious storm? No one believed that your boat could weather that storm and stay afloat.

I responded to Lim, "If these words are true, I want to thank you for caring and worrying about us. We thought we had been completely forgotten." Lim then repeated his apologies, "Please forgive us. We have really shamed ourselves."

Having heard his story, I realized that Lim and his companions had suffered even more than Kim and I had. Their ship had landed at a small fishing village near Pohang. As it turned out, the ship had gone adrift and was carried far off course by the fury of the typhoon.

The passengers were welcomed and treated very warmly by the people of the small fishing village. They rested for one day and left the next morning for Daegu, going on foot and on horse-drawn carts. At Daegu, they boarded trains bound for their homes. This would mean they had boarded the next train after the one I had taken.

I had just been told that the remains of our colleagues had been given a burial at sea. I felt very sorry for the bereaved families, but this made matters easier for me. The questions of where to store the remains and how to deliver them to the families had been weighing down heavily on me for days.

I changed my clothes at Lim's house, finally getting out of my smelly work clothes. Promising that we would meet again, I took my baggage and left Lim's house to go back to the house where my former employer, Lee Su-bok, was living. The members of the household looked at me in surprise and asked, "You were here a little while ago in your work clothes with nothing in your hands. What happened?" From there, I went directly to my aunt's home, which was in the same neighborhood.

At my aunt's home, I met my uncle, Chae kyu-seon, my cousin, Myeong-seok, and his sister. They were all very happy to see me, but my aunt was nowhere to be seen. A mortuary tablet had been placed in the large wooden-floored room, and I was told my aunt had died shortly after liberation. She had been sick, and never had a chance to enjoy the freedom that had been regained.

This aunt was my mother's older sister. She and her husband had moved to Seoul when they were young, and had taken up residence in Gongdeokri. They later moved to this house in Yeongdeungpo to work in a company that was managed by a Japanese named Kamiyoshi. It was with an introduction from my uncle that I came to Yeongdeungpo when I was 19, and started working at the Sowha-Kirin Beer Company (the predecessor of today's Oriental Brewery Company). I worked at the brewery for

about six months before going back home. Then, in the following year, I returned to Seoul and began working at the Fukumoto Concrete Plant that was managed by my former employer.

My aunt had left home at a young age and had experienced many hardships. She had been blessed with two children. Her daughter, who was the older of the two, had married and was widowed at a young age. In addition to her husband, she also lost her oldest son. After her elder son's death, she took her second son and returned to her parents' home. My aunt had raised this son and had grown old in an environment of misfortune.

Performing my Final Duty

I went back to my employer's house late that night. They had stayed awake, and were waiting for me. Surrounded by the members of the household, I stayed up all night telling them stories of what I had experienced. My tales of hardship knew no end, and I got carried away and kept talking for hours. On the surface, my employer's family appeared to be enjoying my stories, but at the same time there was an inexplicable gloom in the room. I concluded that the current situation of the Fukumoto family was exactly the opposite of mine.

Lee Su-bok was obviously Korean. But Lee Su-bok had gone to Japan as a child and had grown up there, and had returned to Korea as a young man with the Japanese name Koichi Fukumoto. He had then married a Japanese woman (Kiyoko Miyamoto) and lived in Korea as a quasi-Japanese citizen. At the end of the war, the Japanese went back home. But Koichi Fukumoto could not immediately shed his Japanese skin and return to being a full-fledged Korean.

I had worked for him during the past five to six years. What could I say to console and encourage him? What did the future hold for Lee Su-bok and for Koichi Fukumoto? Would he be able to live happily as a Korean in the newly liberated homeland?

I wondered how many other people were in the same position as Lee Su-bok. These misfortunes resulted from the tragedies that had assailed a weak and small nation. If there was anything that set him apart from his neighbors, it was that he had actively been pro-Japanese in an effort to lead a better existence than others. The greatest misfortune perhaps belonged to husbands and wives who were now separated by a difference in citizenship. How many of these couples were there, and were they not drowning in tears, in the newly liberated Korea that emerged from Japan's defeat?

I had experienced a sad farewell with Miss Okada in Hiroshima just before returning home. How ironic it was that I would be made to play the same role in the human drama that was playing out in Yeongdeungpo. There they stood before me, my former employer's wife, Kiyoko, and her sister, Ryoko Miyamoto. I had been reunited with a platonic love interest, but she would soon have to leave Korea forever under the Japanese Expulsion Order. The timing of the expulsion had not been finalized, but expulsion was her unavoidable fate. Our happy reunion after ten months of separation may have been marred by these thoughts, but we continued to share stories and memories late into the night.

September 15: The sun dawned on my first full day back in Yeongdeungpo. Exactly one week had passed since my departure from Hiroshima on September 8.

At dawn, I got up and posted the following sign in front of the office.

"Inquire within if you are the family of the following persons who perished in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima."

Members of the household were curious to know what this meant. I had told all of my stories to them but had left out the part about our co-workers' remains.

That afternoon, a young woman wearing white clothes came in to see me. She had heard the stories of our return from one of our co-workers. I expressed my condolences to this widow and handed her the document on her husband. It was a sad scene. All that remained of a son or husband was a piece of paper—a death notice. There were no remains to hand over to the unfortunate family. The notice simply read, "So-and-so person died on such-and-such date due to the atomic bomb." With that piece of paper in hand, a young woman would cry aloud, and a mother would weep quietly as she returned home. This sorrowful process was repeated time and again amidst ongoing celebrations of the long-awaited liberation. I do not have the words to express the emotions that raced through me as I performed this final duty. Had we not all lived under the same roof and suffered the same hardships? But I had returned alive and was delivering the death notices of my friends and co-workers who had perished in that hellish conflagration.

I had been told that the remains of the 20 deceased workers had been given a burial at sea while crossing the Genkai Sea. But how could I explain what had happened to the bereaved families? Hence, I kept my explanations to a minimum and concentrated on consoling the families. By the third day, all the death notices had been delivered to the bereaved. During these three days, the home of my former employer became a veritable house of mourning. Throughout the three-day period, Lee Su-bok and all the members of his family had been very understanding. Now I had completed all the duties that had been given to me when departing Hiroshima.

Home at Last

Finally I could return home. Unaware of my safe return, my family must be spending days of tears and sorrow, believing that I had perished. I could not waste any more time.

September 18: Early in the morning, I said my goodbyes to Lee Su-bok and his family, and stopped by at my aunt's home to see them for a last time. From there, I headed to Yeongdeungpo Station to board a train for Busan.

This was the same train I had boarded on December 9 of the previous year, feeling much like a soldier on the way to the battlefield, despairing that I would never live to return to my homeland. But today, I embarked the train with totally different emotions of joy and delight. As I looked out the window watching the scenery pass by, I was reminded of the words that Ryoko Miyamoto had whispered to me that morning. I was hurrying to leave the house that morning when she approached me and said:

> Mr. Jeong, I can imagine how happy your wife and children will be to see you. When will you come to Seoul next? As you know, I have to return to Japan. Perhaps I will leave without having a chance to see you again. Please take good care of yourself. She too was waiting for a passenger ship to cross the sea. If it is our destiny, we will meet again. So, goodbye for now.

The tears in her eyes clouded my heart.

I was lost in thought when someone yelled out. “It’s you, Chung-hae!” I turned around and saw an old friend from my home village. He was chuckling as he spoke:

> I knew you were in Japan. Are you going home now? All your family is well, but they are worried because they had not heard from you. I heard you were in Hiroshima, and also about that terrible bomb they call the atomic bomb. We were told that no one survived the bomb. Is it true you were in Hiroshima and are you on the way home now? Your family believes you’re dead. What great news that you’re alive and back!

He then continued with his own story:

> On August 15, as soon as we were liberated, the Japanese went into total panic and started preparing to go home. They sold all their household goods at next to nothing. In the towns and cities, this spawned a new business of buying and selling the goods that came out of Japanese homes. Several people from Jincheon, including Lee Baek-soe, came to Yeongdeungpo to take part in this business. But last night, Lee Baek-soe died due to unknown causes. I left the body in his room in the inn and am now going back to inform his family.

It was a sad story.

Lee Baek-soe had the misfortune of dying in the early post-liberation days of total confusion. Under these conditions, where could one go to seek justice? Those who died during these days of lawlessness and anarchy were truly unlucky, and their deaths were truly lamentable.

Lee Baek-soe had spent all of the war years living safely in his own home. But just as a new world was emerging that promised him freedom in his own homeland, he had died a miserable death in his pursuit of material wealth. He had acted unwisely and had robbed himself of the opportunity to see and enjoy the new world. In a sense, the demise of Lee Baek-soe was the result of the desperate poverty that prevailed under Japan’s colonial rule.

The train moved at a snail’s pace and finally reached Cheonan at 2 p.m. This was my destination, and I got off. The mid-September sun was already tilting toward the western mountains, and the bus to Jincheon had left. The charcoal-powered bus to Jincheon departed Cheonan Station twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. I had prepared myself for this possibility, but this would be a tough trek of more than 100 *li* (40 kilometers). To make matters worse, I was carrying heavy luggage. The next day was the harvest festival of Chuseok (similar to Japan’s Obon festival), and this was the first Chuseok of the post-liberation era. I wanted to make it home in time for this momentous festival so that the entire family could celebrate without a cloud hanging over them. Many others were walking the same road home. Some were carrying big bags and others were carrying small bags. Some were holding their luggage in their hands and others were hauling it on their shoulders. Everyone was in the same situation and driven by the same emotions.

According to the lunar calendar, this was the fourteenth night of August. The round moon shone in the heavens in its full splendor, lighting up the path as if it were midday. Mid-autumn was neither cold nor hot as I walked the moonlit road. Everyone was walking in silent determination, getting closer to

home with each step they took.

I am not sure what time it was when I passed Byeongcheon. Next came Dongmyeon, and then on to the Seongam Pass. When I finally came to the Sol Pass, the summit of Bonghwasan could be clearly seen. The town of Jincheon stood at the bottom of this final mountain pass, and my home was located about four kilometers from the town. The town of Jincheon was wrapped in silent sleep as I walked through it. Passing the marketplace, I crossed the Cheom River and descended the path behind Toni. In the moonlight, I could make out the dim outline of the entrance to the village in the distance. This was my home village of Gosu. My heart began to pound as I neared the village that had constantly appeared in my dreams. I had walked through the night covering more than 100 *li* (40 kilometers) while carrying my heavy luggage, but my feet felt light. I was 27 and at the prime of life. I arrived in front of Maesan and walked through a newly constructed road, which brought me to a narrow street. I was already weeping, and my heart was about to burst. All that was left for me to do was to walk through the communal cemetery, pass in front of my grandfather's grave, and I would be standing in front of my home.

I walked into the courtyard. This was still in the middle of the night. The surroundings were dark, and everyone was asleep. I stood in the middle of the wooden floored room and called out, "Mother! Mother!" With a quivering voice, I called out several times. Finally, someone came running out of a room demanding, "Who is calling his mother?" I was finally home, "It's me, Chung-hae." My mother asked in disbelief, "Is it really you Chung-hae? Are you really back or is this a dream?" She hugged me tightly as if to affirm whether I was standing there in the flesh. "Let me see you Chung-hae," she said.

She then raised her voice to the loudest she could manage. "Children, your father is back from Japan! Come and see him." People began to emerge from all the rooms. This was the long-awaited moment of our reunion. My wife, who was sleeping with the children in an annex, came rushing in. There I stood, the husband that she believed was dead, the husband that she had given up on seeing ever again. She ran to me, took my hands and said, "Thank you for coming home alive."

The whole house was now awake and caught up in a storm of joy and celebration. For almost a year, my family had been left worrying. Laughter had finally returned to my home. Just when all hope had been lost, the son, the husband and the father whose face the children did not even remember had come back home alive.

September 19, 1945: Today was August 15 by the lunar calendar, and the first Chuseok festival to be celebrated after liberation. This would be the most memorable festival to be celebrated in my home.

But how many others were celebrating this day with the same happiness as we were? Our compatriots, who had been torn away from their families by Japan, and taken to work under the most difficult conditions, were returning home, wave after wave. Our home was lively, celebrating a reunion with a son, husband and father whom all believed was dead. But what about our neighbor's home, the home of Lee Baek-soe? They would receive the unexpected news of the death of their son and husband at daybreak. From that moment, their home would be thrown into sorrowful mourning. In one home, the family was crying with joy to see the return of someone they thought was dead. In another home, the family was crying with grief to learn that one of their members who had gone to

Seoul to make a living was dead. How cruel this life could be?

What had become of the victims of the atomic bomb who we had left behind in Hiroshima? They had no hospital to go to, and were just lying in the dormitory. They had no recourse to doctors or to medicine, and no one even to care for them. All they could do was to wait for death to release them from their suffering. Would any of them recover and regain the strength to make the arduous journey home? How many were fated never to return home?

I owed my life to Miss Okada. If it had not been for her, I would have been killed in the atomic bomb blast. I wondered whether this savior of mine had safely returned to her hometown. Had she been reunited with her family, and was she sitting together with them, engaging in cheerful conversation? Would she ever recall the memories of what had happened at the No. 2 Dormitory in Mukainada? Would she ever remember the events that had transpired there during those tumultuous months?

My mind next wandered to the fate of the Japanese captain whose ship we had boarded in Hiroshima. He and his crew had gone out into the raging waters of the Genkai Sea for the want of money. Had they returned safely to Japan with their ship loaded with Japanese people fleeing Korea? Thinking back on the ten months that I had spent in Japan, I realized how crowded this period of my life was with dramatic events and crises.

I rested for a few days after returning home. But this could not go on forever. To make a fresh start in life, I set out again for Yeongdeungpo.

Opening the Yeongpo-tang Public Bath for Business

September 30, 1945: On this day, I returned to Yeongdeungpo and went directly to the home of my former employer, Lee Su-bok. The family was happy to see me. Ryoko was still waiting for passage back to Japan, and she too welcomed me warmly. After dinner, we sat and talked. Lee Su-bok anxiously spoke:

> I am so happy that you came to see us again. We were waiting for you. We want to discuss our future with you. As you know, Japan's defeat has turned me into a worthless person. From now on, I won't even be able to go out to work.

As previously mentioned, Lee Su-bok had taken the Japanese name Koichi Fukumoto. He had married a Japanese woman and had been living the privileged life of a quasi-Japanese citizen. Under the occupation of the Empire of Japan, he could strut about town with confidence and impunity. But in the newly independent nation of Korea, he would forever be rejected and disdained for having been pro-Japanese.

Lee Su-bok continued:

> Some of the Japanese I knew well left their buildings and businesses in my care when they returned home. My suggestion to you is to take one of these properties and manage it. If all goes well, you can eventually become the owner.

Then he started to list the possibilities.

When they were fleeing Korea, the Japanese clung to the hope that they would be back soon. Although this was nothing more than a vague and unsubstantiated hope, many had placed their assets in the care of their closest Korean friends.

The first property that Lee Su-bok mentioned was a public bath named Takara Onsen located behind Yeongdeungpo Station. This public bath had been managed by a widow named Kishi, and was ready to be immediately re-opened. (This is the same public bath that I had frequented before going to Japan.) Next on his list was a high-class Japanese house that was previously occupied by a carpenter named Abe. This was located in the Yeonji neighborhood facing the station. (Today, this is part of the Karubochon red-light district Galbochon in the Chagun Market, popularly known as Jagalmachi.) The third property included the house and all the equipment of a contractor named Hirayama, who lived under the elevated train tracks located across the street from the ward office. The fourth and last property was the Hirasawa Concrete Factory located at Wonhyo-ro.

Lee Su-bok spelled out his proposal. "Choose a property out of these four and manage it. Choose the one that interests you the most, the one you want to try your hand at." All of these properties could be acquired for less than 10 yen. Immediately after liberation, properties owned by Japanese were labeled "reverted properties." Any persons with ties to such property, or even any unrelated person, could claim it by moving in and taking up residence.

A month had passed since liberation, but confusion and the absence of law and order still prevailed. If this were a stable society, the most promising property would have been the Hirasawa Concrete Factory. The land covered an area of several hundred *pyeong* (1 *pyeong*= about 3.3 square meters). A two-story building with many pieces of equipment and tools was on the plot. Its location also made it the most valuable property among the four that had been proposed to me. But given the anarchic conditions, I could not imagine that this could be a stable and viable business. Among the four properties named by Lee Su-bok, construction and concrete manufacturing held out little immediate hope. The land and the buildings of these businesses had little or no value. The right choice would put me on an easy and comfortable road, while the wrong choice would saddle me with a life of hardship.

I suddenly remembered what had happened to us on the voyage home. The sign on the cliffs facing our ship as we left the waters off Yamaguchi Prefecture had directed us to "Turn Right," but the captain had chosen to turn left. This wrong turn brought tremendous suffering upon us. The Japanese captain had bragged that he knew the Seto Inland Sea like the back of his hand. But one small error had driven us to the brink of disaster and resulted in a big loss. The captain was made to return 9,000 yen of the money we had paid him. Knowledge was no guard against a small mistake that could lead to hardship, and I was now about to embark on the unchartered voyage of life.

After considering the four choices, I said, "I will manage the public bath." My conclusion was that running a bath was the best way to earn a living in the current environment. Lee Su-bok said he agreed with my choice. My idea was to operate the public bath and wait for things to settle down, and then I would return to my original business pursuits.

It seemed this was the idea that Lee Su-bok had from the beginning. In other words, Lee Su-bok intended to maintain his living by having me operate the public bath as its nominal owner. However, for appearance's sake, he wanted to present this to me as if I had a choice, and see what I had to say.

In any case, all was well. I would operate the public bath for the time being, and go back to the construction business when the time was right. Moreover, the bath was a perfect business for operating alone. The land covered an area of more than 150 pyeong (more than 500 square meters), and the front of the structure that housed the bath had two stories, with two housing units on the second floor. It was not a bad deal at all. Moreover, it was located near Yeongdeungpo Station. I felt great relief. Once again, I had moved to a new job and a new profession. Before being conscripted, I had worked as a clerk in a concrete factory. Next, as a conscripted worker, I had become a metalworker. Now, I would be moving to the service industry to operate a public bath. Any occupation would have been acceptable to me. All I wanted was a steady job.

October 2: After breakfast, I went to see the public bath, accompanied by Lee Su-bok's wife, Kiyoko Miyamoto, and her sister, Ryoko. We entered through the back door. The place was untidy, but the bath was ready to go into operation without much work. My guess was that the previous owner had left everything untouched, and fled immediately after hearing the broadcast of Japan's unconditional surrender at noon on August 15. The three of us worked to clean inside and outside the bathhouse, and we returned home when we were finished. After some discussion, we decided to open for business on October 5. This meant we would have to hurry to complete the necessary preparations. There was some coal left in the coalbin, and this would be enough to keep the business going for a while. We needed someone to operate the boiler, and hired the man who previously had this job. Finally, I put up a sign on the entrance. "Will open for business at 1 p.m. on October 5." The previous owner had lived in an old, Japanese-style wooden house that stood behind the bathhouse. The house was equipped with a Korean *ondol* floor-heating system and had a six-tatami mat room and another room the size of four-tatami mats. This would be my new home. Ryoko and her older sister also helped me clean this house.

That night, I wrote a letter to my wife, saying "Take the children and come to Seoul." We would be starting a new life together. Having returned to my liberated homeland, I was excited to be starting a new life in a newly independent nation. I prayed that our family would be blessed with much happiness and good fortune.

October 5: The skies were bright and clear. Together with Lee Su-bok and his family, I opened the doors to the Takara Onsen public bath located in front of Yeongdeungpo Station.

The first order of business was to change the name of the bath. Takara Onsen could not be used because it was a Japanese name. So, we took one Chinese character each from the names of Takara Onsen and Yeongdeungpo and changed the name to Yeongpo-tang. People began lining up outside well before the opening hour of 1 p.m. They had every reason to line up because no public bath had been open since August 15. Everything went well from the first day, and the business proved profitable. The charge per person was 50 sen, equivalent to half a yen. There were only six or seven public paths in operation in all of Yeongdeungpo Ward, which had a population of 120,000 to 130,000.

Among the public baths in operation, the most memorable were

Saemaeul tang (today's Bogeon-tang)
Yeongdan-tang (for 500 public housing units of Mullae-dong) Jungmaroo-tang (located opposite the Yeonghwa Hotel)
Beobduk Onsen (high-class bath attached to today's Air Force Headquarters)

Chilseong-tang, located on the slopes of Heukseok-dong San
Cheonsu-tang, located next to the Noryangjin Reservoir
Our own Yeongpo-tang

In those days, Jungmaroo Alley (the alley facing Yeonghwa Hotel) and the alley in front of the Kyungsung Textile Corporation were the liveliest and busiest commercial districts in Yeongdeungpo Ward. For this reason, the two alleys had become a center for trading the furniture and household articles that had come out of Japanese homes. Thanks to this, our public bath prospered from the start. I would fill the bath with fresh water every morning, and the boiler operator would arrive at around noon to start up the boiler. By 1 p.m., we were ready for business. Ryoko, the sister of Lee Su-bok's wife, was in charge of the section of the bath for women.

About Ryoko Miyamoto

Kiyoko Miyamoto, Lee Su-bok's wife, came from a family of three sisters. Kiyoko was the oldest, followed by Kusako, who was also living in Seoul. The youngest of the three was Ryoko, who had come from Nagasaki in Kyushu to live with her sister.

A short explanation of Ryoko Miyamoto is in order. I believe it was in the fall of 1942 that I first met her. I was 24 years old, and she had come all the way from Japan to the Fukumoto Concrete Factory, as a young woman with braided hair. She was the younger sister of my employer's wife (Kiyoko was 28 years old at the time). She said she had come visiting because she had graduated from a girl's high school. That would mean she was 19 at the time.

She lived with my employer's family in an eight-tatami mat room that was next to the three *pyeong* (10-square meter) office. I lived near the factory and came to the factory every morning around dawn to prepare for the day's work. I frequently ate with the family. Most of the work at the factory was subcontracted to others, so basically all that we had to do was to supply the necessary materials. Most of the work outside the factory was also subcontracted. But it was very difficult for me to manage a factory with several dozen workers all by myself. At the time, I was also responsible for tasks such as calculating production costs.

Ryoko, with her high school education, was very helpful to have in the office. Maybe they had called her to Korea because my employer realized that the work was too much for me to do alone. Since I had no more than a primary school education, she was far ahead of me in learning and skills.

In any case, she helped with the office work, and also did some cleaning around the office. As a result, we were always in close contact.

I married when I was 20, and my wife was two years younger. By this time, I had one child. This 24-year old young man with a wife and child was working with a 19-year old girl in the same office. Furthermore, she was a modern Japanese woman. It was only natural that we became close and began nurturing special feelings for each other.

One year passed, and then a second. The passion between the two of us grew stronger and stronger. But I was married with a child, and I could never allow these feelings to lead me into an intimate relationship.

My employer had a father who was well into his 70s. This old man may have sensed that something was going on between us. He would say something like "You have to be careful with relations between the sexes," when he occasionally came to the office. But the old man was actually referring to Lee Su-bok, my employer.

The fact was that Lee Su-bok had been previously married to a Korean woman. Lee Su-bok had divorced his wife and left his five children with her to marry his Japanese wife (Kiyoko was working in a café). After the divorce, his ex-wife had given birth to a daughter, and it was this daughter that had caused a lot of trouble. The ex-wife claimed that Fukumoto was the girl's father, while my employer claimed the child was not his. The two sides became embroiled in a full-fledged dispute. Finally, the child was brought to the Fukumoto home, but the dispute knew no end. The old man was referring to this issue and was implicitly criticizing his son by saying, "Relations between the sexes can become very ugly."

Ryoko was now 21 years old. One day, when I returned to the office, Ryoko was wearing a kerchief over her head and standing with an embarrassed expression. I went to Kiyoko (my employer's wife) to ask, "Why is Ryoko wearing a kerchief? And why does she look so embarrassed?" Kiyoko laughed and said that Ryoko had gone to have hair permed because she wanted to look pretty.

I turned to Ryoko and said, "Can you take the kerchief off and show me? I want to see how pretty you've become." She blushed a deep red. Removing the kerchief to reveal her hair, she said, "I had my hair permed, but I am so embarrassed I don't know what to do. Please don't laugh at me, Mr. Jeong." She was right—her frizzled hair did not look good. But at least she looked more mature than when she was wearing her hair in braids. Moreover, the braids made her look awkward because she was quite a bit taller than average. Her new hairstyle apparently had something to do with the new job she had found.

With the help of a man named Tamura, the managing director at a factory that manufactured concrete tubes, Ryoko had joined this company. The factory was located in Dorim-ri (located between Dorim Miwon Plant and DaeHan Heavy Machinery in today's Guro District). Ryoko had to commute about 3 kilometers from the house near the Yeongdeungpo Ward Office to the factory. Because no transportation was available, she had to walk this distance every day.

My wife gave birth to a daughter in July 1944, the year that I turned 26. I was now the father of two children. Ryoko was very kind to the children, and would hold them in her arms and carry them on her back.

My employer had two daughters from his first wife. The older was named Kimie and was a student at the Women's Art School. The younger was named Shizue and was a student at the Women's Commercial School. These two daughters had sensed that something was going on between Ryoko and me, and had told my wife. After that, my wife would occasionally warn me saying, "Why would a married young man with children become friends with a young lady? Be absolutely careful so that this does not develop into something ugly."

By 1944, air raid warnings were being occasionally issued in Seoul (Keijo). Mr. Fukumoto, my employer, was the chief of the local civil defense unit, and also served as the head of the neighborhood organization in Gyeongjeon District. Whenever an air raid siren sounded, he would

take his emergency bag and rush to the civil defense headquarters located in front of the train station. As for me, I would have to go to the office no matter how late at night, and act as a substitute for the head of the Gyeongjeon District neighborhood organization. One of my responsibilities was to go from house to house to make sure everyone was obeying the strict blackout rules. During these air raid warnings, Ryoko and I would be left sitting across each other and holding our breaths in fear, in the complete darkness of the office. It was only natural for two young people placed in such close proximity to grow closer. While it was imperative for us to maximize the distance between us, we were repeatedly tempted by such occasions that placed us together alone.

Three years after the start of my bittersweet relationship with Ryoko Miyamoto, we were separated. I received my conscription order. While this was a disastrous turn of events for me, I believe it was better for her this way because the conscription order separated us before our relationship could become more serious. As previously mentioned, my conscription order arrived on December 8, 1944, and forced me to go on a trip that held out no promise of returning home alive. My destination was her homeland of Japan. Left behind, Ryoko would constantly worry for my life and safety. Ironically, I was leaving to go to her country, while she would remain in my homeland. We exchanged letters during my time in Japan. Our reunion ten months later carried its own unexpected denouement. The war had ended, but she was now subject to the Japanese Expulsion Order.

One cold and snowy day in early December 1945, Ryoko started on her journey home from Yeongdeungpo Station, accompanied by Kusako, her older sister. In tears and turning back again and again to wave goodbye, she left on a journey that promised no reunion.

Why does separation so pain the heart? It was exactly a year before this that I had been separated from my family and homeland as a conscripted worker. My journey had also started from this same spot–Yeongdeungpo Station. The world had changed so dramatically during the year that followed. Those that had departed on a road to death had now returned home in joy and celebration, while she, as the citizen of a defeated and alien nation, was being expelled from her adopted land.

I believe it was in 1947 when Kiyoko Miyamoto, the Japanese wife of my employer, went to Japan. Worried about her family back in Japan, she went to see how her old mother and sisters were doing, but she did not return. One year passed and she still did not return. Kiyoko was caring for four small children. After much thought, Lee Su-bok decided to smuggle himself into Japan, but was immediately arrested upon landing and placed in the Omura Detention Center.

During interrogation, Lee Su-bok appealed to the authorities and explained that he had no choice but to smuggle himself into Japan because his Japanese wife had not returned to Korea and he could not communicate with her. The sad truth of a Korean husband and his Japanese wife moved the authorities, and his plea to take into account extenuating circumstances was accepted. Thus, Lee Su-bok was finally able to return to Korea with Kiyoko.

When she arrived back in Korea, Kiyoko handed me a note from her sister Ryoko. The note read as follows:

> Either awake or asleep, I never forget you. I returned to Japan safely and am doing well. But old memories are imprinted on my mind and will not go away. I am sending this note with sad eyes turned toward the skies over Seoul (Keijo). I pray for the happiness of your family.

(December 1970)

* * * *

It was more than a decade later that relations between South Korea and Japan were normalized. After a lapse of 24 years, it finally became possible to send letters between Korea and Japan. I was able to communicate with Ryoko Miyamoto. For a number of years, we occasionally exchanged letters. But with the death of Lee Su-bok and his wife, this correspondence eventually became less frequent and ultimately ended. All of this has now faded into memories of the distant past.

Forty-five years have elapsed since my homeland was liberated from the colonial rule of the Empire of Japan. I pray that all past grievances have been settled by now, and that the two countries can cooperate and advance together as good neighbors and friends.

This does not mean however that the bitterness and grievances accumulated over 36 years of colonial rule will evaporate and disappear. No, the bitterness created by the persecution, scorn and mistreatment over 36 years and felt by my grandparents and parents will not disappear. In particular, I belong to the so-called "third generation," many of whose members lost their lives when they were dragged into the Great East Asia War against their will. The passage of 45 years certainly cannot erase the bitterness that remains among those who survived the war, nor can it relieve the bitterness that lives on in their children, the fourth generation.

While there may be some difference of degree, I believe these sentiments are firmly rooted in the hearts of everyone who lived through that age.

Be that as it may, I am delighted by the wholly unexpected publication of my book. It is my sincerest hope that this personal memoir will not in any way harm relations between South Korea and Japan or damage the friendship between the people of the two countries.

(August 1990)

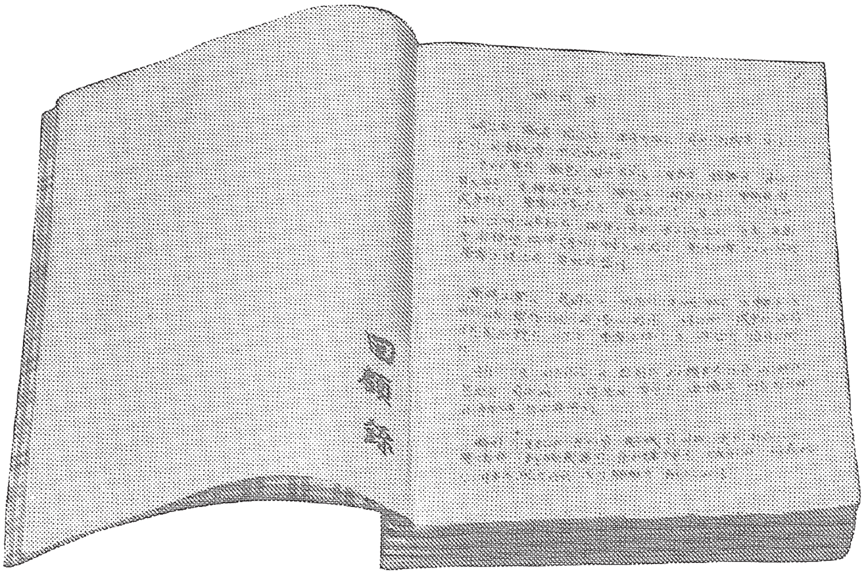
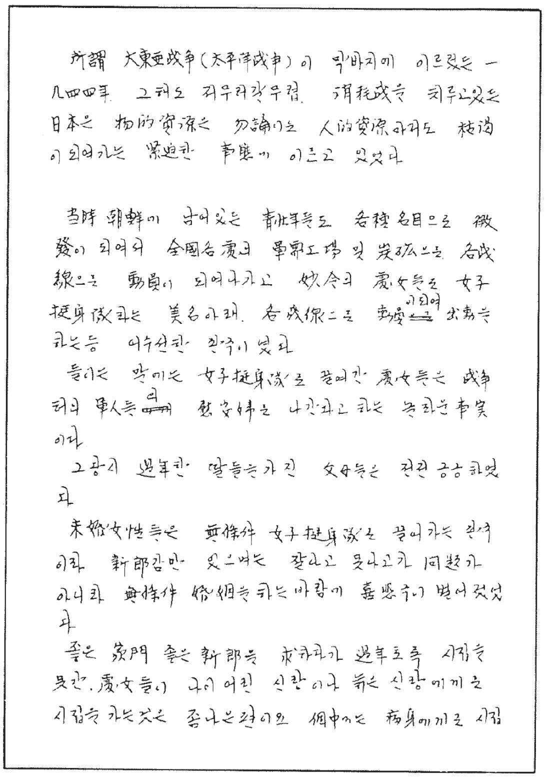


Photo of the Original Journal

Jeong Chung-hae kept a very detailed journal of his days in Hiroshima as a conscripted worker. He continues to keep a diary today. The original journal, written in excellent Hangul penmanship, comes to a total of 511 pages. The entries were made on white paper, and contain almost no changes or corrections. Though mostly written in black ink, blue ink is used in some passages. Along with the Hangul letters, some notations are made in Chinese characters, and some passages are direct quotes from Japanese. The photo shows the inside cover and first page of the journal.
(Length 265mm x width 160mm)



所謂 大東亞戰爭(太平洋戰爭)이 막바지에 이르렀든 一九四四年 그해도 저무러갈무렵 消耗戰을 치루고있든 日本은 物的資源은 勿論이오 人的資源까지도 枯渇이 되어가는 緊迫한 事態에 이르고 있었다

當時 朝鮮에 남어있는 青壯年들도 各種名目으로 徵發이 되어서 全國各處의 軍需工場 및 炭鑛으로 各戰線으로 動員이 되어나가고 妙令의 處女들은 女子挺身隊라는 美名아래 各戰線으로 動員이되어 出動을 하는등 어수선한 판국이 었다
들리는 말에는 女子挺身隊로 끌려간 處女들은 戰爭터의 軍人들의 慰安婦로 나간다고 하는 눈치은 事實이다
그렇기 過年한 딸들을가진 父母들은 전전긍긍하였다
未婚女性들은 無條件 女子挺身隊로 끌려가는 판국이라 新郎감만 있으면 잘나고 못나고가 問題가 아니라 無條件 婚姻을 하는 바람에 喜悲극이 벌어졌었다
좋은 家門 좋은 新郎을 求하다가 過年으로 시집을 못간 處女들이 나이어린 신랑이나 늙은 신랑에게로 시집을 가는것은 좀나은편이오 個中에는 病身에게로 시집

Source: Jeong Chung-hae, "Memoirs of a Korean conscripted worker in wartime Japan," Translated by Haruko Inoue. *kawai Publishing Company*, 1990.

Translator's Postscript

My involvement with this memoir began when I met Jeong Chung-hae for the first time on November 12, 1989. Our meeting was scheduled for 2 p.m. at a tea parlor near the Guui subway station in Seoul's Seongdong District.

The person who arranged for this introduction had informed me that Jeong Chung-hae had worked in Hiroshima as a conscripted worker during the war, and was an atomic bomb survivor. I had promised to meet him to discuss his question of whether it was still possible to apply for an Atomic Bomb Survivor Certificate.

After our greetings, we talked about the past. He began with his conscription in December 1944, and then went on about the work he did at the Toyo Kogyo Company as a conscripted worker. He said a female office worker at his dormitory had saved his life, and that he had never forgotten his debt to her. Recalling the less than one year's time that he had spent in Japan, he explained that the most arduous days were those spent at a training center in Nara. He had also brought a photo of himself to the meeting (the photo in the book's title page). Together with the photo, he handed me a handwritten manuscript that bore the title, "Memoir." He offered it to me, saying perhaps it could be of some use.

Opening the manuscript, I saw that the memoir was based on an extensive journal he had kept during the war. My hands trembled with emotion as I skimmed through passages here and there. Most of all, I was surprised to find such a detailed account of events from that period. I did not waste any time in asking, "Have you shown this to anyone in Korea?"

His response was, "Would anyone here be interested in what I have written?" The voluminous manuscript was written in Korean, with much care given to each letter.

Explaining that I wanted to read it, I asked, "May I borrow this manuscript?"

He welcomed my request saying, "Please take it with you. I would be happy if anyone would read it."

There is a mystery associated with meeting a new person or a new document. This was the realization I gained that day. I continued to read the manuscript after returning to Japan, and was excited by the new knowledge and information I gained of that period as seen through the eyes of a Korean youth. I had previously thought that I was relatively well informed of Japan's colonial rule in Korea, but the manuscript made me aware just how limited my understanding was. As this was based on a personal journal, it could be expected to contain some bias or mistakes. What was more important was the overwhelming weight of the feelings and observations that had been written down as the events had unfolded. My mind was made up to save this record from oblivion.

In attempting a translation, I found many passages to be deeply personal and private in nature. Though I initially hesitated to translate these passages, I finally concluded that these should be included as they were the candid expressions of what was going through a young man's mind at the time. Additionally, I decided to remain as faithful as possible to the terminology and expressions

contained in the manuscript. There were many other challenges for someone who had never published a book before. For instance, as I struggled to maintain some consistency in the translation, I frequently came up against subtle differences in meaning assigned to the same Chinese character in the Korean and Japanese languages. Though used in both languages, I found that a certain character can connote significantly different sentiments and customs when used in Korean or Japanese. Particularly challenging was the Korean concept of *han* (resentment or grievance) that lies at the foundation of this work. Rather than being directed at a specific target, *han* expresses a sorrow, a regret or annoyance that doesn't go away. I was made painfully aware of my inability to fully convey the full significance of such terms.

The manuscript contains some discrepancies that have to do with the time and date of events. While these can be identified from a review of contemporary newspaper articles, they were left uncorrected in light of the information available at the time to the author and other limitations having to do with surviving documentation. Following some discussions with the author, pseudonyms were used for the Japanese individuals who appear in these pages.

It gives me pause to think that my inept translation may not properly convey the intent and sense of the original. However, in undertaking the translation, my hope was to bring this document to the attention of all interested persons, and to as wide an audience as possible. I welcome all forms of criticism and feedback from readers.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Mariko Kanokogi, who appreciated and supported my desire to bring this work to a wide audience, and took it upon herself to find a publisher for this book. I am also deeply indebted to Sayaka Iwata at the Kawai Publishing Company, who took on the difficult task of actively shepherding the translation to its final publication. I further take this opportunity to thank Kazumi Oda, who provided valuable assistance while working at my side throughout the project, the many former employees of Mazda Motor Corporation who advised me on gathering historical documentation, and the many people close to me who aided and supported me throughout the endeavor. To all persons named and unnamed, I express my heartfelt gratitude.

October 1990

Haruko Inoshita
(In Hiroshima City)

Cover Photo Caption; Biographies of the Author and Translator

Design by Yoshiya Tamura

Cover photo: Busan Station circa 1930

This modern brick building housed a hotel on its higher floors. Busan Station was a gateway linking Japan, the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria (Northeast China), and served as an important terminus for trunk and branch railway lines. The photo shows three men dressed in traditional Korean garb standing next to streetcar tracks. (Photo courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun)

Author: Jeong Chung-hae

Born March 1919.

Worked as a conscripted worker at Toyo Kogyo in Hiroshima between December 1944 and August 1945. After returning to Korea, Mr. Jeong operated a public bath until the start of the Korean War. With social stability regained, he established his own company, which engaged in ancillary works for construction projects, and retired at 65. Mr. Jeong currently resides in Gyeonggi Province, South Korea.

Translator: Haruko Inoshita

Born February 1932.

Graduated from the Faculty of Letters, Department of Philosophy at Hiroshima University in March 1956. Ms. Inoshita became interested in Korea upon learning about the United Church of Christ in Japan's *Confession on Responsibility During World War II*. In April 1982, she went to South Korea to continue her studies and graduated from Yonsei University's Korean Language Institute in September 1983. She served as an executive board member of a committee in Hiroshima that worked to invite South Korean atomic bomb victims to Japan for treatment. Ms. Inoshita currently resides in Hiroshima, Japan.

Colophon

Memoirs of a Wartime Korean Conscripted Worker in Japan

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