

# At Ground Zero in Hiroshima

**HIROSHIMA, AUG. 6, 1945:** The *Enola Gay* arrived overhead at 8:15 a.m. and released its solitary bomb. Shizuko Yamasaki was at home with her toddler son. People near ground zero were vaporized—about 80,000 died instantly—and most of the city simply ceased to exist.

**I**T WAS A VERY HOT DAY. I CAME OUT of an air-raid shelter with my 2-year-old son, Atsunori, a little before 8. It was breakfast time, and we hurried back to our old wooden house. I was just about to hand him a bowl of rice when rays of a strange bluish and whitish color came in through the kitchen window, brushed my right cheek and hit Atsunori right in the eyes. I held him tight to my bosom as the house was lifted and moved by the blast.

The next moment I found myself crushed underneath the collapsed house. It was pitch dark and I couldn't move an inch with the roof, walls and rubble on my back. All I could think of was "I'm going to die here." Then something moved under my body. It was Atsunori, begging for help and crying with pain. I had to find a way out to save his life. If he died, I could not face my husband when he returned from the war. The mushroom cloud must have gone, and I saw a ray of sunlight coming through. All I could do was dig the ground with my hand and move like a snail toward the sunlight.

Covered with mud and blood, I pushed my son out, then came out of the fallen house to see a kind of Hiroshima I had never seen—a destroyed city much worse than a living hell. I saw people walking like ghosts with their skin peeled and hanging like seaweed, and there were

charred bodies inside the burned trams. Carrying Atsunori, whose body was slippery with blood, I rushed to the riverbank, where we spent three nights, surrounded by the injured and corpses. On the fourth day I stood up. Holding my son in my arms, I managed to reach a village

was over. So I visited a former military office on Aug. 29 to ask about my husband. There I was informed that he had died of dengue fever in Singapore on March 29. If only they had told us of his death, we could have been spared from the radiation and the hardship that followed.

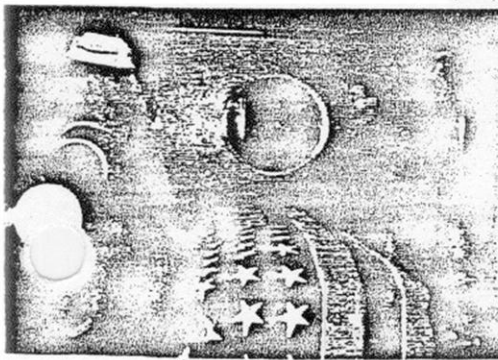
After the blast, I made a living sewing and selling kimonos. I later taught knitting and at times worked as a clerk. But the sufferings from the A-bomb never stopped. When he was in the fifth grade I noticed that something was terribly wrong with Atsunori's eyesight. He was becoming blind, and was diagnosed as having an "A-bomb" cataract. Even after an operation, his eyesight remained weak. He had to attend the school for the blind and became a masseur. He and I worked hard, hoping to build a house one day.

That dream was short-lived. Atsunori began to have serious problems in the early '80s with walking and speaking. Doctors said it was due to a cerebellum disorder. His condition has been deteriorating ever since. As for myself, I have undergone about 10 operations starting in 1958. I am getting old, but I cannot die yet. How can I leave my son behind the way he is? Though almost 54 years have passed since the A-bomb was dropped over Hiroshima, I don't feel the war is over yet. The tragedy of Hiroshima hasn't ended. My son and I are living proof. ■



BEARING WITNESS: Yamasaki in front of the 'A-Bomb Dome' in Hiroshima

over the mountain where my father lived. Soon after the blast, our hair began to fall out and Atsunori developed a serious nose-bleeding problem that continued for years to come. We stayed in Hiroshima in that hot summer to wait for the return of my husband. I wanted to make sure that he had a place to come back to. But there was no word from him even after the war



WASHINGTON, APRIL 12, 1945: Journalist David Brinkley was 25 years old when President Roosevelt died at Warm Springs, Ga., just as Allied troops were closing in on Hitler's Berlin.

**I** WAS WORKING AT NBC, WHICH THEN WAS AT 11TH AND NEW YORK, THREE BLOCKS from the White House. When the news that Roosevelt died came over the wire, I went to the White House. I had never seen so many people in any one place in tears. Of course I was not with the family; they were upstairs in the family quarters with Eleanor. But I saw them coming and going, and I saw several members of the cabinet—all of them crying. Because Roosevelt had not been sick, had not been known to have been sick, it was totally a surprise. Nobody expected it. There was no preparation—no one was prepared for it. It was a shot in the dark.