

Hiroshima — Survivor's account

By Sarah Cox

Sixteen year old Kinoku Laskey was working in a Hiroshima hospital on the morning the Americans dropped the atomic bomb. The city was quiet after the previous day's air attacks and Kinoku kept working when she heard the familiar wail of the air raid sirens. When the bomb exploded, the blast was so loud that Kinoku heard nothing.

"I was sterilizing all the equipment when suddenly I was surrounded by brilliant orange light. It was so bright. I saw nothing but orange all over. I thought a bomb had dropped just outside the window so I went under the counter, but I was blown away," she says during an interview.

When the pressure lifted Kinoku slowly raised her head to see what had happened. "Everything was black and dark and quiet. I couldn't see anything. I couldn't hear anything. Suddenly I heard a crash and something flattened me to the floor. I put my hands onto my face and knew I had a deep cut because I felt my cheekbone."

Kinoku realized the blast had thrown her into the hallway and she crawled to the front of the hospital. I saw many people hurt and bloody, and dying or dead. People were coming toward the hospital. Nothing else was standing. They were black, with no clothes, no hair, no shoes. Their skin was hanging in strips from their chins and their arms."

Kinoku groped her way to the washroom to see how badly she had been injured, but she could not open her eyes to look in the mirror. "I couldn't see. I had to open my eyes with my fingers. I couldn't believe it was me. I had hundreds and hundreds of glass pieces stuck out of my head like a pin cushion."

She left the room, stepping over blackened bodies on the floor. "I went to the back of the hospital because it had a big pool. Everybody was jumping in the pool because there were fires starting everywhere at once. There were people on top of each other and the bottom people were drowning.

I had to force someone's head down to splash water on myself. Everything was so hot. My hair was crackling and my clothes were almost in flames."

She stumbled back to the front of the hospital, where a broken pipe sprayed water into the street. She felt tired and weak, and passed out in the spray, surrounded by orange fire. Later, she awoke to find that everything had become black and lost consciousness again.

"I woke up in the same place. I don't know how long I'd been there. Maybe three days. I saw many dead bodies. It was very quiet, and the sky was blue," says Kinoku.

She crawled the seven yards back to the hospital, where a doctor picked her up and carried her to surgery. "They decided to sew me up. They took all the glass pieces out without anesthetic. The pain was so awful I asked them to kill me. Just to leave me alone," she says.

"After that, they took a door off the hinges and laid me down in the hallway. The door see-sawed everytime somebody stepped on the edge. I passed out many times. I kept waiting for my mother or my father to call my name."

Kinoku's family had moved to a village outside Hiroshima before the bombing. Days were spent searching for Kinoku and her father in the area where their house had been. After two weeks of waiting alone in the hospital Kinoku decided to try to return to her family.

"I thought I could make it if I wanted to so I started crawling toward the Hiroshima train station. I crawled over

dead people and I saw tufts of hair and skin from corpses. When I got to the train station, it was damaged and I was told I would have to go to the next station. So I crawled there.

"I don't know how many days I was crawling. When I got there, I tugged on the pant legs of a man who was leaving and begged him to please take me home to my mother. He did. He picked me up and put me on the train and took me home to my family."

There were no doctors or nurses in Kinoku's village. Her mother and sister nursed her for months with only spring water for medicine. Kinoku was unable to talk about what had happened. Years passed marred by recurring bouts of radiation sickness and six plastic surgery operations.

Thirty-six years later, Kinoku has decided to speak about the day the Americans dropped the atomic bomb. "I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to think about it.

"But I have to tell you about it because I care," she says. "I care about young people and everybody's future. That's why I decided to speak out."

"I am not angry anymore. I'm still living, so I can tell people how terrible nuclear war is. I don't want pity. It's too late for that."

"Today we have more than enough nuclear weapons to destroy the entire world. If more people don't understand, then we will have Hiroshimas all over the world."

Kinoku's voice wavers and she looks out her balcony window to the mountains in the distance.

The evening is as peaceful as the Hiroshima morning of August 6, 1945.

"I've decided to speak out for our survivors' rights and your peace," she says slowly. "This is something. It's people who matter. We have to stop and think. We have to think about this world, here, now. The horrors of nuclear war must be realized."

Reprinted from the *Ubysey* by Canadian University Press

THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON



No man is an island

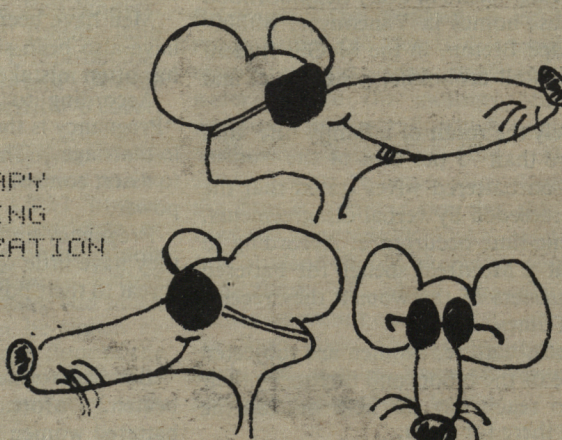
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- DESENSITIZATION
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