

Seventy-seven years after the war

“This little child is me, when I was three”

Hideo Takemoto comes forward, in response to friends' wishes.



Image of brothers in Hiroshima, taken two months after atomic bombing

An image of a seriously injured infant being carried on the back of his older brother was captured two months following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. For many years, the identity of the two boys were unknown. That is, until 77 years later this past July, when a man came forward at the Hiroshima-Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Exhibition in Higashihiroshima City, claiming that the image was of himself when he was three years old. The man was Hideo

Takemoto (80), a resident of Kure City. He had not spoken out until today because of all the tragedies the family had faced through the war.

“It’s not that I didn’t want to say anything, but rather, I couldn’t. The atomic bombing was such a significant event that I couldn’t say anything.” Rubbing the scar on his cheek: “Under the bandages, I was severely hurt. You could see the bone and the keloid scar was so big that I had it surgically removed when I was 19.



I still remember the sound of when they were shaving away the bone.”

He became a victim of the A-bomb at the age of three. A family of six, the Takemoto's had been residing in Otemachi 4-Chome, Hiroshima City, about one kilometer away from the epicenter where Takano-bashi bridge is located today. Hideo Takemoto was the youngest of six children, and two elder sisters had already married out at the time. At 8:15AM on August 6, 1945, Hideo was at home with his father Kazuo, mother Riu, and 11-year old brother Sadao. Hideo was rescued by Sadao, who found him under their home that had collapsed by the blast: "The fire had quickly spread, consuming our house. If it hadn't been for my brother finding me, I wouldn't have survived." Barely remembering anything from that day, the only things Takemoto vaguely recalls are the bridge burning and a woman suffering from burns at the evacuation center pleading for water.

Looking at a photograph of himself that was printed from film footage: "We might have been on our way home after being treated at the nearby Red Cross Hospital, as the bandages wrapped around my face are still clean. Carrying me on his back, my brother walked through the burned-out area to take me to the hospital. He was a caring brother."

His sister Kimie, who was 13 at the time, was working in a munitions factory as a mobilized

student when she was killed by the atomic bomb. Following the war, Takemoto and his family returned to where their home once stood and resided there until they moved to Kitakyushu in 1949: "I don't know why we moved. I carried the money we received from selling our house on my back as we took the train to Kokura (Kitakyushu city). The bag full of money was gone in no time however, and life was difficult."

Twenty-four year-old Sadao had worked with his father at a quarry to help support the family. With Hideo thinking about his future path after graduating from junior high school, Sadao had encouraged him to go on to high school as he would work to pay for Hideo's schooling. Not long after that however, Sadao had passed away in a traffic accident. Looking back, Takemoto shares, "He had even prepared textbooks for me. I couldn't come to terms with having lost my brother and the unexplainable feeling of having let him down when I decided to work instead of continuing my education."

Taking the career path he became a barber. Relying on his sister who was living in Hiroshima, he moved to Kure City in 1961 where he opened a barbershop. Together with his wife Makie, they worked diligently. It was sometime around 1995 that Takemoto received the film to the photo. Coincidentally, it was his brother-

in-law Yoshitoshi Kondo who was on a business trip in Tokyo and saw the footage at a movie theater. It was a film, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki two months following the dropping of the atomic bomb, which had been discovered in December 1993 in the storage of a documentary film production company. In recognizing Takemoto in the film, Kondo inquired with the movie theater who immediately cut three frames from the film and gave them to him.

Then in August 1996, a program entitled Kataritsugu genbaku eizo — shodo no karte (trans. passing down the story of the atomic bombing images — the scorched records) was broadcast on a local television network that surveyed the people and places appearing in the film. However, Takemoto did not come forward. He had recorded the program but could not bear to watch it: "I didn't want to speak up. I wanted to be left alone."

Seventy-seven years since the end of WWII: "I have finally made the decision to come forward. There were two main reasons. Among my few confidants, one friend in particular had been insisting for quite some time now that I speak up. Then, another friend asked to borrow the photo for an atomic bomb exhibition that was scheduled to take place in Higashihiroshima. He had told me that a similar photo of two

brothers was taken in Nagasaki and word was that it was me in the photo and that I had passed away. He wanted to prove that I am alive. I was moved by his kindness.”

Deciding to speak at July’s special exhibition, Takemoto, in preparation sat and spoke with his sister about the tragic day for the first time: “Until now, I never thought about talking with my family about the atomic bombing. I thought it would be useless to talk about it.”

At the exhibition, he openly stated, “I want to tell the young people and children who don’t know war; No to war. No to nuclear warfare and nuclear bombs. Those that become victims are the civilians, the children. Communication is the best solution. The path to peace can be taken by anyone. That is, to look at the person in the eyes and say thank you, thank you for your hard work. This can be done within the family and is the first step to peace.”

“Having everyone listen, I feel like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders. To think that I had been carrying something so heavy on my own, alone for so long. I am now somewhat relieved.”



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