From hell-on-Earth, one man found hope against all the odds

The Doctor of HIROSHIMA

His Heart-Breaking and Inspiring True-Life Story

Dr Michihiko Hachiya

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Contents

Foreword

The translation was hailed as an extraordinary literary event when it first appeared in the United States in 1955, and it retains its capacity to move us today. This is a remarkable accomplishment, for what we encounter here is an account of the end of a ferocious war that is intimately Japanese and simultaneously transcends national, cultural, and racial boundaries. The diary speaks to the human heart and human condition, and does so without artifice, for it was not intended to be published. Dr. Hachiya himself was severely injured by the blast effects of the atomic bombing. At one point he notes in passing that his face and body still showed around 150 scars. By 8 August, 1945, however – two days after Hiroshima was devastated – he was well enough to begin keeping a record of his convalescence in the hospital he himself administered. That record is what we have here, and there is nothing comparable to it.

To turn a chronicle of nuclear horror into an affirmation of life in this manner is no small accomplishment, and the triumph of Dr. Hachiya's writing lies in his ability to do this so naturally – without preaching, usually without philosophizing, just by being himself and setting down his daily thoughts and activities. That his thoughts and feelings are entirely accessible to non-Japanese,

despite numerous small references to things peculiar to everyday Japanese culture, is the ultimate measure of his triumph. Somehow, in August 1945, when the rhetoric of war hate and race hate was at fever pitch and the most devastating weapon in history had just shattered his life, this modest and conspicuously patriotic physician managed to express himself almost entirely in the language of a common humanity.

Of course, the images of nuclear hell that Dr. Hachiya depicts may in the end remain most indelibly etched in many readers' minds. In this regard his chronicle is typical of other *hibakusha*, or survivor, accounts, where the same haunting images of nuclear destruction appear. The stunning flash (*pika*) of the bomb, followed by a colossal blast (*don*) that shattered buildings kilometers away. Nakedness or seminakedness, from the blast stripping clothing away. Eerie silence. People walking in lines with their hands outstretched and skin peeling off – like automatons, dream-walkers, scarecrows, a line of ants. Corpses "frozen by death while in the full action of flight." A dead man on a bicycle. A burned and blinded horse. Youngsters huddled together awaiting death. Mothers with dead children. Infants with dying mothers. Corpses without faces. Water everywhere – in fire-fighting cisterns, swimming pools, the rivers that fed the city – clogged with dead bodies. Fires like the infernos of hell. A man holding his eyeball in his hand. Survivors in crowded ruined buildings, lying in vomit, urine, and feces. Everywhere flies and maggots.

This is the familiar iconography of the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombing, although at this early date Dr. Hachiya, largely cut off from the outside world, was simply recording what he saw or others told him. Some of his descriptions are unusually

vivid. A visitor comments about how roasted corpses become smaller. Burned people smell like drying squid or look like boiled octopuses. The odor of bodies being cremated is likened to that of burning sardines. In perhaps the most haunting of all the diary's images, as Dr. Hachiya makes his daily rounds we frequently encounter a nameless beautiful girl – she is always identified simply as "the beautiful girl" – who has been severely burned everywhere except her face. In early entries, she lies in a puddle of old blood and pus, soiled with urine and excrement. As time passes, she is able to smile when the doctor visits. By the end of the diary she can stand and go to the toilet by herself. What became of her? We will never know.

Because he is a physician, Dr. Hachiya quickly moves, and the reader with him, to the next level of the nuclear trauma: the emergence of inexplicable symptoms and unanticipated deaths. Patients who seemed to be improving suddenly worsen and die. People who appeared to have escaped harm entirely are stricken: they become speckled with subcutaneous bleeding, their hair falls out, and they have bloody diarrhea, vomit blood, pass blood from their genitals and rectum. Autopsies reveal massive internal hemorrhages that are erratic but seem to affect every organ. Belated acquisition of a microscope shows alarmingly low white blood cell counts, as well as the destruction of platelets in the blood. Could this have something to do with the bomb changing atmospheric pressure? Could it be a poison gas? In the course of these weeks Dr. Hachiya himself helps identify the mysterious scourge as radiation sickness and determines that all of the patients dying in this manner were within one kilometer of the bomb's hypocenter.

The intellectual satisfaction of understanding these deaths

is part of Dr. Hachiya's own coming alive again, and he does not disguise the pleasure he takes in helping clarify this dreadful riddle. As early as 9 August he records the delight he feels in finding that his scientific curiosity is returning. Scientific understanding does not eliminate the horror, he indicates throughout, but it can mitigate the terror of the unknown and help dampen irrational fears – help dispel, for example, the rumor that Hiroshima would be uninhabitable for seventy-five years. Those dying of radiation sickness, he takes pains to explain publicly, were exposed to the *pika*. (What the diary does not reveal, for it stops too soon, is the appalling fact that from late 1945 until 1952 Japanese medical researchers were prohibited by U.S. occupation authorities from publishing scientific articles on the effects of the atomic bombs.)

Even in these earliest grim days after the bomb was dropped, Dr. Hachiya emerges as remarkably frank. Within two days, he regretfully observes how quickly he and his colleagues had come to accept massive death and cease to respect its awfulness. In time, the smell of cremations outside the window does not even disturb people's appetites. In one of his most stunning entries, he dryly records (on 11 August) how the rumor spread within his miserably crowded hospital that Japan possessed the same weapon that had devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki and had retaliated against the west coast of the United States. The whole atmosphere in the ward changed, and those patients who were most severely hurt were happiest. People sang songs of victory. They were convinced the tide of the war had changed. In all the literature about the bombs there are few scenes more Dickensian than this.

*

In various ways, Dr. Hachiya's deceptively simple account of the Hiroshima bombing and its aftermath thus reveals a world of many layers of complexity. His diary is not merely an unusually intimate record of nuclear death and destruction. It also provides an unusually broad window on the psychology and social pathology of defeat. Beyond all this, however – and this is what ultimately gives *Hiroshima Diary* its enduring quality – it is a chronicle about coming alive, about cherishing life after tasting the bitterest kinds of death.

I find myself thinking of one such moment: when, on the last day of August, old Mrs. Saeki chides Dr. Hachiya for working so long at his microscope, trying to understand the strange and terrible symptoms that radiation sickness has caused in his patients. He has forgotten to eat lunch, she reminds him, and smoked too much, and is harming his body. This is the passage:

"*Baba-san*," I answered softly, "we now understand some of the things which puzzled us before."

"Is that so," she retorted. "Will you be able to cure the disease now?"

We know, of course, that the answer was no. What the atomic bomb did could never be undone. Our only hope is to face it squarely and learn from Hiroshima.

JOHN W. DOWER
28 March, 1995

Foreword

THE BOMBING of Hiroshima marked a new era in man's growing skill in the art of self-destruction. During the saturation bombing of Germany and Japan in World War II, cities were destroyed, but the destruction was segmental, requiring days or weeks, so that city dwellers had some chance to flee or find shelter. Moreover, those who were killed or injured had the comfort of knowing they were being killed by more or less familiar and acceptable weapons. But at Hiroshima, on the bright clear morning of 6 August 1945, thousands were killed, more thousands were fatally injured, and the homes of a quarter million people were destroyed, within seconds of the falling of a single bomb. Since that day, terrifying progress in the technology of nuclear warfare and the appalling knowledge that indulgence in atomic weapons may permanently impair the biological future of the human race have combined to emphasize the fact that Hiroshima presented mankind with a fateful choice.

Perhaps it was some sense of this that led me in 1950 to accept an offer to become a surgical consultant to the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission. It was a position that I held for two and a half years. The Commission, operating in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, had been formed to discover if there were delayed

effects of the atom bombs dropped on these cities in 1945. Since most of my work was outside the Commission's headquarters, in Japanese hospitals and clinics, I came to know and admire the Japanese medical profession and became acquainted with their patients. It was only natural, therefore, to want to know what the people, as people and not as medical case histories, experienced after the atom bombs were dropped.

By a stroke of good fortune I learned that Dr. Hachiya, Director of the Hiroshima Communications Hospital, had written a diary of his experiences as a patient and bed-ridden hospital director. I also learned that, with some misgivings as to the likelihood of renewing painful memories, he had been persuaded by friends who saw its value as a historical document to publish the diary. It appeared serially in the *Teishin Igaku*, a small medical journal circulated among the medical employees of the Japanese Communications Ministry.

On an overcast, bone-chilling afternoon in the early spring of 1951 I met Dr. Hachiya in his hospital reception room and over warming cups of hot green tea asked his permission to examine his diary with the view of having it translated and published in English. Dr. Hachiya graciously consented and placed at my disposal his manuscript copy and reprints of the medical journal.

I do not know at what point I decided to supervise the translation and do the editing myself. I know I felt it as a very personal responsibility. I cannot read Japanese except in tedious and laborious fashion with complete dependence on dictionaries and grammars. This almost insurmountable handicap I was able to overcome by the assistance of Dr. Neal Tsukifuji, a brilliant young Japanese doctor born in Los Angeles and educated in

America and Japan, who worked with me as assistant and interpreter. During our spare time for the next year, on weekends, holidays, and evenings, we rendered the diary into crude English. When there was any question regarding the meaning of a word, phrase, or sentence, we consulted Dr. Hachiya, so the translation could be as accurate as possible and preserve the Japanese idiom. We met and talked with many of the people mentioned in the diary, and with Dr. Hachiya visited all of the places he describes. Trying to relive Dr. Hachiya's experience, I succeeded to the extent that I came to dream of the bombing and on occasion awakened in terror.

Among those I wish to thank for helping me, besides Dr. Tsukifuji, are my friends in Hiroshima, and I take occasion to wish them health, peace of mind, and a long life. I owe a great deal to Dr. Robert B. Hall, Professor of Geography in The University of Michigan and Director of the Center for Japanese Studies. He introduced me to Japan and by his wise counsel and farsighted way of thinking about people and their place in the world helped me immeasurably. I can say the same about Dr. Robert Ward, Dr. John Hall, Dr. Richard Beardsley, Dr. Mischa Titiev, Dr. Joseph Yamagiwa, and Dr. Dougal Eyre, members of the University of Michigan faculty in sociology, history, anthropology, Japanese language, and geography and also part of the Center for Japanese Studies. If all of the world's ambassadors were of their quality, there would never be any more wars.

I acknowledge with gratitude the help I was given by many people in the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission and the National Research Council of the American Academy of Science,

calling to mind particularly Dr. Grant Taylor and Col. Carl Tessmer, past directors of the Commission.

Mr. Henry Schuman, publisher and authority in medical and scientific history, has helped, advised, and encouraged me from the start. And I am grateful to Frances Gray Patton for her sympathetic reading of an early draft of the translation and for her thoughtfulness in introducing me to the director of the University of North Carolina Press. To the staff of the Press I am indebted for help and suggestions that seem to me to go well beyond the call of publishing duty and to give it the status of true collaborator in this enterprise.

I wish to express thanks to my secretary, Mrs. Elizabeth Dickson, for her expert stenographic assistance.

While working on the manuscript, I was fortunate to be able to turn for help to a remarkably versatile person. She would spell a word, construct a sentence, or retype a corrected manuscript. She was never too busy to give me the benefit of her insight and judgement, or too tired from looking after the house and five children to encourage me or see that I had a pot of hot tea at one o'clock in the morning. To her, words of thanks are inadequate.

All of us will be repaid beyond measure if this diary helps to refresh our memories, stimulate our imaginations, and temper our thinking about war, and especially the horror of atomic war. For if we cannot enliven our humanity, we are doomed.

WARNER WELLS
15 March, 1955

The Place and the People

Since Dr. Hachiya began his diary with no thought that it might be published, he saw no need to describe either the hospital that was its setting or the members of the staff who were the principal characters. The Hiroshima Communications Hospital served the employees in the Hiroshima area of the Ministry of Communications, which in Japan controls postal, telegraph, and telephone services. Since Hiroshima was a city of half a million population, and the capital of the Prefecture of Hiroshima, with over two million population, the hospital was an institution of considerable importance. It had approximately 20 on its staff and 125 beds – this latter figure does not give a proper sense of the scale of its operations since out-patient service in Japan, as in America, is frequently greater than in-patient service.

The hospital adjoined the main office of the Communications Bureau, and both were of strong, reinforced concrete construction. After the bombing, the Bureau became an annex to the hospital. Both were located about 1,500 meters from the hypocenter of the bomb, on the northeast border of a large military area, the Hiroshima Military Barracks, which was totally destroyed. Dr. Hachiya's home was a few hundred meters from the hospital.

Hiroshima had not been bombed during the current war, but

in anticipation of a raid the military authorities, a few months before, had demolished thousands of houses to make fire lanes and had evacuated much of its personnel. Following this, on his own authority, Dr. Hachiya had evacuated his in-patients to the interior, so that at the time of the bombing the hospital was practically empty.

Following are the members of the staff and others who figure most prominently in the diary:

Dr. Akiyama – Head of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department.

Dr. Chodo – A member of the Dental Department.

Dr. Fujii – Head of the Dental Department.

Dr. Hachiya – Director of the hospital and author of this diary.

Dr. Hanaoka – Head of the Internal Medicine Department.

Dr. Harada – A pharmacist.

Miss Hinada – A nurse in the hospital.

Dr. Hinoi – Chief pharmacist.

Mr. Iguchi – Communications Bureau chauffeur.

Mr. Imachi – A member of the administrative staff; he doubled as chief cook.

Mr. Isono – He became Chief of the Hiroshima Division of the Communications Bureau when Mr. Yoshida was killed.

Miss Kado – Dr. Hachiya's private nurse.

Dr. Katsube – Chief of the Surgery Department.

Dr. Kitajima – Chief of the Hiroshima Sanitary Department.

Mr. Kitao – A member of the administrative staff.

Dr. Koyama – Deputy Director and head of the Ophthalmology Department.

Mr. Mizoguchi – Formerly an office clerk, he acted as quartermaster, ration supervisor, hospital administrator, public relations officer, and general trouble shooter.

Dr. Morisugi – Member of the Internal Medicine Department.

Mr. Okamoto – Head of the Western District of the Communications Bureau.

Mr. Okura – A dentist.

Mrs. Saeki – Classified as a janitress, but this appellation hardly does justice to Mrs. Saeki. Bereaved of three sons and her husband, all lost in the war, this woman of sturdy build and sturdier character, acquainted with sorrow, hardship, and poverty, was friend, councillor, sounding board, and mother to staff, patients, and visitors to the hospital. She is generally referred to as *baba-san* which, translated freely, means "dear old grandmother."

Dr. Sasada – Head of the Pediatrics Department.

Mr. Sasaki – A near neighbor and friend of Dr. Hachiya.

Mr. Sera – Head of the hospital business office.

Mr. Shiota – A business officer.

Miss Susukida – A nursing supervisor.

Miss Takao – Dr. Katsube's surgical nurse.

Dr. Tamagawa – Professor of Pathology, Hiroshima Medical School.

Mr. Ushio – Head of General Affairs.

Yaeko-san – Dr. Hachiya's wife.

Miss Yama – Head nurse in surgery.

Mr. Yamazaki – A business officer who looked after the crematory.

Mrs. Yoshida – Wife of the former Chief of the Communications Bureau.