

A Letter of 35 Years

August 5 th, 1980

Dear Principal Yasu Esumi,

I hope this letter finds you well despite the hot weather. Actually, I have never had the opportunity to meet you in person. Every year as the anniversary of the atomic bombing approaches, I recall the deep impression left on me by the actions of your students. I am writing with the hope that this impression of mine, of which there is no record and which no teacher is aware, will be used for educating future Junshin students.

On either the 10th or 11th of August, 1945 (I cannot clearly recall the date) we admitted some ten injured Junshin students to the Nagata National Elementary School in Isahaya City. At first we did not realize who they were and so we gave them floor space in rooms with other victims. The late Mr. Yoshio Tokunaga, who I think taught physical education at Junshin, asked if it would be possible to put the Junshin students together in a separate room.

After consulting with various people, we arranged for them to be moved to the home economics classroom which was in the same building. As you may know, at that time there were almost 200 injured people housed there and being cared for by a united group of local women's and young women's societies. However, the victims were truly miserable. There were some who had oozing burns all over their bodies, some whose skulls were broken and gushing blood, some who had fragments of glass in their eyes, some who were bleeding from holes in their chests caused by something, some with broken bones, some who had gone mad, some who were hysterical with agony, some who begged for water, some whose faces were festering with maggots under their skin and so on, and I felt this must be what they mean by the phrase 'living hell'. Indeed, it looked exactly as hell is usually pictured. That was not just one classroom, but every classroom looked that way.

However, upon setting foot in the home economics classroom, one would find a different world. This may be partly due to the exceptionally careful direction of the attending young teacher (who is probably nearly 60 years old now), but I was keenly aware of the fact that their daily religious education was a major factor. How dreadful it must have been. How much they must have wanted to cry out. How much they must have wanted to complain for water. However, this classroom, aside from the occasional low groan, was truly quiet.

The attending young teacher would encourage everyone to participate in prayers, and devoted herself to praying for God's grace. I was moved as I observed them, and I think it was the fruits of their religious education, though I cannot say for sure.

I wrote this because I was eager to express this information to you. I have many other things I want to write about, such as Ms. Ujie passing away and being moved to another mortuary, but I will save them for another time.

It has been 35 years since the atomic bombing and I am now over 70 years old, but I wanted to make sure you knew about the few days I spent with those martyr-like Junshin students. I heard that the young female teacher who attended them at the time is now working at a kindergarten. As the anniversary of the atomic bombing approaches, thank you for taking time to read this letter.

Sincerely,
Matasaburo Nagae