

# Hiroshi Maruya Poet Hiromi Misho and Physician Hiroshi Maruya

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Hiroshi Maruya

I interviewed Dr. Hiroshi Maruya, the honorary director of Hiroshima Kyoritsu Hospital and the famous poet Hiromi Misho. Misho was born in Iwakuni in 1925. (Misho is the name of the birthplace of his mother, who passed away early in his boyhood.) There are two early motivational experiences in his life: the first is the sense of atonement he felt which was derived from his experience of having been engaged in the reclamation of paddy fields,

when, as a middle school pupil, he was mobilized as forced labor for the construction of the base of the Iwakuni Naval Air Force, the predecessor of the present U.S. Iwakuni Base. The other is his experience in A-bombed Hiroshima. He took an irregularly running train from Iwakuni to Koi (Nishi-Hiroshima) on August 8, 1945, two days after the A-bombing, to look for his girlfriend, classmates and respected teachers. He wandered around within the city area for some time, naturally without the slightest knowledge that he was being exposed to radiation because the whole city was contaminated by residual radioactivity. Having not found any acquaintances after a full-day's search, he returned to Koi in the evening to find a young, half-naked and dying man who had a gash on his chest. He looked at the gash that was still oozing fresh blood and suddenly noticed a bloodstained fly crawling out of the gash. The fly shuddered two or three times and was swallowed back into the chest together with the blood. Completely exhausted from fatigue as a result of his vain efforts to find his acquaintances among hundreds of doomed *hibakusha* and shocked by the traumatic scene, Maruya lost his memory and could not recall how he got home to Iwakuni.

Poet Misho is to be publicly honored in 2009 by the Japan Poets Association, the most prestigious association of Japanese poets. In his response to the notification of this public honor, Misho wrote that he was "willingly accepting" the honor as "an encouragement for my sincere devotion to Korean *hibakusha* and Iraqi sufferers from depleted uranium (DU) weapons, as a physician resident in Hiroshima, and also as a poet who has had the above-mentioned early experiences."

I interviewed Maruya regarding these three points: being a physician and a poet, the Korean *hibakusha* and the Iraqi sufferers from DU.

## 1. As both physician and poet

The professional obligation of a physician is to face up to life. I, as a poet, would like to write poems in praise of the warmth of life. It is fundamentally the same thing to care for people's lives as a physician and to convey the warmth of people's lives as a poet. What is the warmth of life? It is, for instance, the warmth of life or hope everybody feels when one sees a newly born baby. As a physician and as a poet, my starting and guiding point has always been human life, and I have consistently faced it squarely. From the specific viewpoint of writing poetry, it can be said that life is composed of imagination and a critical spirit. These two elements should also be regarded as the very fundamentals of civilization because, without them, no civilization can exist.

I graduated from Hiroshima Higher School under the prewar education system. As my elder brother (by two years) had been killed in the war, my father pleaded with me not to go to war. I respected his wishes and entered Okayama Medical College in 1945, thereby escaping military service. I suffered from tuberculosis in April 1947 and spent four years under medical treatment at National Iwakuni Hospital. While I was confined to my bed, from where I had a panoramic view of the Seto Inland Sea but with the U.S. Iwakuni Base in the immediate vicinity, I

contemplated the idea of poems and the fear of death.

The time of convalescence there marked the beginning of my poetic wanderings. One day by chance I found a poetry magazine at a coffee shop near the Atago railroad crossing, east of Hiroshima Station, and became acquainted with Sankichi Toge who, with some others, soon after organized the Society of Our Poems, and started a periodical *Our Poems* to which I started to contribute from the third issue. I also organized a poetry circle, an Iwakuni Hospital branch of the Society, putting myself in the maelstrom of poetry movements in post-war Hiroshima.

The Korean War started in 1950, and I was forced to witness at the Iwakuni Base, the only U.S. Marine Base on the Japanese mainland, the repeated take-offs and landings of American fighters that were going on bombing missions on the Korean Peninsula. I was so infuriated to idly watch them that I could hardly sleep at night and began to write *Iwakuni Suite*, which was to be my maiden collection of poems. One of my anti-war poems, *To a Lost Arm, from the Memo of a Wounded Soldier*, was regarded by the authorities as violating U.S. Ordinance No. 325 (Ordinance on Obstructive Deeds against the Occupation Army), and I was arrested in March 1951. In that poem I described U.S. jet fighters as "aircraft bugs" to be "knocked down by my iron arms," and I was persecuted for writing "an anti-American Military poem." The case against me was finally dropped as I insisted that there did really exist a bug called an "aircraft bug." Toge and my poetry comrades supported and encouraged my fight most earnestly. Among them, I felt the strongest sympathy with Toge who suffered from the same illness as I did.

My poem collections that have been published include the maiden *Iwakuni Suite* (January 1952), *Blind Autumn* (January 1953), *The Poem Collection by Hiromi Misho* (July 1987), *The Second Poem Collection by Hiromi Misho* (June 1999), *As I Became Little Atomic Dust* (March 2004, co-authored with Itsuko Ishikawa), *Genkyo* (Places Dear to My Heart) (October 2006), and *My Native Place, Iwakuni* (September 2008). I had no publications between 1953 and 1977 because I completely devoted myself to my work as a physician and so did not write any poems during that time. After I returned to Hiroshima and became the director of Hiroshima Kyoritsu Hospital in August 1977, I resumed writing poems at the earnest request of Munetoshi Fukagawa, a poet friend since the publication of *Our Poems*, who passed away in April 2008 at the age of 87. This return to poetry writing led to the publication of *The Poem Collection by Hiromi Misho*.

In contrast to this period, there were only two years between *Genkyo* and *My Native Place, Iwakuni*. When I published *Genkyo*, I never imagined that I would follow up with *My Native Place, Iwakuni* so soon. However, I was so angered by the so-called realignment of U.S. Forces in Japan in general, and particularly by the transformation of the base in Iwakuni, a city adjacent to Hiroshima, into a monster base 1.4 times bigger than the Kadena Base in Okinawa (which has so far been the largest in the Far East), that I began to wonder seriously if any message would be sent out by someone in Hiroshima; people who, in my opinion, as Hiroshima residents, should bear the heaviest responsibility to speak out for peace in Japan. I myself felt obliged to speak out when the time was right. As I wrote in the postscript of *My Native Place, Iwakuni*, I took up the task out of a sense of mission as a poet, thinking about "What kind of words I, a poet born in Iwakuni, could deliver to the 250,000 souls of the victims enshrined in the Cenotaph for the A-bomb Victims." Fortunately the work has been so warmly received that I now have a great sense of achievement.

## 2. Korean *hibakusha*

Munetoshi Fukagawa also played an important role in my getting



involved with Korean *hibakusha*. On August 6, 1945, Fukagawa endured the A-bomb attack at a Hiroshima machine manufacturing factory of Mitsubishi Heavy-Industries Ltd. where he worked as an instructor for Korean drafted workers. Although many Korean A-bomb sufferers went back to Korea after the war, some of them disappeared on their way home when their ship was wrecked in a typhoon. Fukagawa investigated the case and found out that the cesium-containing remains unearthed on Okinoshima Island in Fukuoka Prefecture since 1976 were actually those of more than 200 Korean workers. (According to the website of the Association to Support the Court Struggle for Korean Ex-Forced Laborers and A-Bomb Victims of Mitsubishi Hiroshima (ASK), the exact number of the human remains was 241.) He also supported a consequential lawsuit as one of the representatives of the Association that demanded that indemnity be paid by the government and the company. (The Supreme Court ruled on November 11, 2007 that Circular No. 402 issued by the Ministry of Welfare (now the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare) was illegal as it excluded foreign *hibakusha* from legal protection, and ordered the government, which was the defendant, to compensate them.) His words and deeds gradually aroused my interest and concerns about Korean *hibakusha*. In the meantime, the Japanese government's scheme to provide Korean *hibakusha* with medical treatment in Japan was put into effect in 1981, following an agreement between the governments of Japan and South Korea, but this was cut short abruptly after only five years. My concern about Korean *hibakusha* was only to grow as a result of these events, and in 1990 Hiroshima Kyoritsu Hospital decided, under my guidance, to join the private organization, the Hiroshima Committee for South Korean-Resident Hibakusha Receiving Medical Treatment in Japan (established in 1984 under the initiative of Kawamura Hospital). Kyoritsu Hospital has accepted *hibakusha* not only from Korea but also, since 2002, those from Brazil, the U.S., the United Kingdom and Mexico.

Among the many Korean *hibakusha* I have become acquainted with, I felt the deepest affection for Sun-gi Lee as he, like me, took Hiroshima as his second home. The title of my work *Genkyo* was partly inspired by this common feeling. I first came to know him when he was hospitalized at Kyoritsu Hospital as one of those who came to Japan from South Korea for treatment in 1998. Two years later he visited Hiroshima again, accompanying his niece who was A-bombed at the age of seven and who came to Hiroshima this time to apply for the issuance of an A-bomb health book. At that time, a laryngeal cancer was found in his throat and he underwent an operation at Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital. When I visited him at the hospital, he was so pleased after enduring loneliness during the operation and radiation treatment in a foreign country. After his return to Hapcheon, South Korea, he frequently sent me letters. He came to Hiroshima half a year later for a medical examination and took back to Korea acorns that he found in the Peace Park. He planted them in Hapcheon and they sprouted in 1999. He was hospitalized at Kyoritsu Hospital again in January 2000 and in January 2001. In 2000, a stomach cancer was found and he underwent another operation. In 2001, a metastasis to the liver was found and he was told that it would be hard to completely cure it. He went back to Hapcheon the next day without telling me beforehand. Several days later he sent me a letter in which he wrote, "For what crime should I be punished so harshly?" In my reply I stated that a strong will was indispensable in his fight against the cancer, and strongly recommended that he, as a means to encourage himself, should write an autobiography from the time of the A-bomb. He did so, giving it the title "Acorns from Hiroshima sprouted on the soil of Hapcheon," before his death in November of that year. (His autobiography is compiled into *We Wrote Torn Apart: Memoirs of*

*Korean Hibakusha* co-edited by Hiroshi Maruya and Itsuko Ishikawa.) Sun-gi Lee mediated the twinning between the Hapcheon branch of the Korean Atomic Bomb Casualties Association in the Republic of Korea and the A-Bomb Sufferers Association of Hiroshima Kyoritsu Hospital. The agreement was concluded in April 2001, since when mutual visits have been taking place.

### 3. Iraqi victims of depleted uranium

The first occasion in which I encountered Iraqi sufferers of depleted uranium (DU) was in December 2002 when two professors, one from the University of Baghdad (Pediatrics) and the other from the University of Basrah (Oncology), visited Hiroshima at the invitation of NGOs and had a meeting with me. They hoped to learn from Hiroshima's experiences in order to find out the causes for frequently occurring cancers in Iraq. At their request, I expressed my opinion that a possible cause was duplicated contamination by radiation and heavy metals. But I was shocked to hear their explanation that it was actually alpha rays that were responsible for cancers caused by DU. It is an established theory that the case of Hiroshima was that of external exposure to gamma rays which have a rather long wavelength. In the case of DU, however, the radioactive rays emitted from DU are alpha rays, which have very destructive energy (1,000 times stronger than gamma rays), although their effective distance is extremely short (comparable to the thickness of a piece of paper, or 40 microns). A radiation dose in a tissue of a radius of 40 microns or less is said to amount to as high as 100 sieverts per annum, reaching 100,000 times the permitted level. The DU was used in anti-tank shells during the Persian Gulf War in 1991. It was dispersed into the air as metal vapor caused by heat at temperatures higher than 1,000 degrees Celsius. Iraqi people were then exposed to internal radiation by inhaling the DU metal vapor. "In Iraq, the rate of increase in the number of patients suffering from leukemia did not slow down, even ten years after the war. The development of lung and breast cancers began after a latency period of five years, while it was 20 years in Hiroshima. These facts are very different from the cases of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I was really struck with horror by the fact of internal radiation caused by alpha rays." (Hiroshi Maruya, "Crime of using DU shells in Iraq" in *World Affairs Weekly*, October 21, 2003.) It is really incredible and outrageous to see that the American and British governments, while having used DU shells, flatly deny the possibility of internal radiation by emphasizing the little degree of external radiation that the weapons convey. The United States again resorted to war against Iraq in 2003 and used many DU shells. With Itsuko Ishikawa, I published a poem collection *As I Became Little Atomic Dust* in 2004 in order to lodge an accusation against the use of DU shells in Iraq.

Let me add one more thing. In the case of the Hiroshima A-bombing, only a small percentage of the bomb's uranium exploded, leaving a massive amount of unexploded uranium to be scattered into the air emitting radioactive alpha rays. It was therefore highly likely that many people in Hiroshima were exposed to internal radiation from alpha rays. The so-called black rain may be one result of this fact.



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