

## BOOK REVIEW

# Can the Last Nuclear Bombing Teach Us How To Prevent the Next?

by Ulrike Lillge

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### **8:15—A True Story of Survival and Forgiveness from Hiroshima**

by Dr. Akiko Mikamo

Atlanta: Westwood Books, 2019

Hardcover: \$17.99, 212 pages

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*Dr. Akiko Mikamo presented her book and the film she produced based upon it, 8:15—Hiroshima: From Father to Daughter, at the Nov. 26, 2023 online forum of the International Peace Coalition, titled “No More War Crimes! Economic Development—Not Depopulation.” Other speakers at the event were Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the international Schiller Institute, and Ray McGovern, former CIA analyst and co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity.*

August 8, 1945, 8:15 a.m. At this time the murderous atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. A pocket watch belonging to the author’s father, Shinji Mikamo, and later found in the rubble, recorded the time, as its hands were seared into the metal.

Miraculously, Shinji Mikamo and his father survived the deadly bomb, despite being just 1,200 meters from the epicenter. In a shocking and deeply moving way, Shinji Mikamo later described to his daughter Akiko this terrible struggle for survival, which he endured together with his father, Fukuichi Mikamo. Born in 1961, Akiko wrote this book using recordings and statements from her father as an eternal reminder to future generations. At some point the physical wounds would heal, but how could people cope with such horrible experiences and find peace in their lives, free from inner thoughts of hatred and revenge?

### **Living Through the Bombing**

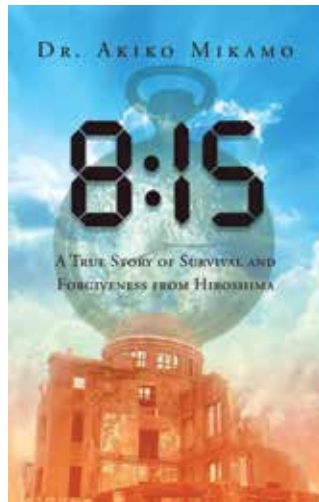
According to Mikamo, the bomb dropped over Hiroshima killed tens of thousands instantaneously, a number which grew to approximately 140,000 by the end of the year. In the following decades that number rose dramatically to over 350,000 as a result of exposure to radiation. The once thriving, prosperous

city had become scorched earth and its population eviscerated. The same horror was repeated in Nagasaki three days later, with an estimated 150,000 deaths.

Immediately after the bomb was dropped over Hiroshima, Shinji and Fukuichi saw a gigantic fireball rushing toward them, “at least five times bigger and ten times brighter than the sun,” a powerful flame, exceptionally bright yellow, almost white. A deafening noise and thunder followed, as if the universe were exploding. Shinji recalls:

It was as if a bucket of boiling water had been dumped over my whole body and scoured my skin.... My whole chest and right arm were completely burned.... My skin hung off my body in pieces like ragged clothes.... The raw flesh on my arms looked like a sweet yellow-powder cake.... Then we heard a roaring sound growing louder—a fire quickly approaching. We smelled and heard the fire before we saw it: an enormous conflagration of flame was leaping toward us.... As it moved, it was burning everything in its path, anything that hadn’t already been burned to ash in the explosion, including people. We heard their screams as the fire caught up with them. We smelled their flesh as they burned. We tasted the ash on our tongues. It was hell on earth.

A deafening tornado followed. It climbed nearly



two hundred meters, and “sucked up large pieces of collapsed houses, burned remains of furniture, and even water from the river,” hurling debris down on them, before finally changing direction. Then came a black rain, like liquid charcoal, covering everything in sight. It took until sunset for the huge fire and tornado to subside.

Things couldn’t have been worse in hell, and those who died immediately were more lucky, because they were spared the torment and misery of a mostly futile struggle for survival.

The rest of Shinji’s journey was marked by an attempt to escape the miserable chaos, desperately searching for medical help in a hopeless situation. His own inner strength, his subconscious will to survive, and his father’s relentless insistence to not give up but to keep going, were his only salvation. For Fukuichi, himself near death, his son’s survival was his final mission that kept him alive at that point. “His forcefulness was a whip made of the toughest love,” Shinji remembers.

After finding medical care and persevering through recovery, Shinji managed to cling to life and begin to rebuild. Because of his injuries, however, it took him a very long time before he could return to normal life. He ultimately survived because in every subsequent stage of his life there appeared an “angel,” a “good Samaritan,” someone who looked after him, even though they themselves were living in the most impoverished conditions—people who felt compassion for his fate and who helped without asking.

### **A Philosophy To Live By**

As if the author knew the parallels that one would immediately draw when reading the book, given the current world situation and the imminent danger of a major war, Akiko dispels any pessimistic thoughts of an inevitable end of the world. The subtitle of the book itself indicates a different conclusion: *A True Story of Survival and Forgiveness from Hiroshima*.

Shinji’s own life experience taught him that goodness and love for mankind is the way to life. Evil, anger, hatred, and revenge lead to destruction and ruin. Akiko’s father’s mission was to take one’s own step into the future and teach his children that path. Akiko conveys Shinji Mikamo’s words:

Our city was forever changed. There could be no doubt of that. But I saw nothing good to come

from holding tight to animosity, from focusing on the past instead of the future. No good would come from narrowing our eyes to the complicated and vehement disposition that had engaged so much of the world at war. These were the blinders that provoked conflict, not soothed it. I wanted to look forward. I wanted to see enemies become allies. I wanted peace.

Shinji Mikamo wanted such a future for his children.

I wanted them to live in a world of peace, a world where cultures worked to know and understand each other, a world where they would never see or know the atrocities of war. I wanted more for my daughters than to merely live in that world. I wanted them to help make that world.

And that’s exactly what Akiko did. Graduating from Hiroshima University’s School of Education, she came to the U.S.A., where she now lives and works as a clinical and medical psychologist, and is involved in many peace activities.

How can one develop human greatness and forgive a person for the injustice that he or she has perpetrated against us?

Her first point is that every person has the free will to decide. Because of this uniquely human quality, it is possible for us to “turn an opportunity to hate into an opportunity to love.” One can choose to do this.

The second point is to understand the importance of empathy (Friedrich Schiller coined the term *Empfindungsvermögen*). Without sharing the other person’s views, you can still empathize with the other person. You can see things from the other person’s perspective, taking into account their upbringing, culture, and personality to understand how that person might feel, think, and experience.

Her conclusion is that the lifelong bonds of anger, condemnation, and divisiveness can only be broken through empathy and forgiveness. These are the only paths to true healing.

Mikamo’s belief, given the current world situation, is that by reading her story people can also understand the universal ideas of forgiveness and empathy, and apply them to their own lives.

It’s an incredible book written at an incredible time, and one can only wish it the widest possible circulation.