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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH AKIKO SEITELBACH

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Akiko Seitelbach wishes to express her appreciation to her close friends Bernadette Roig and Paul Pittari, for their assistance in editing this history.

Mohammad Athar: This begins an interview with Akiko Seitelbach in Monroe Township, New Jersey. The date is January 4, 2016. I am Mohammad Athar conducting the interview along with:

Linda Ikeda: Linda Ikeda.

MA: Thank you for having me in your home and agreeing to the interview. To begin, where and when were you born?

Akiko Seitelbach: I was born in Shanghai, China, October 25, 1922, in a Japanese colony.

MA: Yes, a section of Shanghai was a colony of Japan at the time.

AS: Yes.

MA: I want to ask you about your family history. What do you know about your mother's history?

AS: My mother died when I was five months old.

My parents lived in a Japanese colony in Shanghai when I was born in 1922. At the time of my birth my mother was very ill and 5 months after my birth she died. I cannot imagine how my father must have felt. He must have been lost, being left with a newborn baby. But, we were fortunate because at the time of my mother's death, my aunt and her husband, who lived in Nagasaki, were looking for a child who could become their heir. My aunt was not able to conceive on her own. She and her husband were already retired and living comfortably in Japan. My aunt adopted me and brought me back to Nagasaki. At the same time, they hired a Chinese nursemaid for me. That was fine at the beginning. However in 1922, if you were Chinese in a Japanese society, you were not treated very well. Because she could not speak Japanese, she was very lonely. So, she went back to China. After she left, all the trouble started because my adoptive mother couldn't feed me. She was trying to find formula, but in 1922, artificial formulas were not available for a new born baby. Whatever was available made me sick. I was told that the pediatrician was there almost every day in my house. My mother really had an awful time. Later, she told me that she was afraid she was going to lose me, because I caught every childhood disease. My ability to resist infectious diseases had deteriorated.

MA: No antibiotics and things like that?

AS: No. However, my mother loved me and I had a wonderful childhood.

MA: Okay. When you were born in Shanghai, were you born a Japanese citizen or a Chinese citizen?

AS: I was born in a Japanese colony at that time. We had the war, remember, the Chinese-Japanese War? [Editor's Note: After the First Sino-Japanese War, which resulted in a Japanese

victory, Japan was able to gain extra territorial rights in China through the Treaty of Shimonoseki. Parts of Shanghai came under direct control of the Japanese Empire.]

MA: Yes.

AS: So, this area was under the Japanese government. I have official papers of my adoption, and it doesn't state anything about being Chinese.

MA: What about your mother's parents? Do you know anything about their history?

AS: My mother's parents?

MA: Yes.

LI: Her real mother or her adoptive?

AS: My adoptive mother and my real mother were sisters, so they had the same parents. My adoptive mother told me that she had a little sister when she was growing up and loved to babysit with her. That little "sister" was my real mother, but my aunt did not tell me that. She was always afraid that I would find out that I was not her birth child. Since I adored my adoptive mother, I did not have to have anyone else if she was with me. That's all.

I do not have much knowledge of my grand-parents.

I know they owned a nice big home in Nagasaki. I remember where they lived. They had lots of children and I had many aunts and uncles.

I should mention that my real father came from the samurai clan. You know the caste system, under the Meiji reform. You remember that? [Editor's Note: The Meiji Restoration began in 1868 and removed the Tokugawa shogun from power, re-establishing the emperor to a supreme position within the government, although the emperor was relegated to more of a figurehead. The reforms enacted are often cited as Japan's rather quick path towards modernization.]

MA: Yes. For the record can you explain briefly what that was? Can you say anything about that, your father being a samurai and the Meiji period?

AS: If you want to know about it, I must make a study of Japanese history during that period. Offhand, I do not remember much about the history during the Meiji period. My real father used to come to see me, but my parents strictly forbade him to mention that he was my real father. Therefore, I thought he was a kind uncle or somebody.

MA: So, you did not know he was your real father?

AS: No. I look like my father, but the thought that we were related never entered my mind. I was just a kid.

MA: So, most of your childhood was spent in Nagasaki?

AS: Yes.

MA: What was your neighborhood like? What were your earliest memories of Nagasaki?

AS: First memories of Nagasaki? I cannot tell you whether these are my first memories or just what my mom told me. I do have pictures. They had a nice home in Nagasaki. I was just telling Linda about my home. I had two real brothers, and a real sister.

MA: Where did your sister live?

AS: My sister lived in Shanghai until it was time to attend the high-school in Nagasaki, because my other aunt adopted her soon after the death of our mother. She had a great childhood, because the aunt who adopted her was a very successful business woman and she adored my sister, even more than her own daughter.

My sister and I were only two years apart in age.

I had never seen my sister, Hanako, until I was five years old. She was an independent child when she was growing up, and made the overnight trip all by herself on a steamboat from Shanghai to Nagasaki to visit me. It's only an overnight trip from Shanghai to Nagasaki as you can see on the geographical map. When my mother and I went to meet Hanako at the harbor, I remember my mom pointed at her and said "Akiko, that's your sister." She was wearing a raw silk dress like a grown lady and had beautiful, curly hair. She skipped over to where I stood hanging on to my mother's hand. She said, "Akko-chan", which was baby talk for my name, "konnichiwa" (hello). My sister smiled at me, but at the same time looked at me curiously. She was gorgeous! I was smitten!

I found out that she was not too thrilled to baby-sit with me, but as far as I was concerned she was very sweet to me, and that's enough.

MA: What about your adoptive father? What was his job?

AS: My father?

MA: Your adoptive father, yes.

AS: He was retired by the time they adopted me. He was born the second son of a farming family. The first born would inherit the whole farm and business. He was the second son, therefore, it was up to him to make his own life. He found out that there were fortunes to be made in Formosa if you were clever enough, and I guess he must have been. By the time they adopted me, he had made enough money, was retired, and living comfortably. They bought a fine house with a garden in Nagasaki, but they needed a baby…an heir.

MA: Tell me about this house and living in the house, the things you did.

AS: The Nagasaki house?

MA: Yes.

AS: That house is still standing.

MA: Wow.

AS: The thought of my childhood home or even my childhood has not entered my mind for a long time. I found out that the house was still standing when I went to visit in Nagasaki many years after I was married. It was in fine shape. They must have kept it up because it was a beautiful home. Behind the house was a Shinto shrine and it remains today. I went into that house and asked the owner if I could see the garden. I said, "Excuse me, you don't know me, but this was my house when I was a baby." The owner was very sweet. She said, "Oh, you can walk around and see the garden." The garden, as I remember, I thought was so big, but it wasn't that big. At that time, they didn't keep it up like a real Japanese formal garden. There was once a pond and a bridge and things like that. The formal garden was once kept beautifully by professional gardeners. I remember playing with the goldfish in the pond. One day, someone brought a turtle over and placed it in the pond...I don't know who. The turtle had a feast eating all the goldfish. I was so angry.

The weather in Nagasaki is warm. It rains every day and is humid. We had an awfully high snake population. The climate was perfect for them. They used to come in my yard. They were not poisonous—just grass snakes. I didn't particularly like them, but my mother was a very devout Buddhist. Sitting in the veranda she would talk to the snakes, "Please go away, because if my husband sees you, he's going to kill you." I believe they understood.

MA: Were there other houses near your house?

AS: By my house, right?

MA: Yes.

AS: There were other houses and also a canal.

It was a big neighborhood. I remember a couple houses down from us there was a little boy my age. We used to play Samurai.

MA: How would you play with your friend?

AS: I had to play a boy's game, with a wooden stick used as a sword.

My father was an expert on Japanese archery. What do you call it? I can't think of it.

LI: A bow and arrow.

AS: A bow and arrow. He was very proud that he could use a very strong, stiff bow, so that he could make his arrows fly straight and true through the center of the target at a long range.

MA: What about school? You said you went to the Katsuyama School in Nagasaki.

AS: Katsuyama was the name of my grammar school. But in order to be accepted by the high school of my choice, I was required to take the entrance examination and pass it. If you didn't want to go to a prestigious school like the Prefectural High School, you didn't have to take an entrance examination. When I was going to the grammar school, they picked ten girls out of the graduating class to take the test. They wouldn't even give you a chance to take the test if you were not a top student. I took the test. It was a government sponsored high school. In those days it was quite prestigious, because later, when I was looking for a job in New York, I was asked what school I attended. When I told them, they hired me without much ado, because of the reputation of the school. When I finished high school, I could get into any college without taking a test. But, then the war came.

MA: Before we get into World War II, because I have a lot of questions about that, what was school like, high school, grammar school? What was it like at that time?

AS: Okay. When I went to school, grammar school was six years and high school was four. That's it. I graduated high school when I was sixteen. I thought I was finished with my education. My parents were very pleased, but, my father wanted me to go to college. But to go to college, I would have to move far away to Tokyo. My mother was very upset, and said, "If you take her away, I will kill myself." I didn't particularly want to go to college anyway. As most young girls, I was more interested in being nicely dressed.

MA: What subjects interested you?

AS: I liked almost everything. I was good at math. Even when I was in grammar school they said I was at a high school level. In addition to math, I liked to write. I studied hard to get into my high school. When I was in sixth grade, we had a thick book of many subjects that I had to memorize. It included philosophy, history, and geography. My teacher said, "In order to get into that high school, I should be able to open this book, ask you any question, and you should be able to answer it correctly." Fortunately, I could remember everything I read. That school was very hard, but I made the honor roll.

MA: Were you involved with any extra-curricular interests in high school?

LI: Activities.

AS: We had a group of about ten girls who learned archery.

We were required to take sewing and social dancing, but the dancing was like sixteenth century European dancing, like you see in the movies. They also taught marching.

MA: Your school had marches?

AS: No. We were taught to march like the military school students. My father said, "I want you to learn how to do archery." Remember, I was a very sickly little girl. I was very weak, but, I wanted to please my father. He bought me a very weak bow. So, when I shot at something, the arrow never reached the target. I wasn't very good at playing outside sports, like tennis. My mother was worried that I would hurt myself. She wouldn't let me do anything strenuous, so I didn't do anything. However, I wanted to learn the naginata (Japanese martial arts). My naginata teacher was a woman, but she was powerfully built, like a man. She was very strict, but fair, and I liked her.

My archery teacher, who was also my homeroom teacher, told me, "Aim high, so it goes down this way." So, I did and one day it went over the fence and into the street and he said, "Oh, no. Somebody may be walking out there." I said, "You told me to aim high." I had wonderful school experiences; I enjoyed it.

MA: During this time did you travel to any other parts of Japan?

AS: Oh, yes. My school was special. They had a whole month of trips with full classes, and four teachers accompanying us. We went all over Japan, but not northern Japan; we went to Tokyo and Nikko. Have you heard of Nikko?

MA: I have not.

AS: Well, Nikko is a very famous place in Japan because a very important Shogun has a tomb there.

MA: That was his palace?

AS: No. It is where his tomb is. That trip was the first time I left my mom. She said, "Are you going to cry?" I said, "I don't know." I didn't cry. I was grown up.

MA: What year did you graduate high school?

AS: I was sixteen, so 1922 plus sixteen.

MA: So, 1938?

AS: Yes. Because I was not going to college, my parents said I must learn to become the mistress of a decent household, and learn proper etiquette to act as a well brought-up lady. My sister and I went to the same high school, but after high school, she went to Kassui College, which is a mission school run by American Methodists. She was an avid reader, and she encouraged me to read translations of famous European literature. I love to read a lot.

When I was twelve, I wrote a story at my high school that won a prize. My teacher called me and he said, "Did you write this?" I said, "Yes." He asked, "Do you have a boyfriend?" I said,

"Boyfriend? No. No sir." He said, "This story you wrote is a love story." Most everybody liked it, and it was published by my school.

I was not supposed to even walk down the street with my brother. My Japanese language teacher called me one day and said, "Who is that guy that was walking with you?" I said, "That's my brother."

My sister, Hanako, read all kinds of books. I especially liked to read tragic love stories. My sister told me that I should not be reading those kinds of stories. So, I got most of my education from what she was reading. She would tell me what to read, and what not to read. I was very young and did not understand the ideas of Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, but my sister said to read it, so I read it. At least, I remember the names now, thank God. The ground work was done, so now, I enjoy everything I read.

MA: You mentioned before that you went to school to learn how to sew and do these different things.

AS: After graduating high school, I had private teachers who taught me how to sew by hand, and how to use a sewing machine. There were also ceremonies that had to be learned, for example, the tea ceremony, which is the custom of how to serve tea. We were taught by a Buddhist priest's wife. Unlike school, nothing was written, such as directions on how things are to be done. We had to sit there, and observe how she performed the ceremony. I couldn't take notes so I had to remember how to do the ceremony. If I am forced to do the ceremony now, I would have to study how to perform it. Also, at my age, I cannot sit on the floor, which is an important part of the ceremony. So, that's it. They taught me how to be a good wife.

Then, the war broke out.

MA: So, before the war officially broke out, did you follow what was happening in Japan on the news or the radio? Did you keep up with what was happening in the country?

AS: I knew what was going on?

MA: Yes.

AS: Yes, we had to be aware of what was going on, but I didn't believe it.

MA: Did you get the information over the radio or did you read it? How would you get these announcements?

AS: Besides the radio and newspapers, I got information from my sister and older brothers, Nijitsugu and Tsuguo. Tsuguo was a civil engineer, and during the war he was drafted and became a captain in the Army Engineer Corp.

MA: For Japan, the war really broke out in 1937. Around when you graduated high school is when the war broke out? You must have been around eighteen.

AS: When the war broke out, I had already finished school.

MA: How did you find out the country was at war?

AS: By mass communication, such as radios and newspapers. We were told that the Japanese Navy had attacked Pearl Harbor.

MA: Okay, you are talking about Pearl Harbor.

AS: They told us. Oh, of course they told us.

MA: Was this before the attack happened, or was it after that you were told, if you remember?

AS: I think after. We attacked Pearl Harbor, and then they told us. I knew about America, how big it is. I didn't know if our military leaders knew their geography, Japan compared to America. I had no feeling about Americans. My government said we were being mistreated. When we were told that we had hit Pearl Harbor, I was scared. I said, "America has airplanes. They will come."

MA: Do you remember what the feeling was among your family, different people you knew? Did they all feel the same way? Were they also scared?

AS: We could not say we were scared. We would die for the emperor. We wouldn't dare say we were afraid. But, I was scared.

MA: So, this was all your personal feelings, but you couldn't express them?

AS: These were also the feelings of my friends and my contemporaries; they were college students. All of my friends went to the same school as I did. There was also a medical school. One of my best friend's cousin was in the medical school. He was drafted, though he was still a student. They gave him the rank of captain. I used to help him study. The Japanese government actually forced all the high school and college students to work for the war effort.

MA: Did you work for the war effort, too?

AS: Yes, but I didn't want to work in a factory. My real father got a job as a manager of a dormitory for the workers. It was a big place, and since he was the manager, he could get my adoptive mother and me food and a place to stay. He gave us one of the dormitory rooms, a nice big room. My mom and I lived there with him and his family for a few months, I think. Sadly, my mom died of a heart attack while we were living there. She was not that old, but the world was changing and she couldn't take it. After my mother passed away, my father was able to get me a desk job in the supply office of the Mitsubishi Electrical Works. Because of the war,

supplies were scarce. With the shortage of supplies, I had little to do in the office, so I spent most of the day reading fiction books.

At first, we were fighting successfully. Everything was great. Gradually, the news became depressing.

MA: You were aware of all of this going on?

AS: Yes. We were told that we were winning. How could they say we're winning? Who do they think they're kidding? Everybody is dying. I had to go to the train station to commute to work and there I saw many families holding small boxes of ashes of soldiers killed in battle.

I didn't care if the Emperor was a god or whatever he was. We were all going to die anyway because we didn't even have food. There was nothing we could do about it. We didn't even have rice.

MA: There was just nothing?

AS: Japan is a little island. Where could we get food? They gave everything to the Japanese military. Even then, I think they weren't eating that well either. However, they had more than we did. Finally, at the end, we didn't have anything at all. I remember all we could eat were pumpkins, when we were lucky enough to get some.

In 1944, my cousin's wife moved into our house in the city of Isahaya. She had just had a baby, but her body could not make milk because she could not get any food to eat. I was with her and the baby cried day and night. The baby starved to death.

MA: Were you affected by air raids from American planes?

AS: No American airplane came to bomb Nagasaki until the atomic bomb was dropped.

MA: Okay.

AS: On the morning of August 9, 1945, I was working in the supply office of Mitsubishi Electrical Works in Nagasaki at a job my father had obtained for me, to spare me from forced labor in a factory. To stretch my legs, I got up from my desk and walked to the large picture window behind my boss. It looked out over Nagasaki harbor. I just wanted to look, resting my eyes. My boss said, "Get away from the window." Since I was sort of proud, I replied, "Don't yell at me." I gave him a dirty look and started walking back to my place. Then, the atomic bomb hit.

It was like an earthquake or a tornado. The whole building was violently shaking. During air raid drills, we were instructed to lie on the floor and cover our heads if attacked. Just as I threw myself on the floor, the ceiling collapsed, but I was very lucky. It did not fall on me, because it fell on a slant against the wall, not flat on to the floor. But, I did get hit on the head with small objects that were on top of a nearby filing cabinet that had toppled over.

I didn't have any religion at that time so I said, "Oh, mom please help." Then, it stopped and I got up. I ran out of the office and entered the attached factory area to make my way to the air raid shelter. The heavy glass ceiling of the factory had shattered and collapsed, leaving a thick layer of glass splinters all over the floor.

The air raid shelter was located some distance from the factory and office building. The shelter was a very wide tunnel dug into a large hill with entrances at both ends. Because space was limited, factory machines had also been installed in the shelter. When I first entered the shelter, I sat on the floor because I felt physically drained. It was very dark inside. Then, candles were lit, and I was able to see the many people who had been injured by the blast. I was very frightened because their faces were covered in blood. I had volunteered to be in the first aid squad when I started working for the company.

Somebody was yelling, "First aid squad, report to the other end of the tunnel." The other end was the location in the shelter where medical emergencies were handled. I walked along the dark tunnel to the other end.

When I got there, I saw a line of people, some with their clothes still smoking, waiting to be helped by the doctor. They had burns and cuts from the blast.

The doctor was there, but he didn't have much in the way of medical supplies. All he had was some ointment. The doctor looked tired and had a bad cut on his head which was bleeding.

I said, "What can I do?" and he said, "Just put this salve on these people." I knew that the ointment was not going to help them very much and as I applied the salve, they told me they were cold. Of course, I knew they were cold; their skin had peeled off. At the beginning, I hesitated before applying the salve, but after a while, I got used to it. At one point, the doctor said there was a boy on a make-shift table.

LI: A gurney?

AS: Wooden horses with a board across them.

He was a young boy, about fifteen. Blood was spewing from a deep cut on his neck. I sat on the ground next to him, and silently held his hand. The boy opened his eyes and saw me looking at him. "I'm going to die you know," he said quietly.

"I want my mother."

"Yes, she's coming. Hang on! You are not going to die!"

In the eerie silence of that moment, I heard his blood dripping on the ground. Then he was still, his innocent face peaceful, and he was gone.

That was about noon. Then, about three o'clock, I heard water splashing outside of the tunnel. I was thirsty and wanted a drink of water, and also wanted to wash my hands. I said, "I'm going to wash my hands and get a drink of water." A volunteer said, "Don't go outside." But, I ran outside of the cave anyway, because by then I didn't care.

When I got to the rushing water, I just wanted to stick my head under the water. But when I touched my hair, it was matted like steel wool. I couldn't put my comb through it. It was all covered with broken glass fragments. I couldn't even touch it, but it didn't matter at that moment. When I went back into the cave I asked if we had had a direct hit. People coming from outside said they saw a big flash of light, and that it might be a new type of bomb.

MA: You did not see the flash?

AS: I saw a short burst of bright light, followed by a shock wave from the blast.

MA: Do you remember how far away you were?

AS: No. Years later, when I was working in New York City, my boss told me that the Mitsubishi Electrical Works was about 1.3 miles from ground zero, and if I had been closer than that I would have been incinerated.

Finally, at about five o'clock, my boss, Akira, who was my friend's husband, came to me and said, "Let's go. I'll take you home." I said, "Is it okay to quit?" I meant it. I didn't want to be punished.

We still didn't know the extent of the damage that was done, because we had been in the tunnel for about six hours. When we got out, we saw that the city of Nagasaki across the harbor was in flames. To get home, we had to take a ferry boat across the harbor to get to the train station. But, we couldn't because the ferry boats were destroyed in the blast, and we could see that the train station across the harbor had been leveled.

To get to the other side of the harbor, we had to go by foot, so we started to run along the road. As we ran, we could see that the wooden houses on both sides of the road were burning. We could hardly move, because of the heat from the fires. It was like the flames were going to reach out and catch us. We were young, thank god, so we ran through it. We just ran as much as we could. When we got to the other side of the harbor, we could see that the train station was gone.

My boss said that we have to get to the next train station at Urakami, which although I didn't know at the time, was ground zero for the atomic bomb. My boss and I started to run to the Urakami train station.

To get to that station, we had to go over a railroad bridge which passed over a little canal. The railroad track ties of the bridge were on fire. So, he said, "There is no other way. I'm going to run across." So, he ran over the bridge. He called back to me and said, "Come on, come on, come across, and don't hesitate."

I wasn't even sure if the burning bridge would hold my weight, but because I was just a little girl, I ran across. When I got to the other side, I saw bodies piled against the wall of the station like fallen leaves blown by a whirlwind. Even their clothes had been burned off. In addition to adults, there were also children. The train station was demolished.

I said, "Well, we cannot catch a train here." Akira said, "Let's go to the next station." So, we started to run again. Along the way, a tall man was approaching us. He was burnt and his head was swollen. He had no hair, and his skin was hanging off his body like black seaweed.

I stopped. I was scared. I looked at him and I knew he was human.

He was mumbling, "Water, water." At first, I ran passed him because I was frightened. But, because I had been a volunteer in the emergency squad, I knew I had to help him. I stopped and I turned around to help, but he had fallen to the ground. I knew then that he was dead.

We ran until we were finally out of Nagasaki. We saw rice paddies with unharvested rice…oh my god! At least, now we don't have to run. Akira said, "We must have been running quite a bit because this is the third train station. This is where my wife's parents live. It's just a farming place in the country. We can probably stay with them and go home tomorrow, because I'm really tired and can't take another step." I felt the same!

Suddenly, we heard the sound of an airplane approaching. I'm sure it saw us walking because it zoomed down toward us. We jumped into the rice paddies. I thought, "This is it. They're going to shoot us." Maybe they were only taking pictures because they didn't shoot us. It circled around and went away. It was a small American plane. We staggered up the hill to his wife's parents' house. Everybody came running out saying, "Are you okay? Are you okay?" A little boy looked at me and started crying. I said, "What's the matter?" He was pointing at me and crying. I looked down and saw my white shirt was covered with blood. I said, "Don't worry, this is not my blood. I'm okay, so don't cry."

The next day was horrible. We saw more of the damage caused by the atomic bomb.

MA: You went through the whole city trying to find a train station? Were there soldiers around trying to stop people from coming in?

AS: There were no soldiers. The soldiers were probably all dead, because wherever we went, I didn't see any people. The houses had been flattened. Japanese houses are made of wood, so only concrete buildings were here and there. We lost our sense of direction…no road signs. I didn't know where I was.

I was glad my mother had died a year before, because we were where the bomb had been dropped. Thank God, when she died, I was right there with her.

MA: So, the next day, were you able to get back home? What happened the next day?

AS: The next day they must have started a train somewhere between Akira's in-laws' house and another station. They must have started picking up all the injured people. Train after train came, filled with people, some severely burnt. They didn't even look like people, and yet they were speaking Japanese. They didn't make sense. We waited at the station until we were able to finally board a train, about three or four in the afternoon. At that time, I was living about thirty-five miles from Nagasaki with my aunt in Isahaya after my mother had died. When I got to my aunt's house and my sister saw me, we just held each other and cried. She said, "I thought you had died."

After that, things were really bad. We had nothing to eat. At least during the war, the government had some authority to help a little bit, but right after the war, who was going to help us?

MA: How long after the attack did you learn that this bomb was dropped and Japan had surrendered?

AS: Oh, right away. That was August 9th in Nagasaki. On August 15th, Japan surrendered. After about three days, I went back to work in Nagasaki.

MA: Three days after the surrender or three days after the attack?

AS: Three days after the attack. I went back to Nagasaki and saw all the destruction and loss. The poor people I worked with and their families lived at ground zero. Some couldn't even find their wives or children. This one guy I knew only found his wife's wedding ring.

MA: The bones were all gone?

AS: Everything was wiped clean, but we survived. I didn't know at the time that six or seven days after the bombing, Japan would surrender. I thought Japan would never, ever do that. The Japanese military police came around to each house. "We're going to fight until the last person on the island is dead. You kill one American before he kills you." How am I going to kill somebody? I don't have anything. I said, "What do I use?" He said, "Use a bamboo stick. Make a spear." Yes, against their guns? Oh well, I didn't argue, because they were going out of their minds, too. So, we're all going to die. That's what he said. Then, my friend, a medical student came around. He had been given the rank of Captain and assigned to treat the injured. At least he could get some food, because he's now in the military. He brought some food to me and my aunt…not very much, but enough. He had his pistol with him and he came every day. I thought about it for a couple of days before I asked him if he would do me a favor. I said, "We're all going to die." He agreed and said, "Yes, it looks like it." So I said, "If the Americans come, I cannot fight with them. How am I going to fight with them? I would not want to be defiled. I would rather die, but I cannot kill myself. I'm too scared. Would you please shoot me in the back when I'm not looking?" He looked absolutely shocked. He said, "Kill you?" I said, "Yes, please, when I'm not looking, kill me. Then, you can die. Will you promise, please?" He finally understood and said, "Okay. I promise." Thank god the war ended quickly! I was so happy. Everybody was crying because our country had lost the war, but my eyes were dry.

MA: Do you remember hearing the emperor's last words?

AS: I sure did. [Editor's Note: Known as the *Jewel Voice Broadcast*, on a radio broadcast Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced to the Japanese people that Japan had surrendered to the Allied Powers under the terms of the Potsdam Declaration, calling for Japan's unconditional surrender. The speech was broadcasted on August 15, 1945, a date that also marks the official date of the Japanese surrender.]

I was extremely grateful. But, of course, we were starving to death!

I didn't blame the American soldiers for what they had done. The Japanese had done the same thing to them and why not? It's so sad. Some people say we still need war. I don't know how they can think that way. They have never been there.

MA: When do you remember the American troops coming to Japan and beginning the occupation?

AS: Yes, they came. They were very good. General MacArthur did a wonderful job because he was clever and had very strict regulations. All the soldiers that came to Nagasaki right after the war were combat soldiers, the Marines from Guadalcanal. Yet, nothing bad ever happened. In Nagasaki, they had some barracks. The occupation forces were very good. They really didn't allow anyone to step out of line. They were very kind to the Japanese people. Of course, there were incidents, but I never felt fear against American soldiers while working as an interpreter for the Occupation Forces.

MA: How did you get the job as the interpreter?

AS: That's in the book. That's a long story. That was like a miracle. It's in the book. You want to read my book? [Editor's Note: In 2003 the book, "Nagasaki Woman", written by Akiko Seitelbach was published by Xlibris Corp.]

MA: We can look at it after the interview and we can see. So, this time of the occupation, you also met your future husband. He was part of the occupying forces. So, tell us that story.

LI: Why don't you ask her if she wants a break?

MA: Oh, yes. Do you want to take a break? We have been going for a while.

LI: Why don't you take a break, Akiko?

AS: Yes. You want something to eat?

MA: Let me just pause.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Transcribed by Nina Malagi
Reviewed by Mohammad Athar 7/7/16