

How World War II Affected My Life

World War II played an important part in the lives of our generation. We were forced to live a different life style; played various roles, and did things which we would not have done normally if not for the War.

Taiwan's involvement in the war near the end of World War II for about a year had a great impact on me and significantly affected my life.

Taiwan had been under Japanese occupation since 1895.

I attended elementary school in 1943 at age six. The school was primarily for the Japanese children. At the time, it was superficially peaceful in Taiwan because the World War had not directly affected Taiwan yet. My Japanese classmates were friendly with me.

In late 1944, Taiwan, being a territory of Japan, became a target of bombardment by Allied Air Forces. The school started to prepare us for the war. We wore slacks, hats, masks for the first time in our lives; and we had drills every day to learn to protect ourselves in case of emergencies: like prostrating on the floor during an air raid, running to the shelter upon hearing sirens of certain frequency and length. B29 was a dreadful number to us. But I had no idea what was going on, and I had no clear sense of enemy and war.

The teachers at the school told us that the Chinese were our enemies and we were fighting against them. Then the Japanese girls in my class started to intimidate me. Once during the recess, I heard them shouting:

“Shina Hei (Chinese soldier), go home” I ignorantly looked around and found out to my surprise, that I was the target of their outburst. They were shouting at me.

“Why did they call me Chinese?” I was totally confused. I knew I was a Taiwanese not Japanese, but I never thought I was a Chinese. No one ever told me so. We never had much association with China in the history of Taiwan. As far as I knew, they were foreigners to us. So, I had an identity crisis and I have had this same identity problem all my life up to date.

By spring, 1945, the war became intense. Since there was a major air force base in my hometown, Chia Yi, we were fiercely bombarded. It became very dangerous to stay in the city, but the Japanese government in Taiwan forbade the adults to leave the city.

We, my siblings and my cousins, 12 of us all under age of ten were taken to my grandfather's house in a deep mountain called Konten. In order to get there, we had to take a two hour bus ride from Chia Yi to a village at the foot of the mountain called Takau, and then climb up through a steep mountain for a few hours to reach Konten, our

destination. I was eight years old then. My aunt and a maid took care of us 12 kids. We squeezed in an approximately 9ft by 8ft wooden bed.

It was the first time I was separated from my mother, I missed her badly. So, one day, I quietly followed my grandfather's hired men to the village, Takau. From there, I slipped on the bus to Chia Yi to see my parents.

My parents were shocked to see me. They exclaimed: "How in the world did you come back? It is so dangerous!"

The next day, mother took me back to Takau on a bus. The bus was packed with people. A relative threw me into the bus through a window and then mother came by me afterwards. The road was bumpy and uncomfortable, but it was the sweetest and coziest feeling I ever had, riding on the crowded bus with mother at my side. I could never forget.

Mother spent one night with me in Takau. That night she told me two stories. I remember one of the stories was about a poor girl who was framed by a rich and wicked girl. I don't remember the detail of the story but I do remember that I was deeply moved by it. The next day, mother arranged for someone to take me back to Mt. Konten and she went back to Chia yi.

My father used to work very hard at his clinic and my mother always assisted him. So, they hardly ever had time to be with their nine children, even seldom ate with us. So, the trip and that night with mother staying with me telling me stories were very special and rare. I felt elated. The feeling of joy and love I experienced that night more than sixty years ago warmed my heart throughout all my life.

Later that year, 1945, about June I think, because the city was constantly bombarded, finally, my parents were allowed to leave the city. But for the convenience of their going back to the city occasionally, we all went down to live in Takau, the last stop of the bus line.

Takau was a one street village; half surrounded by a river cutting through a steep mountain. It flowed through the end of the village street and turned to the back of one side of the street. We lived in a little house on the river side of the street, so it was a short walk from our backyard to the river. A suspension bridge on top of the river connected the village with the steep mountain which led to Konten, my grandfather's house..

Life in the countryside, Takau, was most unforgettable to me.

For the first time, I was able to live close to nature. I ran around all day long exploring the environment, wading in the river, searching for shrimps under the rock, watching little tiny crabs swimming in a stream, and running on the suspension bridge to create excitement as the bridge would sway vigorously when someone ran on it.

Then one day, one of my father's patients gave him four ducklings. I fell in love with them, fed them, took care of them all by myself; I even went near the dirty swamp like area to dig for earth worms for them. I was broken hearted when they died in a stormy night.

In early summer 1945, we began to plant our own vegetables and sweet potatoes. It was not my job to dig or plant but I had fun playing in the field. When I saw a tall, large brown bull standing on the side of the field, I thought, since it belonged to my grand father, he would recognize me and be friendly with me, so I grabbed some grass trying to feed him. But, he must have gotten the wrong signal, tilted me up in the air suddenly. I was terrified. Though someone came to my rescue right away, I had bruise on my chest for a long while and I developed a life long phobic fear of bulls and cows ever since.

A flash of memory: we, my parents and my relatives were all standing at my grandfather's house on top of the mountain watching a fire far beyond the valley. All the adults were crying. It was the day our city and our houses were bombed and burned to the ground. We lost everything.

The most devastating thing that happened during that period of time was my first encounter with death of a dear one: my sister Amy who was less than two years older than I, and was very close to me. She died in August, shortly before the end of the war. She was poisoned by eating stale crabs and then later contracted malaria.

I was summoned home one day while wandering around our neighborhood, to transfuse my blood to Amy. Then I watched her struggle with shivering cold all night till she suddenly calmed down. I was glad that she was all right, but all the people around her started crying. I did not comprehend enough to feel sad right then until she was put in the coffin the next day. I shouted: "NO, no, don't put her there!" and broke down crying.

The tragedy hit hardest on my father, not only because Amy was his favorite but also being a doctor, he could not forgive himself for his failure to save her. He often had nightmares long after her death: calling "Amy, Amy" in his dreams. He never got over it until his death at 86.

So many things happened during those few months which changed my life in many ways. I seemed to have grown up and matured all of a sudden after going through so many incidents. Though sad, they also enriched my life.

World War II further affected all the people on the island of Taiwan: it was a transitional point from Japanese to Chinese occupation. We had to adjust to a new life, learn to use different language and cope with various problems after Chiang Kai Shek's defeated army took over the island.

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