

Shirota Suzuko (pseudonym), the only Japanese survivor who spoke out

Summary of her autobiography *Mary's Hymn*

Translation by Keigo Nishio

Shirota Suzuko was born in 1921 in Fukagawa Ward, Tokyo

Please build a memorial for "comfort women." I am the only person who can say this.

- Becoming a *geisha* at Kagura-zaka after the downfall of my rich family

I was born into a family running a bakery in Fukagawa, Tokyo, as the first girl among five siblings. I was a typical tomboy in downtown Tokyo. However, following my mother's sudden death when I was a sophomore at Kyoritsu Girls' Vocational School, my family went bankrupt after becoming a guarantor of my relative. I was entrusted to a *geisha* house at Kagurazaka as a babysitter.

Due to my father's debt, the creditor, who was over sixty years old and a customer of a *geisha* house, who was over sixty years old, raped me who was a virgin. I became infected with severe gonorrhea, sold to a red-light district in Yokohama, and eventually sold to a "comfort station" in Taiwan at the age of seventeen. My father came to Yokohama station to see me off and cried, saying, "Please forgive me." I went together with seven other women.

- Days when I served at comfort stations in the South Sea Islands

There were approximately twenty brothels for the Japanese Navy in Magong, Taiwan, and I was deployed to the Tokiwa-rō brothel, where there were fifteen prostitutes in total. I was issued a license by the Magong Subprefectural office, took a medical checkup for venereal diseases, and given a professional name, "Shinachiyo." Then, my life as a sexual slave began. Soldiers lined up on weekends, and ten to fifteen soldiers flocked into the same woman. In order to go out, we needed a permission and license issued by the police box. The debt did not decrease at all even after eight months of service. Trying to escape at any risk, I deceived one of the customers into sending massive money, which allowed me to return to Japan. However, my stepmother did not even admit me into her house, and my younger brothers were suffering from poverty and illness. In order to make money to save them, I had no means but to work for a comfort station in the South Sea.

I worked under the name "Misako" in Garapan Town, Saipan, at the Miharashi-tei brothel in Truk Islands, and at the Kōju-en brothel in Palau. At the Kōju-en brothel, I was in charge of the Navy Special Corps, which consisted of twenty girls from Korea and Okinawa, and I sold tickets for the "comfort station," as well. Then, severe air bombings began and we had to live in the jungle, helping one another, together with the soldiers. Some girls died from the air raid. Gradually we ran short of food, but the Japanese troops demanded a comfort station for the surviving soldiers in the Navy and Army, and the engineering battalion established a comfort station in the jungle. I served as an innkeeper of the Kōju-en branch there. Eventually the war ended, and it was in March 1946 that I arrived in Uruga by Landing Ship Tank (LST) of the US Navy. It was the last repatriation ship from Palau.

- Devastated life after the war

After the war, I moved to Kyushu after staying at a house for repatriates in Zushi, and I wandered around by selling myself, abandoning myself to despair. I fell into Philopon (methamphetamine) addiction, and I moved around brothels and recreation houses for the US Occupation Army. I went to Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Kobe, and Yoshihara (red-light district in Tokyo). I attempted suicide with a student with whom I fell in love in Toyohashi, but only I failed to kill myself. When I visited my mother's grave after a long interval, I was informed of my younger brother's death and my younger sister's suicide. I was shocked by the news as if I had been struck by an iron hammer. Desiring to repay my debt and work at a decent place, I left for Tokyo on September 3rd, 1955, when I found an article about the Jiai-ryō house in Shinjuku in the *Sunday Mainichi* that I bought at the station. The Jiai-ryō house was a facility that rehabilitated women who came out of red-light districts. That day, I headed straight for the Jiai-ryō house.

- Towards the establishment of the memorial after dreaming my "comfort women" coworkers

My life had drastically changed after entering the Jiai-ryō house. I attended worship on Sundays and received baptism on the very day of hysterectomy. My body was devastated, but I was delighted when my father and younger brother visited me. However, when I returned home, my stepmother told me to "return to prostitution." I was at a loss and turned to the Bethesda Sisters' House. Minister Fukatsu Fumio paid every trouble to find a job for me. After that, Mister Fukatsu established the Izumi-ryō house for the protection of women, and he made my dream come true that I wanted a colony where I can live for the rest of my whole life, by establishing the Kanita Women's Village. At the village, I spend time knitting, reading, listening to radio, keeping a diary, and writing letters. I wrote about half my lifetime in *Mary's Hymn*.

Forty years after the war, I came to feel overwhelmed since my "co-workers" during the war showed up in my heart during worship. Nobody speaks up about "comfort women" at any place in Japan. I was so overwhelmed that I asked Minister Fukatsu to establish a memorial, he built a poll for commemoration made of Japanese cypress. The news was covered by the mass communications, and we got donations that allowed us to build a stone-made memorial in 1986 that reads "Ah, Comfort Women." After that, Korean "comfort women" began to speak up.

Let us pray for the numerous spirits of the "comfort women." I think that this is the duty of those who survived the war.

**Note: This content has been reconstituted as a first-person narrative by WAM for its exhibit, based on *Mary's Hymn*. It is reprinted here with permission from Kanita Women's Village and WAM.