

Chapter 1

①

[Gen holds a sheaf of wheat. His family stands behind him.]

Gen: “My name is Gen Nakaoka.

Gen for Genki -- full of pep and energy.

The people behind me are my family.

This is my father, Daikichi.

This is my mother, Kimie.

This is my big brother Koji.

This is my sister Eiko.

This is my second oldest brother, Akira.

And this is my little brother, Shinji.

Don't forget who they are!

See you again soon!

[.....pull.....]

②

[The page shows a battlefield, and a bomber dropping bombs on people.]

It was April 1945. Japan was fighting a war against many countries, including the United States, Great Britain and China.

Japanese troops had suffered crushing defeats on the Chinese mainland and the Pacific islands. They were ordered to fight to the death rather than surrender. Bombs showered down from B-29s onto Japan's cities, including Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya and Osaka.

“Help!”

“It hurts!”

“I'm burning!”

Many people died in the bombings.

[.....pull.....]

③

[A cat steals a fish from Gen's house. Gen and Shinji run after the cat.]

This is the city of Hiroshima, the way it looked just a little before the Pacific War ended. It was a beautiful city, with seven rivers flowing through it and lots of greenery.

Gen Nakaoka was a second-grader who was born and brought up in this city.

Because of the war, people couldn't get enough food. Gen and his little brother Shinji were in the habit of saying "I'm hungry!" day in and day out. They weren't about to let a cat steal their precious food.

Gen: "Hey, leave that fish alone!"

Shinji: "Yeah, that's ours to eat!"

[.....pull.....]

④

[Gen and Shinji help their father take care of the family wheat field. They look forward to eating bread and wheat noodles.]

Daikichi, Gen's father, often took Gen and Shinji with him to take care of the family wheat field.

Daikichi: "Gen, Shinji, listen to me. Wheat pushes its shoots up through the winter frost, only to be stepped on again and again. But that trampled wheat sends strong roots into the earth, and grows straight and tall. I want you to be just like the wheat. No matter how much you're stepped on, grow up and be strong!"

Their papa was always saying that. The boys heard it over and over. But they weren't paying attention. All they could think about was food.

Gen: "Hee hee. I'll get Mama to bake bread with it!"

Shinji: "I want noodles!"

[.....pull.....]

⑤

[Daikichi works, painting clogs. Gen and Shinji feel the baby moving in their mother's belly.]

Gen's father made a living painting and decorating wooden clogs.

And his mother had a baby on the way.

Gen: "Wow! It's moving again!"

Shinji: "Hee hee! It's moving, it's moving! Make sure it's a boy, Mama!"

Being the youngest in the family, Shinji wanted his own little brother to play with.

Shinji: "Make sure it's a boy, Mama!"

He said that over and over.

Kimie: "We won't know if it's a boy or a girl until it's born, Shinji."

Kimie somehow looked stern and happy at the same time.

[.....pull.....]

⑥

[Koji works at the factory.]

Koji, the eldest child, was in the third grade of middle school, but he was not at home.

He was forced to work in a factory making guns, tanks and battleships so that Japan could win the war. He worked hard day after day, believing that victory would come to Japan.

Japan, however, continued to lose battles. Japan's war leaders hid the truth about the country's losses. In the newspapers and on the radio, they said things like:

“Japan is a nation blessed by the gods, so we will never lose the war.”

They told lies and deceived the people of Japan, and refused to bring the war to an end.

[.....pull slowly.....]

⑦

[Akira is evacuated from Hiroshima with the other students. His family sees him off.]

Akira, the third-eldest child, was evacuated with most other grade-school students to temples and farmhouses in the countryside, far from the cities being bombed by the B-29s. The family was split up. Eiko, who was in the sixth grade, remained home because of her poor health.

Akira: “I’m gonna be lonely. I don’t wanna go!”

Gen: “Hang in there, Akira. You’ll be okay!”

Shinji: “Take care, Akira. See ya!

[.....pull.....]

⑧

[Citizens take part in a spear drill.]

Gen's family, now numbering five, struggled to live from day to day without enough food.

In the city, people took part in spear drills every day. They were told to practice so they could kill American and British soldiers with a bamboo spear even if they were the last Japanese left alive.

Gen's father hated the war.

Daikichi: "Japan must become friends with other countries and live in peace. War only kills people, burns down houses and destroys everything. All it does is make us suffer. There is no such thing as a war that's right!"

One day, Gen's father couldn't hold back his anger any longer.

[.....pull.....]

⑨

[Daikichi refuses to take part in the spear drill.]

Daikichi: “I quit! I quit! I can’t drill to kill people! Stop the war! You’re all crazy! Wake up!”

In those days, only a handful of people opposed the war. People who had had enough of the war couldn’t say so aloud. If you said something even slightly negative, people would call you a communist or a traitor.

Chairman: “Traitor! If you’re against the war, you’re unpatriotic! That’s unforgivable!”

Everyone: “Yeah, that’s right! You’re a traitor!”

Everyone from the Neighborhood Chairman on down criticized Daikichi. They all believed unquestioningly in Japan’s victory.

People began to torment Gen’s family without letup.

[.....pull.....]

⑩

[Eiko is humiliated in the teachers' room.]

Someone told a tale on Eiko, accusing her of stealing her classmate's money at school, which was untrue. Her teacher made her take off her clothes so she couldn't hide the money, and yelled at her.

Teacher: "A traitor's child is bound to come to no good. Admit you stole the money!"

Gen: "Eiko never steals! Don't tell lies, you stupid teacher!"

Eiko: "I didn't steal anything, sir. I would never do that!"

Eiko wept in anger and frustration.

The Neighborhood Chairman's son, Ryukichi, had lied about the theft to get Eiko in trouble.

The Nakaokas had to endure more and more harassment.

[.....pull.....]

⑪

[People throw stones at Gen's family and call them traitors.]

When Gen and Shinji were out walking in their neighborhood, people threw stones at them, and said things like:

Townsperson: "Those kids' father is a traitor who is against the war. No one should play with them!"

People also stopped selling food to them.

Shinji: "I hate this, Gen!"

Gen: "Those jerks! They make me mad!"

But they believed that what their father said was right. Gen, Shinji and their mother somehow put up with the bullying.

One day, after Gen's parents had stayed up late working, Gen, Eiko and Shinji set out with a handcart full of clogs to take to the wholesaler. Suddenly, Ryukichi and his friends appeared in front of them.

[.....pull quickly.....]

⑫

[Ryukichi and the other boys bully Gen, Eiko and Shinji, and knock the clogs into the river.]

Ryukichi: “You traitors! You have no right to walk down this street! Let’s get ‘em, boys!”

Everyone: “Yeah! Traitors! Traitors!”

Gen: “Why, you--!”

The bullies pushed the cart of precious clogs into the river, and Gen exploded with rage. He threw himself at Ryukichi, a sixth-grader, and they began to fight tooth and nail.

Gen: “You idiot! My Papa isn’t a traitor. He’s telling the truth. You moron! You can’t get away with this! Don’t take me for a fool!”

Gen bit Ryukichi’s fingertips to the bone and beat him to a pulp.

Ryukichi: “Waah! Owwww! Look what he did!”

Ryukichi and the other boys ran away in tears.

[.....pull slowly.....]

⑬

[Daikichi is beaten at the police station.]

Then, Gen's father was informed on as an antiwar traitor and arrested by the police.

Detective: "You punk! At a time when all good Japanese citizens are giving their lives for victory, who do you think you are, opposing the war? Traitor! You should beg the Emperor's forgiveness! You shameless traitor!"

Daikichi: "Groan..."

Bam! Whack! The detective's bamboo sword struck Daikichi over and over.

Gen's father received a severe beating, but he never stopped believing he was right.

[.....pull.....]

⑭

[Gen and his family catch locusts in the fields.]

Gen's mother was at a loss for what to do. Her husband had been taken away by the police, and no one would sell her any food.

Gen tried to cheer his mother up and help her out by catching locusts and gathering edible wild herbs in the fields.

Gen: "Catch as many as you can, Shinji! Times are tough for our family right now!"

Shinji: "I know. Anyway, grilled locusts taste pretty good if you can't eat rice!"

Gen: "Right! We gotta hang in there!"

Shinji: "Look! I got one!"

Gen & Shinji: "Heave-ho! Heave-ho!"

Gen and Shinji spent all day trying to catch locusts until it got dark.

[.....pull.....]

⑮

[Mr. Pak gives some rice to Gen's family.]

One day Mr. Pak, who was Korean and lived in back of Gen's house, visited the family and gave them some rice.

Gen: "Whoopee! Rice! Rice! We can eat cooked rice!"

Shinji: "Ha ha ha! I'm so happy! Is this a dream?!"

Gen's family was very grateful.

Mr. Pak told Gen that he liked Gen's father because he spoke out against the war. And Gen learned that Chinese and Koreans were brought to Japan by force and made to work like slaves in the coal mines and on the railroads.

Gen: "That's awful... How could the Japanese do that...?!"

[.....pull.....]

⑩

[Gen's family is overjoyed to have his father back. Daikichi is bruised all over.]

A few months later, Gen's father was sent home by the police, covered with cuts and bruises. Gen and Shinji were overjoyed to have their father back.

Gen: "Papa!"

Shinji: "Papa!"

The two boys clung to him and yelped with delight.

Daikichi: "I'm sorry I made you all worry about me. I'll work hard to make up for all the hardships you've suffered."

Their neighbors stared at them with cold eyes and whispered that the traitor had come home.

For just a brief moment, there was happiness in Gen's home. But there was more hardship to come.

[End of Chapter 1]