May 25, 1998: The rain that started the night before had turned into a downpour; there was a strong wind. At 5:00 a.m., leaving myself plenty of time, I dressed and got into my car. In winds this strong, the superhighway scared me. I’d drive carefully on lesser roads. The convenience store at which I often bought food was closed for renovations. And there weren’t similar stores along the way. So I headed straight for my destination, the international convention complex in Chiba. I’d been asked to speak about Bikini to ninth-graders from Sakura Junior High School in Yokkaichi. They were on their annual school excursion, staying at a hotel in Makuhari. Last year, too, I’d spoken to students from the same school.

Beginning at about Yumenoshima, the oncoming lane was bumper-to-bumper, stretching on and on. Apparently there’d been an accident. Yumenoshima means Dream Island. Belying its name, Yumenoshima used to be Tokyo’s vast garbage dump. Seagulls flocked and flies swarmed around massive, stinking mounds of garbage; no one wanted to go anywhere near. The disgusting odor and the flies assaulted the nearby apartment complexes and caused great problems for the residents. But the place was now completely changed, as if that earlier state had never been. Today Yumenoshima is a beautiful park with stadiums and baseball fields, an indoor pool, and a tropical garden that uses the heat from the garbage incineration plant. There is also a fine marina on the canal.

That canal was once a graveyard for ships. And that was where my ship, the Lucky Dragon #5, had been left to rot, its second name Hayabusa-maru on the
hull. The concerted desire of the residents of Yumenoshima for a total ban on atomic and hydrogen bombs had brought pressure on the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, led by the progressive Governor Minobe Ryōkichi. In 1976, the half-sunk ship was salvaged, a roof was built over it, and *Lucky Dragon #5 Exhibition Hall* came into being.

Year by year, visitors to this hall have grown in number; now more than two hundred thousand people a year come to visit. Students come on school excursions, and one always hears lively voices and laughter inside the building. People seem to appreciate the exhibition all the more because we have been at peace. For twenty years, Mio Takahide and Hata Sayoko have served the museum as guides and guardians, explaining the ship and the Bikini Incident. Their dedication to peace has helped the museum grow.

I go to the Exhibition Hall twenty or thirty times a year. I’m especially busy in the spring, the peak season for school trips. On May 14, 1998, I spoke to students from three schools in one day, and the next day I spoke about my
experience at the Prince Garden Hotel in Tokyo. At sessions at the museum and elsewhere, I’ve met and spoken with students from all over the country: Osaka, Kyoto, Gifu, Nara, Mie, Aichi, Shizuoka, Kanagawa, Yamanashi, Saitama, Iwate, and so on.

Fortunately, traffic going in my direction was smoother than I expected, and I reached my destination in less than two hours. That left me time to find a convenience store, where I bought breakfast. I ate in the car, looking up at the Chiba Marines Baseball Stadium. Unlike the way it appears on TV, the gigantic stadium, deserted and silent, made me uneasy. Makuhari International Convention Complex is an artificial town, built on reclaimed land in Tokyo Bay. Its abundant greenery and huge buildings somehow make it look foreign.

When I entered the hotel lobby, the teacher in charge of the day’s session and the principal of Sakura Junior High School greeted me. In a gentle and soft voice, the principal said, “The students have just finished their breakfast and are now getting the room ready for your talk. Please wait here.”

Looking around at the fancy lobby, I said, “Students today sure are lucky. On their school excursions they stay in luxury hotels.” He replied, “Well, some parents say staying in a Japanese-style inn would make for better memories—the students could have pillow fights in the dormitory-style rooms. But there are problems: the big buses can’t drive up to the entryways, and today there are fewer inns.” “Hmm. Back in our day, there were no school excursions. After the defeat, Japan was a mess, and excursions were out of the question. My wife is three years younger than I am, and she tells me that on her school excursion she had to carry her own food and firewood. Times really have changed.”

The room for the session was in another building, facing the lobby. We went outside, and I was nearly blown over by the strong wind after the storm, made worse by the tall buildings. I staggered across the traffic circle in front of the lobby. In the meeting room, the students were sitting at round tables, waiting for me.

The teacher introduced me: “Ôishi-san is a fine person; he was a victim of the U.S. hydrogen bomb test, suffered greatly, and has told many people about the Bikini Incident. Please listen quietly to his talk.” I was a little embarrassed by that and said, “No, I’m not a fine person at all. I’m just an ordinary laundryman. So please relax and listen to me.”

It’s always the case that the first few words of my talk determine whether it goes well or poorly. But what I have to say doesn’t change. All I do is describe what I saw and experienced—a faithful account of the facts. Telling myself that I’m an amateur and don’t have to be a polished storyteller, I get serious. Maybe that’s why I’ll never be a good speaker.

In my mind, the event has seven parts. Depending on the audience and the
time I have, I make it longer or shorter. But those with no knowledge at all of the Bikini Incident have a hard time grasping it in only thirty minutes or an hour: it’s already been forty-six years since it happened, and it involved complex global politics. So whenever a school asks me to speak, I send them videotapes or the book I wrote as background material to prep the students. Then in the time allotted, I tell only part of the story. These are students who are excited to be going to Tokyo Disneyland. Some of them look unhappy. So I try to pique their interest by telling unusual experiences I’ve had: scary ocean waves you can’t encounter ashore, the beauty of nature, ways of catching tuna, and the like. I also ask the teachers to have their students write down their impressions afterwards. If they have to write about the talk, they have to listen carefully. So instead of tuning out, they remember the content. I’m sorry for the students who come along simply to enjoy the excursion, but I do want them to understand at least how important the Bikini Incident I experienced is.

Sometimes I’m encouraged when I receive a letter from a pleased teacher: “One student I can’t do anything with in class was quiet and listening to your talk intently, and he wrote a surprisingly good essay.” Even if they seem not to be listening, students really do listen. And they reveal themselves in their writing. So I can’t ever give less than my best.

With these thoughts in mind, I start out: “The Bikini Incident was a very grave event that happened almost forty-six years ago. But it’s not a thing of the past. It was the start of the terror that even now grows bigger day by day. . . .”