

My early days' memories during the war

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The war was over in summer. I was at the 2nd grade of the elementary school. Before the evacuation, our family (six members altogether) had lived in Kisarazu as my father was an assistant station master of Kisarazu Station, Japanese National Railways (later, privatized in 1987). It took more than 30 minutes to school on child's foot. I went to school with a satchel on my back, and on my both shoulders carried a shabby first-aid kit bag made with white cotton cloth, and anti-air raid hood made by my mother. In the final year of the war, we heard air raid sirens and warnings almost every day. On hearing it, we wrapped up the belongings and ran back home in a hurry. Air raid warning siren made me horrified. Today, you cannot easily imagine the life without anything you need and the terrible situation of food shortage. Everything was controlled under the ration system. Rice was scarce. My family sold mother's Kimonos and bought rice at the black market. My mother was a sickly person. When she went out to buy rice in the black market, she carried a heavy basket on the lean body, and always took me with her. She used to take a rest on the way, leaning over the handrail of the bridge. Seeing such mother, I felt uneasy and thought, "My mother is dying." We used to cook Suiton with rationed wheat called Fusuma (wheat bran), but without soup stock, and greens were the only ingredient. It was hard to swallow. I remember when I said "I don't want Suiton. Only soup is enough for me.", my father muttered "What a pity." As a substitute food, we often had a kind of sweet potato named "Okinawa", which was different from the sweet potato of today and was too watery and not sweet. I had too much of it and came to hate it. Even after I grew up, I did not like sweet potatoes for a while.

◆ Suiton...

Wheat dumpling boiled in soup. During the period of food shortage after the war, eaten as staple food.