CHAPTER 14

EIGHT YEARS IN SOLITUDE
(c.1964–1971)

The eight years in solitude after I had lost Shichi and Nakahata were twice as difficult and painful as the previous score of years had been.

Around 1965, from a point some fifty yards away from my underground shelter, I saw a petrol tank of some sort and buildings, which looked like aircraft hangars or barracks, being built at the bottom of Pasture Hill.

Before that, the only man-made structures which came into my sight were distant steel electricity pylons which the Americans built soon after their invasion, from the bottom of Pasture Hill to its top, where they also built a sentry box. The sentry box was brightly lit by electricity at night. After I was discovered, I was told that the buildings which were constructed around 1965 were, in fact, a gas tank and a block of flats for local inhabitants. I had been convinced that these were US military airfield facilities. So long as I assumed that they belonged to the enemy, they were nothing to do with me, hardly providing me with any opportunity to grasp the true situation on the island, even if they were brightly lit at night.

My only hope at that time was based on a piece of information I obtained from a newspaper published in Saipan back in July 1945, reporting developments towards the end of the war. That was the only piece of outside information available to me, whether I believed it or not. Twenty years thereafter, I imagined that the war had probably ended and peace had been concluded. Then, I thought that the Japanese troops would eventually come back here to
repatriate us from the front. Then, I might be able to go home without becoming a prisoner of war. I thus persuaded myself that I had to survive at any cost until that eventuality.

In fact, I was always busy with leading my day-to-day life. After the huge typhoon in 196(2), I increasingly suffered from a lack of food. I had to make everything on my own; and from time to time repair my underground house. Above all, I had to be always vigilant concerning every possible enemy movement. Therefore, I had actually little time to ponder my future.

In retrospect, it might have been actually good for my mental condition to keep myself thoroughly occupied with day-to-day business: weaving cloth, tailoring clothing, making sandals, cord wicks, fishing cages, etc., planting root crops, fishing in the river. I derived simple delight and satisfaction from every moment of these activities. I concentrated on surviving every day and night, entirely on my own, enduring complete solitude.

I survived, enduring the unendurable, forbearing the unforbearable, literally on the borderline of survival. I was in need of everything. While being condemned to such severe deprivation, my utmost concern had always been the maintenance of fire. Whenever the hearth fire was allowed to die down inadvertently due to the leaking of rains or inundation, or whenever the fire on a cord wick was extinguished by mistake, I had to make a fire with three bamboo slivers in the manner which I explained in the previous chapter. But I was beginning to notice the waning strength of my body which reduced my ability to rub the bamboo slivers with enough vigour. Also, early on, a cartridge-full of cotton gunpowder was sufficient to make a fire seven to eight times with this method. However, the rate of failure seemed to have increased as my body’s strength waned. Towards the end of my life on Guam, I was able to make a fire only twice at the most with the same one cartridge-full of gunpowder. The cartridges were running out. When I thought about how to make a fire, the future seemed entirely unworkable.

However, I thought that it was pointless to ponder over this and worry about the future. Every morning, I began cooking at the time when the earliest regular flight flew over me. After an hour of cooking, my underground hole was filled with heat and smoke and I