

# BEGIN THE CONVERSATION

HIROSHIMA/NAGASAKI

A RETROSPECTIVE ON 80 YEARS OF SILENCE

2025 edition



## **There is no such thing as a 'minor war'**

**I was born into the warlight of the world. There were beds in the corridor of the hospital and blackout curtains on all the windows. My unwrapped consciousness was already marked by in-utero rations and the pump of a daily cocktail of war-anxiety rippled through the soup of hormones in which I bathed. For the next three-quarters of a century it would remain so.**

**There are big wars and small wars, fat ones and thin ones; wars that only kill 'them', ones that kill us, too. In the beginning, there was supposed to be just one; the one to end all the other ones. It didn't. The script went on, the Theater of Pain kept producing new ones. I expect I will also die in the warlight of the world.**

**I set about selecting a few anti-war pieces suitable for the annual get together of Poets Against War. I should not have been surprised that nearly all my work had some mark of war on it; on the surface or etched deep into the layers of the palimpsest of my life. Nothing, it would appear, can escape being marred by the years of reciting the same script, over and over. My mind simply cannot divorce itself from the scratches of war. Having some pure, peace-bent thought within a national consciousness that makes war the very centerpiece of its own ego is impossible. Everything we say or do is tainted by the fact that war is in the very air we breathe, the language we use and the thought we think. We cannot avoid the fact that we, too, are an occupied and preoccupied nation.**

**No matter that we say we will fashion 'peace' – we are so tilted by war that the very path to that wish only circumnavigates a globe of horror. We write, we cry out, we dance, we sing under the lamp of warlight. "Six big ones," they said. But the reality is that the countless 'little ones', the ones that only spend a few days in the news, are not really any smaller. They all survive and metastasize and go right on re-enforcing our grand delusion that they are somehow "necessary steps" on the road to peace – "peacemaking" or "peacekeeping" we dub them as we bomb the daylights out of someone or something until the next war is on the horizon.**

**Truth is, there has only been one war – and it is huge. Iraq, Afganistan, Pakistan, India – one war: Vietnam, Lebanon, Indonesia, E. Timor, Chile, One war. WWI, WWII, Korea, the next war, Syria, Yemen, ISIS, Ukraine, Gaza. They are all the same war, and they are all MAJOR WARS. From the very beginning, those who wage them and those who suffer them – soldier and civilian alike – are war's victims. For our species and our planet, there has never been and never will be such thing as a 'minor war'.**

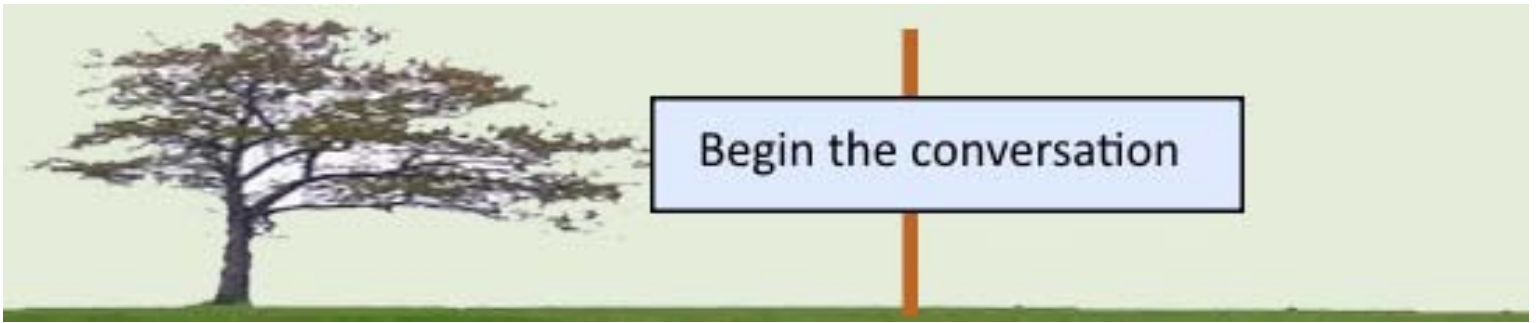
*Kodomo no tame ni*

## *Acknowledgements*

To those who showed up and began the conversation in 2016. Though we may have been few, and our voices but a whisper in the wind, we did what we could to awaken the voices of the world and break the long silence.

To hibukasha-sama everywhere, who have long endured their burdens of witness and suffering on behalf of all humanity. We have nothing but gratitude for your coming to us, breaking the silence and sharing your painful witness so that future generations may be safer and at peace - *omoiyari*.

To Sadako-san, for her thousand paper cranes that started us on the quest for *omoiyari* in her name. A quest which we all must complete.



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**Under the rising sun  
The enemy came  
Wearing my face**

**We sliced the chrysanthemum  
Off its stalk  
And left it naked in the sun.**

**Over the ashes of Hiroshima,  
Our victory was hailed.  
Beneath, my ancestors lay buried.**

**— Frances Kakugawa**



## Begin the Conversation

### "What Conversation?"

- It's not about who was to blame for dropping the atomic bomb.
- It's not about whether the bombing saved lives and ended the war.
- Not about what they did or what we did or what anybody did.
- It's not the conversation how horrible they were, we were, or it was .
- It's not whether 'We had to do it, or if they were building a bomb.
- It's not about this alliance, or that alliance or some wiggly line on a map.
- It isn't a conversation about liberty or tyranny, democracy or autocracy.
- Not about blaming or about who should apologize to whom.
- Not about some "moral awakening" or the bounties of science.
- Not talking about M.A.D., non-proliferation, SALT 1 or 2, blah, blah, blah.
- It's not a conversation about the usual narratives of war and peace.
- Not about wishes, hopes and promises, or 'human nature'.
- It isn't about what minute or second the Doomsday Clock is pointing to,
- nor rummaging around in the history of failures for an example of success.
- It's not about books like Giongreco's "Hell", or Frank's "Downfall", or Graff's "Devil", all stuck in the past, arguing endlessly the undecidable.

— Not about Pellegrino's "Last Train From Hiroshima, or Chad Diehl's "Resurrecting Nagasaki", or PBS's "Atomic People", or James Cameron's film to come, "Ghosts of Hiroshima", or Nihon Hidankyo's Nobel peace prize, or a Thousand Paper Cranes to ring the Pentagon.

**"Then just what conversation are you talking about?"**

—"What it means to be on the receiving end of a nuclear weapon."

—"What Hiroshima and Nagasaki really have to say to the 21st century."

—"Why our narratives of horror and planet-wide consequences don't work,"

—"It's the conversation about what comes before and after nuclear war.

—"It is about why it doesn't matter whether it happens by accident,"  
mechanical failure, or blunder, or fear, or terrorism, deliberate intention,  
or sheer bad luck, as will happen."

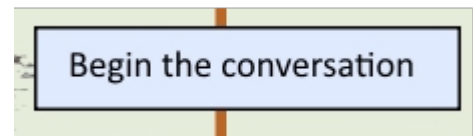
—"it's about the certainty that the unimaginable is inevitable if something  
isn't done to prevent that from happening, and done soon."

—"We need to talk about the reality our kids and their kids will wake up to if  
we don't get rid of all nuclear weapons, or if they'll wake up at all."

—"It's about what we must do — to get rid of nuclear weapons, all of them."

—"It's about living in a world without a Doomsday Clock.

- "It is a conversation about the cost of supporting and maintaining a global nuclear weapons industry that produces and maintains more these weapons, and lobbies for more of them.
- It's a conversation about a game of Nuclear Roulette, where the only way to win it is to stop playing.
- "It's about the conversation we should have had 80 years ago, and didn't.
- it's about [THE ULTIMATUM](#)



**"So, do you want to have it? Then make a sign, step out the front door, go to some public park and wait."**



## REFLECTIONS ON A DAY IN THE PARK

"BEGIN THE CONVERSATION" DAY WAS A VISIBLE MESSAGE FOR OUR LEADERS TO START TALKING ABOUT RIDDING THE WORLD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. ON MAY 27TH (the day Obama and Abe meet in Hiroshima) WE TRIED TO DELIVER THAT MESSAGE ALL OVER THE WORLD. IT'S WASN'T HARD TO DO - JUST PARTICIPATE! IT WAS A SIMPLE MESSAGE:

"PEOPLE AND LEADERS OF THE WORLD - BEGIN THE CONVERSATION."

We spent the day in a nearby park, alone or with friends. stuck a sign in the grass that said "BEGIN THE CONVERSATION". That's was it...

### POST-GAME REFLECTIONS:

Post-game reflections: It wasn't the shot heard round the world, that's for sure. Of the thousands of people notified, only 30 or so people indicated interest and, of them, only 17 said they were going. Of those, only 3 groups as far as I can tell actually went to a park and held an event (In students from UH Hawaii, an individual in Kenya and our group in California.)

So why do I still have the feeling that 'Begin the Conversation' was a success? By any quantifiable test, it wasn't. I tried to make it as easy an event to do as possible. I tried to make it as pleasant and enjoyable (a day in the park with family or friends) as I could imagine. And I left it as open and democratic for people to supply their own content as I could. Still, the party happened and hardly anyone showed up.

Well, maybe I feel it was well worth doing because it did happen and those who were there know they did the right thing, no matter the outcome. Maybe, because we met a few neighbors and strangers and actually had some conversations that mattered and wouldn't have happened otherwise. And maybe it's because I'm seeing the word "conversation" ("we haven't had one...", "It's time for a...", "we need to begin...") in social media discussions talking about Hiroshima and nuclear weapons and such. I have not seen that particular word used in that context before the event. So maybe, just maybe 'Begin the Conversation' is working its own way toward becoming a meme for the world on the subject of disarmament?

For me that makes "Begin the Conversation" Day an effective success as well as a personally satisfying one. Not the one I'd hoped for. Not the one that is needed. But a success, nevertheless. Perhaps our event didn't start the conversation. Perhaps it only shortened the time until we do start it, by a little. That much is possible. That much made it well worth doing.

~ ~ ~

## **Sorry, Margaret**

*"Never doubt a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."* *-- Margaret Mead*

*"Never doubt a small group of thoughtless, committed citizens can fuck up the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."* *-- Red Slider*

## **The Tree They Could Not Hear**

I know a world that pulls itself apart  
and from the start did not know when to stop,  
so hooked itself to evolution's wake  
and tailless told stories till it dropped.

Above it was a most enchanted tree  
whose branches bore them all they ever knew  
of golden fruit that ripened in that canopy  
above their heads, and then would drop  
as the passing of the seasons bid it do.

That, it seems, was not enough for them  
who impatiently incline and cannot wait  
for any reason they might constrain  
an appetite that leaps into the seasons,  
deign take whatever they would take.

Though it might have ripened on the branch  
as children skyward glanced beyond the fruit,  
why then did they prefer to chop it down  
and stuff their pockets full of immaturity  
that lay nearby the severed root?

Who might have heard that fallen tree  
that would not be content to leave it so,  
if storied end was what they wished to be  
why did they take the rest of that great work  
and bring it, soundless down, to lay with thee?



**Report from My Yard**

**A long line of ducks ~ ~ ~ ~ ~  
on their way to Bushy Lake.  
Not one has been shot.**



### **Shadows of a forgotten conversation**

An ironic side-bar on the visit of President Obama to Hiroshima and the laying of wreaths at the memorial cenotaph is hidden in the history of the cenotaph itself, that familiar arch at the Japanese Peace Memorial that was originally designed to have the names of the victims of the bombings inscribed on it.

Its design was a commission first given to the sculptor Isamu Noguchi in 1952. Noguchi had designed a much more elaborate memorial, one judged by most critics to be far superior to the one finally realized by Kenjiro Okasaki, a friend and colleague of Noguchi's. Noguchi's design was initially accepted by the Japanese, but later rejected.

The reason for the substitution of designs was the government's objection to a biracial Japanese-American citizen with a Japanese father and Irish American mother, as an inappropriate choice for designing a Japanese memorial. The cenotaph we see in familiar pictures is but a partial realization--a shadow--of Noguchi's original design. Throughout his career, there were attempts by Noguchi to resolve these deeply felt intercultural tensions that had been handed him as an accident of birth. Not least were a string of unrealized designs and sculptures that bore the marks of this antagonism and ultimately left him straddling the divide between his Japanese and American ancestries. Subsequent to the Japanese refusal to construct his cenotaph design, Noguchi would attempt to get it built in Washington D.C. That proposal was also rejected, this time by the Americans.

In the 70th anniversary year of the bombing, another biracial American citizen has placed a wreath at this phantom version of the Noguchi cenotaph, a monument with the original vision only partially realized within it. Along with his Japanese counterpart, Shinzo Abe, this visitor leaves behind the hidden shadow of another design, the dialog that might open the way to a long overdue conversation, one that might lead the way to global nuclear disarmament.

That conversation--that shadow--has also been rejected. Nationalist Americans and their counterparts in Japan make vigorous objection to discussing anything about the implications of that tragic history for future generations. Nothing that doesn't rationalize or defend the bombing as justified on the one side; nothing that doesn't brand it as criminal on the other are acceptable subjects for discussing this tragic history. To those who cannot let go of that history, contemplating its meaning for a future generation is beside the point. Undercurrents of nationalism and the national origins of the messengers continue to haunt this unresolved chapter of their common history.

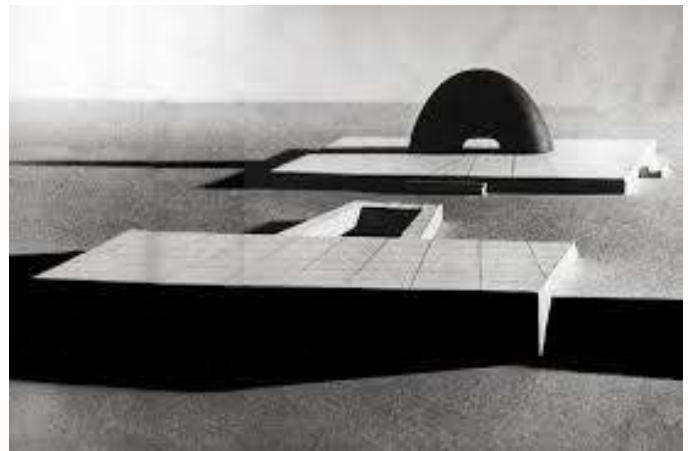
As a result, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Barak Obama had been constrained from realizing an original and grander design for their meeting in Japan. Instead, these two world leaders were compelled to confine their remarks to a lesser and partial realization of the conversation they might have had, and probably wished to have. Their remarks at the Hiroshima cenotaph were muted to simply honoring the victims of the bombing and offering some vaguer and more general allusions to the cause of world peace. Shinzo was bold enough to state his resolve to carry a resolution to the U.N. in August to rid the world of nuclear weapons. Obama? Well, not so bold. Just some vague allusions to "moral awakening" and children playing in peace.

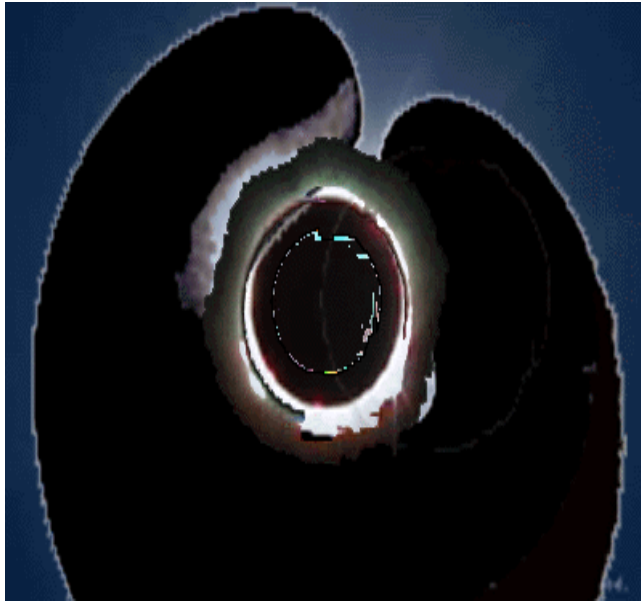
How ironic that a President and a sculptor, so separated in time and purpose, meet in this way. So much alike, yet each revealing only the shadow of a gift they might otherwise have offered the world. We are left to ask if Shinzo Abe and Barak Obama will now return to their capitals and try again to get the vision of a world without nuclear arms implemented? Will they be rejected again as Noguchi once was? We shall have to wait and see if anything has been learned during the past 70 years where the shadows of a conversation that should have started long ago still lay in silence beneath the cenotaph and the unrealized dreams that it memorializes but do not reside within it.

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 \* 'cenotaph', a memorial for the dead whose remains are located elsewhere.

\*\* They did not. Barak Obama caved into pressure and did not talk about nuclear weapons abolition. Shinzo Abe did take a resolution to the U.N. to abolish nuclear weapons, then turned his back on it and walked out when a vote was being taken.

# Noguchi Cenotaph Designs





## Twin Suns

Wreathes wither on a monument for the dead,  
a cenotaph for a past we can no more change  
than a future we are incapable of creating—  
our gestures of reduction, of non-proliferation,  
of MAD treaties scattered like flocks of doves  
over oil-soaked beaches, upgrades to arsenals  
we pretend, most of the week, are not there,

Nor the sullen nations dressed in solemn poses  
as if to care about marks etched on old stone  
monuments that echo apologies that cannot be made  
to a promise not to be kept— a silence we declare  
*artifact of peace*, watch from both sides of its arched back  
the pitiless glare of twin suns and shadows of names  
burnt into its walls.

## Meeting in Hiroshima - a prologue to a conversation

Anticipating the first visit of a U.S. President to the city of Hiroshima, the title of an opinion column in a major American daily read, "A time to consider what U.S. did at Hiroshima". The text contained a few remarks about "moving forward" and peace and ending the prospect of nuclear war. But the context of the column was all about how "the trip has ignited debate over whether the U.S. should apologize to Japan". Over and over, the column mentioned that the visit will avoid any appearance of a U.S. apology for those events. There were quotes from government officials underscoring the fact that WWII was not going to be discussed as if to offer proof, like announcements that the water is safe to drink, or the danger of some tornado has passed.

Yet most of the article was taken up with the history of the debate over whether the bombing was necessary or not, or with Eisenhower's remarks that it wasn't, or with others that it "saved American lives." Some made the observation that it was a mistake in the past for some U.S. politicians to go to Hiroshima to pay their respects. In short, the column, along with its title, was all about who was to blame for those horrific events, and what to say or not say about that. Only in passing was there a brief mention about how the matters of those horrific days were to be put aside. The conversation of who was to blame, most of all, was not to be raised. That commitment was certainly to the good. That conversation has gone on long enough and has never gotten us anywhere.

To be sure, it is a conversation on the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one that persists today as much as it did 70 years ago. But it is precisely the wrong conversation. The one we should be having, the one it is essential we have, is not on culpability or necessity, but on the reality of what happened on

those two August days in 1945 that changed the world forever. What were the reality of those days for the people that lived through them, and what was the real meaning in them that changed the world forever? That is a conversation that has never taken place, not then, not now.

Masahiro Sasaki, the brother of the familiar Sadako, the 'Thousand Paper Cranes' girl, who finally succumbed to injuries she received at Hiroshima, gives talks around the world about the meaning of those events and the urgent need to alter our perspective so that things like that can never happen again. In his talks Masahiro says, "the blaming chain gets stuck all the way in the past. Then we are completely derailed from the lesson that war itself is humanity's Pandora's box, and that nuclear weapons are something that came out of Pandora's box." Masahiro has no interest in hashing over Pearl Harbor, or the responsibility for Hiroshima or who did what to whom and whether they needed to do it or not. To him, that is to be stuck in the past and goes nowhere. Remarking on Masahiro's caution, Charles Pellegrino, noted forensic archeologist who has conducted a minute inquiry into the actual effects of the bombing on those who perished and those who survived at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in his book "Last Train From Hiroshima", says, "If victimhood and blame become the lesson (*Your country hurt me. You hurt me first!*) then we become imprisoned in the 1930's and the 1940's forever trapped by our past."

Mr. Sasaki, further enlightens his audiences by relating to the teaching his sister imparted during the final days of her life, when it became clear that she would not live long enough to complete the job of folding all those thousand paper cranes of peace as she had set out to do. Sadako's message was not about blaming or being ashamed or even about forgiveness. Those were all things hopelessly tethered to something that could not be changed. Instead, Masahiro remarked that the thing "Sadako understood...more personally and intensely that most people ever will," is *omoiyari*. "This," he says, "is the best

way to start," the essence of what it means "To think about the other person first." Despite Mr. Sasaki's talk, and the sincere attempts of many others to move on to the real conversation, we remain locked in the war of causes and responsibilities, none of which contribute an iota to preventing the same, and much worse, from happening again. Certainly, that realization must begin with thinking about those who perished on that day.

Yet we continue to do it in our press, in our public discussions, our schools and other forums. It is all about justification, or the lack of it. It is a conversation which simply guarantees that we will remain trapped in our past over the issue of nuclear weapons. Equally, we are just as trapped in the past if we remain silent about the matter and, as President Obama's visit to Hiroshima promised, avoid discussing the matter altogether. "Instead," as the President's Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications put it, we must, "...offer a forward-looking vision of our shared-future," That, of course, completely avoids talking about what happened. It is a *cul de sac* that avoids altogether the conversation we need to have about the real meaning of those bombings. It can only perpetuate the seven decades of silence that have served to insure we have learned nothing from those events.

*Omoiyari* is not about silence. Not at all. Silence is *gaman*, bearing up under circumstances one cannot change. *Omoiyari* is more kin to the golden rule or *grace* in more familiar western terms. *Gaman* is *personal*, something self-expressed through heroic silence. *Omoiyari* is relationship, an active conversation with others.

Absent an open and frank conversation about 'What the hell really happened, and what does it mean?' to be on the receiving end of a nuclear bomb, things not only can't move forward, they can only get worse. What has 70 years of silence gotten us? It has only gotten us into a recurring cold war and a

resurgent nuclear weapons race—the insane stockpiling of weapons of unimaginable power, a new request from our current President to spend one trillion dollars on upgrading our nuclear arsenal and a return to the frightening policy of keeping open the option to use nuclear weapons , as expressed by one of our current candidates for president. This does not sound like anything that promises to end our love affair with nuclear weapons or their threat to life on earth. Every one of those steps has done little but widen the scope of the threat, cling to our stockpiles and intensify the likelihood of a future nuclear war. No one can say for certain if a real conversation, had it been conducted back in 1946 or 1950, about what really went on at Hiroshima and Nagasaki , would have rid the world of nuclear weapons by now. But it is quite clear that not having that conversation is a sure path toward the expansion of our arsenals, the development of bigger weapons and the near certainty they will someday be employed.

Before that conversation can begin, however, there is something that must be understood and dealt with. It is the answer to the question, "Why the silence?"

Most of us know about the silence of the Japanese. Until recently, the survivors of that horrific experience (the *hibakusha*) were stricken with a mixture of shame, dishonor and *gaman*, the Japanese cultural response to be silent and stoically reserved about things one cannot change. Indeed, for a very long time the *hibakusha* were treated by their own countrymen as an untouchable caste, to be shunned and shamed. It is only in the past decade or so that those survivors still alive have come forward to tell their stories.

From the Japanese point of view, the Obama visit does not imply they are fishing for apologies or that such things even matter to them. As the head of a Hiroshima survivors group said, the visit would be "a first step toward

abolishing nuclear weapons.” That is all. That is also the frame of reference of the Japanese government for the upcoming visit. According to the New York Times and other sources, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo has characterized the visit as "a chance to honor the dead and support the cause of nuclear disarmament." Abe has clearly moved past the wall of silence that has haunted his country's memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His Chief Cabinet Secretary, Yoshihide Suga, has echoed Abe's sentiment in stating the visit would be “very meaningful in building momentum for a world without nuclear weapons." It is pretty clear that the Japanese have not only gotten over *gaman*, but that they fully realize a new conversation is long overdue.

The American side of the matter is a stranger case, and more complicated. Obama's visit has touched off a storm of contentious rhetoric and condemnation, equating the very fact of his visit with an apology by America for dropping the bomb. Nothing, of course could be further from the truth. It is only our own wall of silence that prevents an open conversation on the realities of atomic weapons and need to rid the world of them. That starting point is hidden behind the insistence that one of the most important conversations the 21st century can have is to be held hostage to some question of responsibility that was already irrelevant more than 70 years ago. Why does America have such a hard time letting go of the past to make way for such a critical change of course for the future?

Certainly, there are a few who don't want to see the world rid of nuclear weapons. Abe has his nationalistic right-wing, and so do we. Both will oppose the leadership just because it is the leadership, if for no other reason. Any thought of demilitarizing on any level is an anathema to them. So too, to be downright cynical, there are those who profit from the persistence of these weapons and enjoy lucrative contracts made from servicing them. But there is

also another reason that keeps to the shadows and operates by stealth to obstruct moving past the assertions of blame that Masahiro warned us about.

For decades there has been the persistent presence of a small group of self-appointed censors in the U.S. They have made it their business and mission to see that any story which doesn't glorify the role of the American military and its history is to be kept from public view. They don't represent the view of the American people, they don't reflect the view of our veterans. They only promote and insist upon their own narrow, selfish view of how the conversation of military affairs must be conducted and what it can or cannot speak about.

This is especially true regarding attempts by Americans to present or publish details on the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki beyond the purpose of showing how effective the bombing was or how right we were to do it. The people who carry out this suppression of speech in America have embedded themselves in otherwise well intentioned groups and organizations, many of them representing various kinds of veteran's interests. From there, they carry out campaigns of distorted lies and misinformation to thwart the free speech of anyone who doesn't hold their view of military history.

These terrorists of free speech will stop at nothing to achieve their goal. They were among the people responsible for lobbying Congress and forcing the resignation of a distinguished Smithsonian Director and historian, Martin Harwit, when he insisted on including a small number of photographs of the victims of the bombing in a larger, Smithsonian bicentennial exhibit covering those events. They even refused Harwit a platform when he offered to speak to their own organizations and explain why including that history was so important.

These free-speech terrorists will go after any publication that meets with their disapproval with a vengeance. They will plant false news reports in legitimate newspapers where they can, create fake Facebook and other social media pages and host false Wikipedia entries to defame targeted authors and discredit their work or assassinate their character. They will attack the credentials of those they don't like, and hack or manipulate university records to cast doubt on their professional standing.

They have even intimidated publishers and threatened them with organized veterans' protests if they dare publish works which are on their targeted list. In the case of the above mentioned book by Charles Pellegrino, they went so far as to intimidate its well-known publisher, causing them pull the book from store shelves after it had been distributed, and to shred all existing stocks. Even today, with a new publisher and a second edition of the book, these censors are hard at work and one is apt to find library copies with notes slipped in them that savagely attack the book and its author and warn would-be borrowers not to read it.

This conduct is not only reprehensible in a country where its soldiers have fought and died to protect, among other things, our freedom of speech, but it abets the crime of obstructing the very discussions that might help to relieve us from the dangers of a nuclear weaponized world, one which moves ever closer to the day of self-annihilation. News articles and editorials are going to have to change their focus from that of reviewing the history of blame to one of discussing the meanings of Hiroshima in the context of the Pandora's box that was opened that day. If we are really ever to "move-forward", as the Obama administration suggests they'd like to do, we will first need to end the silence that bars our way. We will need to have that honest and very public conversation with ourselves for the sake of future generations.

It is with some credit to Obama and Abe that they both seem to have recognized the need to begin the dialog leading to a discussion on the questions of war, peace and the prospect of future Hiroshima's that must precede any real action to get rid of these weapons. Even if the dialog is a silent one, reduced to gestures and a few remarks that probe the edges of global disarmament, it is their refusal to give in to those who prefer no discussion at all and to remain stuck in the folly of history that distinguishes them from the silence of the past 70 years. Obama and Abe seemed willing to take the political risk of offending some who prefer not to understand this, than risk what happens had they disregarded the opportunity to meet, altogether.\*

For the rest of us, we who live with the prospect of being on the receiving end of the unthinkable, this may be the first small shot we have at preventing thermonuclear catastrophe from ever happening. To have done otherwise than insist Obama and Abe show up at the cenotaph would be to insure that the unthinkable will happen, and it will leave no survivors to meet in the future and tell their stories.

**If you honestly believe that marginal reductions of nuclear stockpiles, non-proliferation treaties or "moral awakening" are going to make the world a safer place,**

**Then you probably think that hiding under your desk and shutting your eyes is going to prevent you or your children from being vaporized in the event of a nuclear attack. It won't.**

\* Obama caved in to pressure and fell silent on the matter. Shinzo Abe took his resolution to the U.N. and then turned his back on it. His excuse, "It wouldn't do any good."

*A small tribute to those who suffered, to those who still suffer and, most of all, to those who work tirelessly to insure that the children of the future will not continue to suffer our folly— kodomo no tame ni.*

### **Thy Fearful Symmetry**

They say it didn't happen that way,  
 some died quick, others not at all,  
 held in the sway of "necessity"  
 called down from the sea to wash away  
 our sins, yet even now burns brightly

beneath their skins.

They say It didn't happen that way,  
 but in that way success is born  
 and for those whose time had come,  
 and those that lingered on to pray in silence,  
 the altar of war and profit shone,  
 it was just another day in gray light

burning brightly beneath our skins.

Somewhere, deep in the skin of their ghosts,  
 hubris burns brightly, renewed in the curse  
 of Prometheus plucking our livers from  
 the ashes of Fukushima-Daiichi where they said,  
 again they said, "It didn't happen that way,  
 but there in the distant keep of our desire"

burned brightly, beneath our skins.

They say, to end a war we must light up the day or  
to light a lamp, place a speck of sun upon a coastal ledge  
where ashen ghosts are still at play among the ruins,  
their shadows lengthened into rays of paper, fan and broom.

By fire or by sea are the sins of ignorance swept clean  
while a thousand folded paper cranes pass by  
in lingering review, they spin eternities in hubris gray,  
they calculate the half-life of a day burning brightly

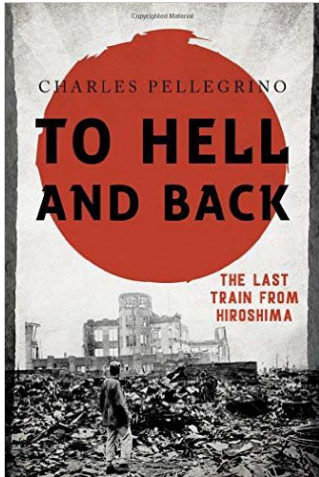
beneath our skin.

~ ~ ~



## TO HELL AND BACK

This is a review of what I would argue is the best book ever written on the details of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the people who lived and died in that horrific event. It is the natural place to start for anyone who wishes to understand what the continuing presence of nuclear weapons in the world really means.



Review: "To Hell and Back — The last train from Hiroshima", Charles Pellegrino, Rowman and Littlefield, 2015. (an Amazon Review by Red Slider, September 2015)

Actually, I give "To Hell and Back - The Last Train from Hiroshima" six stars. The first five are for content and the remarkable confluence of history, science and humanity which the story of Hiroshima from the POV at ground zero provides in abundance, and Dr. Pellegrino captures in painfully exquisite detail. Those are matters of content which I leave for other reviewers to take up and comment.

The sixth star is for courage, and it is shared by two recipients. You see, Pellegrino's book is a conversation that really should have happened 70 years ago. Indeed, it needed to take place the day after the bombs were dropped. It didn't. It began only a decade ago when the survivors, 'hibakusha', at long last began to come forward and lift the veil of silence on their first-hand accounts of what nuclear weapons look like from the receiving end.

It was an understandable silence on the part of the Japanese who suffered those days the sun fell to earth on two of their cities. Shame and guilt played

their part. For who would not feel hubris when they realize they had conceded to power and wealth the atrocities of a war which their leaders visited upon them? 'Gaman' also played a part, the ancient Japanese tradition of bearing the weight of catastrophic events without complaint and enduring in silence those events which seemingly cannot be changed. Gaman was the invisible force which muffled complaint as Americans of Japanese descent were marched off to the internment camps of America. It played an even greater role in suppressing the stories of those who knew, first-hand, what the creation of a new class of weapons meant to the children of the future.

The other side of the conversation that has yet to take place is the American side and our full disclosure of the hubris and consequences of using such a weapon, even (especially?) in a case where our leaders feel it is a fully justified "necessity". Indeed, unlike the decades of Japanese reluctance to discuss the matter, the conversation from the American side seems to be completely limited to whether dropping atomic bombs was necessary, i.e. saved American lives, shortened the war, etc.

However, unlike the Japanese reluctance to discuss the matter, the American wall of silence has taken the form of active suppression of information and malicious forms of censorship, including false character assassinations of the author (a few more details on these "literary terrorists" and their assaults on the book is given in my August 28th, 2015 Amazon review of the first edition "Last Train from Hiroshima—The Survivors Look Back".)

What is of importance is that these self-appointed censors fiercely insist that the only history of the bombing fit to tell is the one that justifies and defends the decision to use the bombs. They will stop at almost nothing to silence any

viewpoint which may be in disagreement with their own view of history. Any position which might lead to question whether the necessity of the bombings outweighed the consequences that have unfolded for the past seventy years is likely to receive the same hostility from these self-appointed censors who often operate, falsely, in the name of veterans and their groups.

"Last Train" is not a book about military history. The few military/technical facts in the first edition that were challenged were minor and much off the point of the whole book (I note, corrections were made immediately by the author when these were brought to his attention).

The conversation that has not yet happened, what the book is about, is what it means for any nation to have and ultimately risk employing such weapons. The meaning of the absence of that conversation, fully and publicly, is clear. It means we haven't yet begun to discuss the elimination of all nuclear weapons and the relegation of their horror to the "impossible" as well as "unthinkable." Instead, for the past 70 years, we have gone through dozens of permutations of keeping them, improving their destructive power and eventually, inevitably using them—from 'Fail Safe' and 'Mutually Assured Destruction', to 'Non-proliferation', North Korean bluster, and Iranian diplomacy debates—all of which can only succeed in normalizing and insisting on the presence of these weapons at the tables of an ever changing and always volatile geopolitical landscape.

"Last Train from Hiroshima" (in either of its editions) is not, by itself, the conversation that is still waiting to take place. But it is the beginning\*\* of that conversation. At a minimum, it eloquently and courageously breaks through the taboos and walls of censorship and denial that America maintains to

prevent such a conversation from happening. No one can be certain that such an open conversation would result in an end to the insanity of thinking the human project is somehow advanced by the fact of these weapons being in the world. But it seems almost certain, without the dialog that appreciates the full range of meaning of their presence in our midst, elimination of the world's nuclear arsenals will remain quite impossible and the employment of these weapons quite thinkable and ultimately inevitable. For that, and for Charles Pellegrino's courage to persist in getting his book on the table of public discourse, six stars seems hardly sufficient (with a few stars for the publisher of this edition, Rowman and Littlefield, for taking it on and standing behind the work.)

Red Slider, August 2015

\*Since that time, new versions of "Last Train from Hiroshima" have been published. The latest, "Ghosts of Hiroshima", from Blackstone Publishing, is scheduled to be made into a film by director James Cameron in 2026.

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## CIVIL DEFENSE

"In the event of an atomic attack on your city, you may find postal service interrupted for several weeks and that your local post office has been relocated to the general area."

source: United States government civil defense phamplet  
circa, 1952

## All The Travel Guide You'll Ever Need

From Volos to Tahrir Square,

From Paris to Liberty Plaza,

From L.A. to the sands of Yemen

From Jalalabad to a homeless camp on the American river,

This is our country now, and it has only one name,

afghanistanakrotirialbaniaalgeriaamericansamoaandorraangolaanguillaantarcticaantiguabarbudaargentinaarmeniaarubaashmorecartieris.australiaaustriaazerbaijanbahamasbahrainbangladeshbarbadosbassasdeindiabelarusbelgiumbelizebeninbermudabhutanboliviabotswanabosniaherzegovinabotswanabouvetislandbrazilbritishindianoceaner.bruneibulgariaburkinafasoburma(myanmar)burundicambodiacamerooncanadacapeverde caymanislandscentralafricanrepublicchadchilechinachristmasislandclipertonislandcocosislandscolombiacomoroscongo(republicof)congo,drcookislandscoralseaislandscostaricacoted'ivoirecroatiacubacyprusczechrepublicdenmarkdhekeliadominicadominicanrepubliceastafricaecuadoregyptelsalvadorequatorialguineaeritreaestoniaethiopiaeuropaislandfalklandislandsfaroeislandsfijifinlandfrancefrenchguianafrenchpolynesiagabongambiageorgiagermanyghanagibraltargloriosislandsgreatbritaingreecegreenlandgrenadaguadeloupeguamguatemalaguernseyguineaguineabissauguayanahatiheardmcdonaldis.hondurashungaryicelandindiaindonesiairaniraqirelandisleofmanisraelpalestineitalyjamaicajanmayenjapanjerseyjordanjuandenovais.kazakhstankenyakitribatrikuwaitkyrgyzstanlaoslatvialebanonlesotholiberialibyaliechtensteinlithuanialuxembourgmacaumacedoniamadagascarmalawimalaysiamaldivesmalimaltamarshallislandsmartiniquemauritaniamauritiusmayottemexicomicronesiamoldovamonacomongoliamontserratmorocco mozambique namibia naurunavassaislandnepal netherlands(the)netherlandsantillesnewcaledonianewzealandnicaraguanigernigerianiuenorthernireland and northkoreanorfolkislandnorthernmarianaislandsnorwayomanpakistanpalaupanapapuanewguineaparacelislandsparaguayperuphilippinespitcairnislandspolandportugalpuertoricoqatarrenunion(island)romaniarusriarwandasainthelenasaintkittsnevissaintluciasaintpierremiquelonst.vincentgrenadinessamoasanmarinosaotomeandprincipesaudiarabiasenegalserbiamontenegroseychellesierraleoneslovakiasloveniasolomonislandssomaliasouthafricasouthkoreasouthgeorgiasouthsandwichislandsspainspratlyislandssrilankasudansurinamesvalbardswazilandswedenswitzerlandsyriataiwantajikistantanzaniathailandtimorlestetogotokelautongatrinidadtobagotromelinislandtunisiaturkeyturkmenistanturkscaicosislandsturvaluugand

The citizens call it 'Love' for short.

The only passport required is your heart.

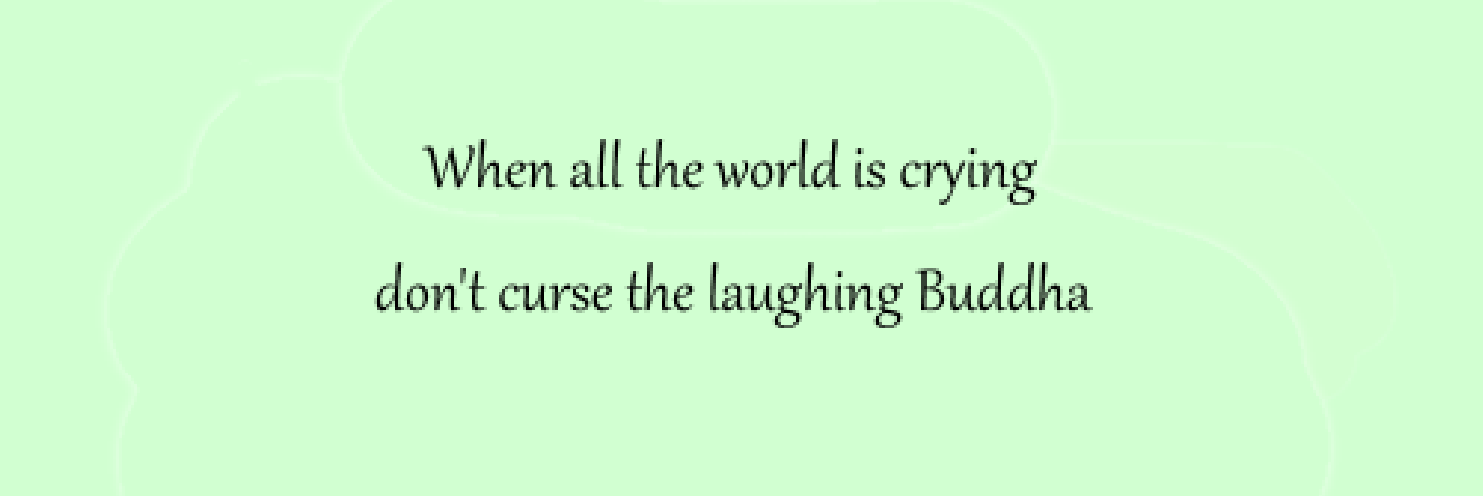
The currency is in units of compassion.

Peace, justice and a healthy planet are its main exports,  
and you need never check in at airport security.

The common language is poetry and everybody speaks it.

Wherever the sun rises,  
the Day of Change rises with it  
and you have arrived. Welcome to,

afghanistanakrotirialbaniaalgeriaamericansamoaandorraangolaanguillaantarcticaantiguabarbudaargentinaarmeniaarubaashmorecartieris.australiaaustriaazerbaijanbahamasbahrainbangladeshbarbadosbassasdeindiabelarusbelgiumbelizebeninbermudabhutanboliviabotswanabosniaherzegovinabotswanabouvetislandbrazilbritishindianoceaner.bruneibulgariaburkinafasoburma(myanmar)burundicambodiacamerooncanadacapeverde caymanislandscentralafricanrepublicchadchilechinachristmasislandclipertonislandcocosislandscolombiacomoroscongo(republicof)congo,drcookislandscoralseaislandscostaricacoted'ivoirecroatiacubacyprusczechrepublicdenmarkdhekeliadominicadominicanrepubliceastafricaecuadoregyptelsalvadorequatorialguineaeritreaestoniaethiopiaeuropaislandfalklandislandsfaroeislandsfijifinlandfrancefrenchguianafrenchpolynesiagabongambiageorgiagermanyghanagibraltargloriosoislandsgreatbritaingreecegreenlandgrenadaguadeloupeguamguatemalaguernseyguineaguineabissauguayanahatiheardmcdonaldis.hondurashungaryicelandindiaindonesiairaniraqirelandisleofmanisraelpalestineitalyjamaicajanmayenjapanjerseyjordanjuandenovais.kazakhstankenyakitribatrikuwaitkyrgyzstanlaoslatvialebanonlesotholiberialibyaliechtensteinlithuanialuxembourgmacaumacedoniamadagascarmalawimalaysiamaldivesmalimaltamarshallislandsmartiniquemauritaniamauritiusmayottemexicomronesiamoldovamonacomongoliamontserratmoroccozambiquenamibianaunavassaislandnepalnetherlands(the)netherlandsantillesnewcaledonianewzealandnicaraguanigernigerianienorthernirelandnorthkoreanorfolkislandnorthernmarianaislandsnorwayomanpakistanpalaupanamapapuanewguineaparacelislandspaguayperuphilippinespitcairnislandspolandportugalpuertoricoqatarrenunion(island)romaniarusriarwandasainthelenasaintkittsnevis saintluciasaintpierremiquelonst.vincentgrenadinessamoasanmarinosatomeandprincipesaudiarabiasenegalserbiamontenegroseychellessierraleoneslovakiasloveniasolomonislandssomaliasouthafricasouthkoreasouthgeorgiasouthsandwichislandsspainspratlyislandssrilankasudansurinamesvalbardswazilandswedenswitzerlandsyriataiwantajikistantanzaniathailandtimorlestetogotokelautongatrinidadtobagotromelinislandtunisiaturkeyturkmenistanturkscaicosislandsturvaluugand



When all the world is crying  
don't curse the laughing Buddha

## The Press & the Bomb

*radioactive fallout from coverage on the Hiroshima visit*

(Press chooses to frame Hiroshima visit in past controversy )

If you look at recent press coverage on the President's upcoming visit to Hiroshima what you will find. In article after article, paper after paper, are references to the "controversy" over apologies, blame and justification for the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Some make a reference or give a quote or two in that vein. Some offer some remark about that subject every paragraph or so.

But it's there, like a flash of dark sunlight, in every one of them. Oh sure, some talk in the negative about the matter, "The visit is not going to be an apology for...", or "The White house will not be speaking about the necessity of the bombing, but will look to the future," etc. Many will even repeat the theme of 'ridding the world of nuclear weapons' and such. But you can be sure, all the articles are framed in the anxiety of blame and apologies, things so stuck in the past that moving on to the future becomes little more than a wishful footnote:

"Officials said Obama won't apologize for President Harry Truman's decision to drop the bomb, explaining that he's not traveling to Hiroshima to "re-litigate" the choice." - **CNN\***

"Last August, on the 70th anniversary of the attacks that killed about 200,000 people and ushered in the atomic age, we asked readers: 'Did the United States have to drop the bomb?'" - **NYT**

"Even with decades of perspective and more historical knowledge about what was happening at that time in the war, the debate over the use of atomic weapons has yielded little consensus." -- **NYT**

"Japan identifies mostly as "a victim rather than a victimizer," Stephen Nagy, an international relations professor at the International Christian University in Tokyo" -- AP

***What President Obama Won't Say on His Visit to Hiroshima—but Should***

"Not a single president has expressed regret for the devastation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima." -- **Alternet**

" Even before the president sets foot on what many consider hallowed ground, the announcement has sparked new debate on the decision to drop the bomb, and whether the United States should apologize or if a U.S. president should even visit." -- VOA

"The White House said there would be no apology for the bombings." A statement from Mr Obama's press secretary read: "The President will make an historic visit to Hiroshima with Prime Minister [Shinzo] Abe to highlight his continued commitment to pursuing peace and security in a world without nuclear weapons." -- **BBC**

***"Apology question hounds Obama's planned visit to Hiroshima"***

"TOKYO — Critics on both sides of the Pacific lashed out Thursday at President Obama's plans to visit Hiroshima next week, highlighting raw emotions that remain more than seven decades after the world's first atomic bombing." -- **USAToday**

"As the White House announced that President Obama would visit Hiroshima, Japan, next week, it immediately pledged that he would not apologize for the United States dropping atomic bombs on that city and Nagasaki during World War II. But the real reckoning in Hiroshima should be about the future of nuclear weapons, not the past. Unless the president acts and speaks forthrightly, his visit may mark not only the ashes of Hiroshima but also the ashes of his promise to move toward a world freed of the threat of nuclear annihilation." -- **Washington Post**

"He won't apologize for the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki more than 70 years ago," officials said. But the symbolism of an American president commemorating the

victims of the attack on Hiroshima is as close as the U.S. will have come to delivering one." -- **Wall Street Journal**

***President Obama will visit Hiroshima – but he won't apologise to the Japanese***

"Obama's presidency has been filled with firsts – Cuba, a prison visit and now Hiroshima – but he doesn't intend on feeding into Trump's view that America is weak and apologetic." -- **U.K Independent**

Here, for example, is the only letter on Hiroshima that the Sacramento Bee chose to publish on May 23, despite the fact that most days they will include at least one letter pro and con on a subject of some contention:

*"Survivors hope Obama trip is a step forward" (Capitol & California, May 23): Japan owes America the apology, not the other way around. I vividly remember the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Thomas Lea Owsley from my hometown in Idaho went down on the USS Arizona. His name is on the memorial mounted on the ship where he and his buddies remain. I commend President Harry Truman for having the guts to end what Japan started. I also commend FDR for the internment camps for the Americans with Japanese heritage. It is easy for survivors of the bomb to cast blame, but those who would consider that America apologize are not looking at the full picture. The bomb did not just end a war and save many lives, but it served as a grim lesson. It tells the world what can happen. Countries will remember what a nuclear bomb can do and will take every precaution to be sure it is never used again."*

-- **Sacramento Bee**

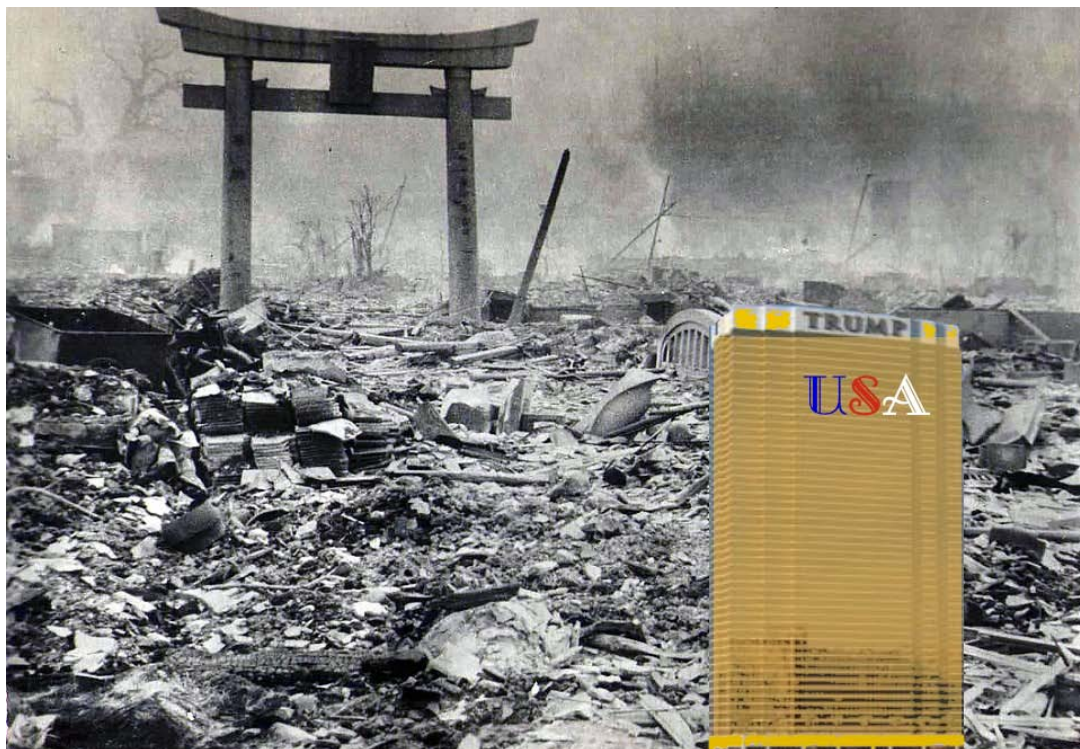
AND ON, AND ON, AND ON....

So what do you think people are going to be focused on when they watch the ceremony and Abe and Obama laying their wreathes, offering a few condolences for the victims

and giving a few platitudes about 'looking forward to a world without nuclear weapons'? On the plan to end nuclear weapons? No. They are going to be hanging on the edge of their seats looking for the slightest sign of apology or blame or rehash of the past that the President and Abe have promised will not happen, one on which the public can perform its customary 'gotcha!' The whole matter has been framed by our press as a "hold your breath' & 'gotcha!" exercise for the possibility of insult heard round the world. That's how it is set up. That's what it will be. And the conversation that ought to happen, the one that begins with, "The way we plan to get rid of these weapons...", that didn't happen 70 years ago when it should have? Given the framing of things by our media, that conversation is unlikely to happen for another 70 years. The whole matter has been reduced to symbols and empty gestures signifying silence.

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\* To CNN's credit, they did manage to do one article (May 25, 2016) that spent much of its copy on the need to discuss the horrors of nuclear war to the purpose of preventing it from every happening again, with only brief contextual reference to blame and apology issues. The article did justice to reviewing the steps forward and backward of our current nuclear policies and actions and what they represent in terms of our nuclear future.



" ... now from head to foot I am marble-constant;  
 now the fleeting moon. No planet is of mine."  
 — Antony And Cleopatra, V. II - 244

( Phases of August, 1945 )

Where are the remains the cenotaph tells are buried elsewhere.  
 Ones so easily said but with no spoke of their own,  
 no earthly ray can be said to remain at all—specks,  
 lest ghosts appear to confirm their vaporized denial,  
 the present saying only shadows on the freshly mowed grass  
 of Monday, or again on Thursday, a burnt rose shadow  
 on the garden wall.

But for poetry, the moon says nothing—a soundless moon that  
 speaks to us in forbidden cliché, parenthetical crescents  
 that enclose the decay of a rising sun or the beheading  
 of the setting moon, the wax and wan of August  
 across its dead face. A spoken earth, the cenotaph  
 equipped to observe the unnoticed, to say what otherwise  
 cannot be said remains elsewhere—not here.

## **A REAL DENUCLEARIZATION DIALOG**

**Donald:** You must denuclearize before we talk.

**Kim:** Fine, no problem. What do you want us to do?

**Donald:** No more testing, stockpiling or upgrading of nukes.

**Kim:** Great. Just tell us when you are going to abandon your trillion dollar investment in doing that and we will be glad to do the same.

**Donald:** No, no. You don't understand. You have to get rid of all your nuclear weapons.

**Kim:** I understand perfectly. Just name a percent of them you will be getting rid of, and we will match that number that we get rid of. If you wish us to get rid of all of our nuclear weapons, then just get rid of 100% of yours.

**Donald:** We can't do that. We have Russia and China and a few other countries to worry about.

**Kim:** Yes, you do. So I suggest you get busy talking to them, too.

**END OF REAL DIALOG. ANYTHING ELSE IS BULLSHIT.**

**THERE IS NO "GET RID OF YOUR NUKES"**

## Cranes Over the Morning Lake

(A tribute to Sam Grolmes on the Occasion of  
Receiving his Translations of Ryuichi Tamura)

### 田村隆一詩集

|  
Your translations arrive this evening.  
I run my hand over the flames  
of the characters on the cover.

The smell of roast lamb  
through the open doorway  
bids me, enter.

Slowly I turn pages,  
warm light glows  
above the hot coals.

I read a line or two.  
here and there the tea  
swirls in my cup.

Words like fresh baked trout,  
scooped up in meters  
of steamed rice.

Figures on lacquered bowls  
dance by in flowered kimono.  
sake spreads through  
my veins.

We converse late in the night,  
sitting by the fire, stirring  
the coals in the dark.

The bottle finally drained.  
 With first morning light,  
 I bid my host farewell.

The long journey home  
 is filled with sadness,  
 and the sight of cranes

rising from the lake.

||

On the front step a dead bird  
 eyes the sky

now, with morning  
 the excuse of light  
 turns me

from the dark print  
 of the newspaper.

you must read the bird  
 he says, I will like to know

the embrace of death does not translate so well.  
 We no longer know if it should be placed before or after

We eat our hiroshima's a little at a time,  
 the smallest sliver echoes in blood  
 a redevelopment project  
 sinking beneath the horizon



I will wrap the paper in bird

to dwell in those villages - whole complexes are dressed  
for the purification of war in a flash it will be over

sometime in the night,  
my cup drops from my hand  
I wake to the smell of brittle air  
one red eye opens where a shard has penetrated.

The characters on the cover  
gaily wave and celebrate.  
When I understand why,  
I will open my other eye.

|||

No One            one            on e            one            one

No One            one            one            on e            on e

echoes at the edge of the first page like a siren spinning  
on its axis  
should alarm us.

There is already something bottomless  
in reflections that will grow louder  
as they diminish  
the spirit within the thing within the name  
is too delicate to bring to the surface;  
it moves towards a margin without wings.

Something is ominous in the extra space fractured thought  
 we have been warned early there will be gaps traces of  
 the unsayable like the palimpsest of the executioner  
 only\_ the translator can guide us precisely when, at last,  
 we are severed from ourselves;

where we  
 fall from a great height  
 where we  
 will be crushed by dense sentences  
 where we  
 will be listed into oblivions we did not anticipate

where the angel cannot liberate the image  
 from the images within - the sky, the bird, the scream -  
 only a handful of soil is carried across the sea

we will need to go far from the safety  
 of understanding if we wish to resurrect  
 unbroken light from the archeology of dream,  
 our shovels  
 will strike darkness.

we hear the prophecy of silence  
 we taste the prophecy of grass  
 we think there is prophecy in our words  
 we are deluded souls, we think we are plunging.

We must go further, much further  
 with this fist of dirt. On a good day  
 our translator is, Sam is, the image  
 of a really lanky Will Rogers Sr.  
 on a good day.

This man from Kansas sits large and to the side  
 Ryuichi, Yumiko and Mrs. Estuko Tamura  
 are centered and a little to the back in separate tableau.  
 The camera keeps its distance, a plant in a foil pot intervenes

a low table intervenes. We know that Tamura was too tall  
 for the cockpit of suicide planes. He would first think of  
 getting his teeth fixed and new clothes a brief  
 moment later he would view the naked soil of *Arechi*

Sam says it was the years of falling through the silence.  
 The brutality and censorship that grew, poisoned and  
 wrecked the souls of men who thought god had made the sky.

After that, we are native plants rooting in foreign soil.  
 After that, we are *chin wa*, dissolved in water.  
 After that, we are serial killers disguised in art. After that,

the left-hand column is full of villages running in every direction;  
 two-pained windows scream, figures rush past with streaming hair  
 in dark print. There are no flames, just piles of untranslatable ash

Shīrén

bird : ground :: stone : sky

Shīrén

||||

In his own hand  
The 4 panes variously appear  
as sailboats tacking in the wind.

The man and the woman are unmistakable.  
The samurai holding the flag is:

closely inspecting something.  
confronted by clouds and rain.



shown proper respect.  
holding amiable discourse (or var.  
has seen a pretty woman.)

is in mortal combat (or var. is getting it on with her.)  
paying homage to the bird.

The samurai is var. caduceus, caducous

No man writes himself the same way twice.  
our own ends do not mean anything.



~ ~ ~

Readers are encouraged to check into the "Poetry of Ryuichi Tamura", Samuel Grolmes and Yumiko Tsumura, trs. (CCC Books, Palo Alto, 1998). Japanese Characters read 'Tamura Ryuichi Shishu' (Poetry of Ryuichi Tamura) and are provided with the permission of the translator.

## The Silence of the Ghosts

*"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."*

— George Santayana

Whether one uses their ouija board to serve drinks on the patio or write long poems channeling departed poets, ghosts are sending messages to us, like it or not. At least those that have had a fatal brush with catastrophe and didn't live to tell the tale. From the once molten slopes of Vesuvius, or 3k meters deep on decks of the titanic or rummaging through the pulverized dust of ground zero or Fukushima-Daichii, the ghosts of human folly have learned the hard way that we need to *know what it is that we don't know that we know*.

I say "our folly" since it is clear that they would not be so driven to send such messages —no matter they come from some spirit world or just the undead phantoms of our imagination— were it not for the crushing responsibility such creatures feel about their being witness to the misery of the future. Death is ultimately the greatest "now I get it!" experience of all. Stripped of all excuses, political realities, wishful expectations and cost-benefit analysis, ghostly wisdom has no place to hide from itself and the only mission it can possibly have -- "Warn them!" it intones, "Waaaaarn Theeeeeem," it drones on and on.

Unfortunately these ghosts also know that we, in the present, cannot hear them, refuse to listen to them. We are committed to making the same mistakes they did and, apparently, no ghost-note is going to stop us. The ghosts of catastrophes gave up expecting us to heed these warnings from our past Hiroshimas, holocausts, mass extinctions or the building of scaffoldings for even greater monuments to human inhumanity.

If we insist on "not getting it", why do these ghosts keep sending us warnings? Ghosts have no conscience to assuage, or redemption to

anticipate. So, why bother? Perhaps it is because there remains the possibility that some future generation might "get it". Perhaps we in the present have merely become relay stations for uploading these messages to those that will follow us in hopes that some future generation will understand and act to head off catastrophes that their ancestors refused to take steps to prevent. Perhaps, provided future generations survive our incompetence, they will possess sufficient wisdom to heed those warnings from the grave and take appropriate action to prevent more avoidable suffering.

*"Those who can remember nothing but the past, are doomed to repeat it"*

— Red Slider

The present, it seems, cannot be persuaded to take another course in writing its own future history. Just read a newspaper or consider the coming American election or observe the behaviors of the Israelis or Iranians, or Chinese, or observe the follies of your own communities. Take note as they demonize one group or another, shuffle the homeless from one end of town to another for the crime of being "unsightly" or "bad for business. Do we get it? Do we understand the irony of denying someone, for any reason, the right to stand on the earth because they're "bad for business"? It doesn't appear that we do.

No, the ghosts of catastrophe are not going to waste their time whispering dire warnings in our ears with the expectation we can understand them or act on their advice. Of that we can be sure. Oh, they will keep sending. They will continue to entrust their messages to individuals who make contact with them -- to scientists who dive the 3300 meters to the Titanic's 'zone', or forensic archeologists who sift through the ruins of WTC or Pompeii, or the faceless 50 who wait to die after volunteering to enter Fukushima-Daichii to prevent

further catastrophe, hoping a few of their warnings will be uploaded to some future which is able to act on them. Perhaps a few poets may join in the effort as well, helping to translate some of these ghost-notes and prepare them for uploading.

Once aware that the hubris and inhumanity of the past was being recreated in the present, on a scale unimagined by our ancestors, what else is there to do but try to pass some of those 'ghost-notes along in hopes a future generation might understand why their ancestors, even though they could "remember the past" , had no immunity from repeating it.

Nothing is guaranteed, of course, save the fact that the warning of our ancestors remains dangerously unheeded in the present. The price of that arrogance and hubris will undoubtedly be to invite a very long dark ages into the life of the human project — a dark ages, the likes of which history has not seen before. I fear that can no longer be prevented and many generations may pay dearly for our folly. But perhaps, as Azimov's Harry Seldon observed, we might be able to shorten the duration, if only by a little.

~ ~ ~

**Mu**



## The Eradication of Popups

Damn the green valley,  
the poppies in bloom,  
their mad-cow dances  
on the black-grazed fields,  
the dancers too; & too,  
you are there in nothing  
but your loose feet  
and perfect perfume,  
standing on the last rung,  
a ladder rising from the haze  
and lofted into the shroom  
of cloud-curdled capers,  
smoked on a hot green griddle  
popping open in surprise.

## Shinzo Abe's U-Turn

If you will recall, when writing about Obama and Abe meeting in Hiroshima, back on page 11, I mentioned that neither of them talked about what was most on their minds—abolishing nuclear weapons. The politics of their respective countries simply forbid them to say anything about it. But Abe did mention that he planned to take a resolution to the U.N. calling for the abolition of these weapons.

And he did that. He carried a resolution to abolish nuclear weapons to the United Nations that August and called a conference to discuss the matter and compose a final draft they would put before the UN committee on banning nuclear weapons. 123 countries signed on to the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty, but Japan and Shinzo Abe wasn't among them. Japan turned its back once again on its own calls for abolishing nuclear weapons, as it had every year since 1994. It was no different this time, though it took on a different character after his solemn speeches on the occasion of meeting Obama at the Hiroshima memorial cenotaph. Abe's refusal rose to the level of public hypocrisy of the first order. What did Shinzo have to say for turning his back on his own public declarations? "I didn't vote for it because it wouldn't have done any good." Imagine if Eleanor Roosevelt had said the same about her resolve to have a Declaration of Human Rights put before the UN?

Of course, the real reason hiding in the closet of Abe Shinzo's shame is that Japan is a client nation and handmaiden of the United States which thwarts every attempt to rid the world of nuclear weapons. Japan thinks its security depends on the largest holder of nuclear weapons on the planet. It prefers to risk planet-wide nuclear war than to find other ways to achieve security.

## **Nuclear Roulette**

### **You play, You lose**

“Begin the Conversation” is a story about narratives. In particular, the narratives we have been using since 1945 about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the existence and persistence of nuclear weapons in our world. On the one side it would assure us there is nothing to be worried about as long as Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) is kept in place and in responsible hands through treaties of Nonproliferation (NP). On the other side, the same narratives are reactive and filled with the notion that if only we make visible the horrors of nuclear war, show what it was actually like at ground zero on those two August days in 1945 and spread the stories of the Hibakusha who knew that horror first-hand, then a world with nuclear weapons will become unthinkable and we will get rid of them.

That narrative, for in reality it is but a single narrative, was actually scripted for us about 75 years ago by the allied occupation command (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) during the post-war era which not only wrote a story that it employed to justify the bombing and erase any doubt about its necessity in the public mind, but also to encourage and normalize the presence nuclear weapons in a future that would accept these weapons as an unavoidable, even desirable feature of the world of the future.

Ever since that time, those promoting the accumulation of nuclear weapons and the making of even more powerful ones, and those so adamantly opposed to them and their threat to our planet, have internalized and mutually re-enforced that narrative presuming it eventually would lead to a destination they publicly state they would like to arrive at, though from distinctly opposite directions—more weapons and no weapons.

Well, we haven't even started down that road, not either side, not in 80 years, and there is no reason to believe we ever will. The conversations, speeches and debates we have are nothing but evasive substitutes for the real conversation that has yet to begin, one that appears to be as distant from human occupation as the remotest of galaxies in our universe. In the words of Greta Thunberg, a most capable steward of preventing another equally great threat to our planet, all our narratives on nuclear weapons are just a lot of "blah, blah, blah."

In the August issue of this year's Atlantic Monthly, a series of articles were presented to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They discussed the precarious history of handling nuclear weapons, the diplomatic brinksmanship and number of times the 'almost lost it' button push distance we'd been away from blowing up the world. They described in some detail the mechanics of deciding whether to launch or not-launch, the chain of command, the split-second decisions that needed to be made, the state of our arsenals and a myriad of other details on the zero-sum game of thermonuclear chicken, driven by geopolitical tensions more unstable than plutonium. It is a zero-sum game in which the winner loses as well.

In the opening of the game, the very first article closes with a warning in the form of an 'informed consent' to all who would play this game, a quote of the mathematician Martin Hellman, "*The only way to survive Russian Roulette is to stop playing.*"

The closing article of the series makes it very clear that no one who is playing the game of nuclear roulette intends to stop playing. In that final word, the series concludes with the observation that the game needs to go on, just as it has, with the arsenals getting larger and more powerful and complex, and the trigger left in the hands of single individuals whose reliability depends on voters to "choose the right person for that responsibility. In short, 'stop playing' is not the dominant narrative in the game of nuclear roulette. The nuclear

abolitionists consistently loose at placing their bets on victim accounts, horrors and death-of-planet stories to end this race to extinction. The barrel of the gun has two empty chambers, Mutually Assured Destruction (M.A.D.) and Non-Proliferation.

We've already fired those rounds. MAD depended on leaders sane enough to not to pull the trigger. We now have certifiably deranged individuals in charge of our nuclear weapons, and more on the horizon. "Nuclear Non-Proliferation" didn't work at all, and now promises to fail altogether. Yet the dominant narrative holds tight, and 80 years of telling that story—of the necessity of those weapons, of their containment and the security of having them—has not given way to Hellman's mathematical warning: In the game of Nuclear Roulette, We play, We lose.

How did we get that story? How has it so mesmerized us that we insist holding a gun to our heads is somehow safer, more necessary, than to put it down and stop playing? Given that is exactly where the past eight decades of the same to narratives has put us, perhaps it is time we took a look at how it all started, how the tale we now take for granted got told, the one that led us, step by step, to this final stage of teetering on the edge of self-annihilation. That is another long and complicated story of manipulations of what we would be told of the bombing would and who would get to tell them. Narratives that would thread our way into the games of MAD and Non-Proliferation, through the cold-war and into an era of uncertainty where the likelihood of some minor incident, an insult, some saber rattling gone too far, technology out of control or plain bad luck, grows more threatening every day.

For now, whatever stories have been told, whatever justifications of the status quo have been made, none of it has made us one bit safer, reduced the number of these weapons or limited the players who have them. If the intent of the abolitionists was scare us out of our fixation with playing the game of nuclear roulette, it hasn't worked. Eighty

years of telling the of the horrors suffered by the hibakusha, or the tales of nuclear winter, or the films and books describing every detail, has shown it won't work. The decades of pleas for "Peace!" have not moved us one step in that direction. Perhaps we need a scarier story than the one filled with horrors that now fade into legend. Whatever that may be, one thing is certain, whether we succeed or not stopping the game, the last page has the same words printed on it, "The End."

## Recipes for Pika Don

### **MAD Surprise**

Take one or more certifiably insane leaders  
 Put the nuclear footballs in their hands.  
 Add a pinch of insult, miscalculation, or revenge.  
 Stir until mix explodes

### **Non-Proliferation Soufflé**

Serves 4, then 9, then as many as there are guests.

Ingredients:

- Unlimited supplies of nuclear weapons,
- pinch of insult, insanity, error, accident, and bad luck.

Divide weapons into 3 well-greased baking pans; add pinches and allow to rise over several decades. Take excess and put in separate cupcake tins. Allow to rise again. Repeat until there are enough portions for everyone. Then put in oven, bake at any temperature from minor insult to major threat, and wait. A surefire recipe, bound to please everyone.

### **Hellman's Desert**

Russian Roulette: The only way to win is to stop playing.

Nuclear Roulette: You play, you lose.

*To the victims of the Japan tsunami and the horror of Fukushima-Daichi, who have born their ordeal with grace and courage, and to first-responders everywhere whose daily work is a sacrament - 'an exterior visible sign of an interior state of grace'."*

## **Shock Cocoon**

They say, not to worry the clouds, the rain,  
do not worry, the wind. The sea will wash away  
like the man on his bicycle turns and peddles away  
over the rooftops, or she holds her mask to her face,  
or carries kindling on her back, or someone's baby in his arms.  
Not to worry, to survive they say, *gaman*.

*they're leaving us to die, the mayor said,*

fifty without faces, *gaman*.  
a million without a place, *gaman*.  
ten-thousand without names, *gaman*.  
not to worry, not to be forgotten.

The rain will wash away, the clouds, the sea  
number 4, number 2 will wash away,  
the faces without names will wash away,  
and the places, only the places *gaman*.  
and the sea and the people, stunned.

*I resent the nuclear plant, the doctor said.*

Do not worry the clouds across the sea, the rain.  
 I will show you with paper and broomstick and fan,  
 the day, the sun, the means to not worry about things far away,  
 about the way to put out fires from above, to retrieve the ashes  
 of Pompeii, to remember the horrific rain of September,  
 the woman beyond the door, the glass, the napkins  
 on the table, undisturbed.

*I'm having a real strange day, the officer said,  
 in the blackness beneath the South Tower*

We will build you a shock cocoon, and they will find  
 someday across the sea, in the clouds, beneath the rain,  
 you comforted a wheezing man on the 62nd floor  
 or played becalming music on the deck of a sinking ship  
 or lingered with a speck of dying sun deep in your body  
 where a thousand paper cranes still whisper *omoiyari*  
 or as a rose—by name, *the shadows of Vesuvius*

the children of New York would grace  
*the doll of Hercules, reclaimed*

the dazed and stunned, though oft bemused  
 witness to the split of wood, the lift of stone,  
 capricious facts that hide their face in stubborn riddle  
 as eons pass unnoticed by, to lie in wait  
 at the House of Souls, their names to emerge  
 from those fragile gray cocoons.

## **Chad R. Diehl, “Resurrecting Nagasaki Reconstruction and the Foundation of Atomic Narratives” (a review)**

This important volume ranks, for English speaking readers, right up there with Hersey’s “Hiroshima”, Pellegrino’s “Last Train from Hiroshima” and a few other notable works that are essential prefaces to the complete abolition of nuclear weapons on this planet. Diehl’s “Resurrecting Nagasaki” provides a critical piece that has been almost entirely overlooked in postwar inquires into the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima—the creation and mechanics of the dominant narratives that have ruled all future discussions for nearly 75 years and defeated any attempts to persuade the leadership of the world’s nations to ‘cease and desist’ from their nuclear weapons ambitions.

Hersey quickly and early (New Yorker, August 28, 1946) brought a ground level view of the human experience and horror of *pika-don* to American readers who were already being swept and hardened into the manipulated narratives of blame, responsibility and necessity. Pellegrino’s “Last Train From Hiroshima (which was censored and removed from store shelves by his first publisher but is now available in a new edition, “To Hell and Back” by another publisher with more courage) added the narratives of forensic science in a minute examination of the unfolding of these two nuclear events and some of the post-war attempts to make clear what is at stake from the perspectives of science and humanity. But these and other accounts provide little information on the exact nature of how and why the post-atomic narratives that most of the public receive and accept were actually manufactured during the occupation period, and why they persist to this day reflecting the same official ambitions decades after the bombing, using many of the same methods by leaders who have the audacity to propose the promise of such horrors must continue.

More than any, those who live within a constructed narrative have the hardest time seeing that the reality they are accepting is one that has been scripted for them by others. It is exactly as one White House aide related to Dick Cheney, “Reality is what we say it is.” Above all, those who have suffered these scripts produced for the Theater of Pain need to know how this was done to them and is still being done.

I advisedly say, ‘prefaces a conversation’, for I do not believe a real conversation on the abolition of nuclear weapons has ever taken place despite the valiant attempts of the hibakusha and the myriad of peace activist groups world-wide (nor the mergers of intent after the Lucky Dragon incident in 1954). Nothing has really changed, and even the counter-narratives of Hersey, Pellegrino or other post-atomic bombing literature have accomplished very little to date. The dominant narratives of ‘who is to blame?’, ‘who takes responsibility?’, ‘who will compensate the victims?’, or the counter-narratives ‘to be moved by the human horror and toll’, ‘we must have an end to war and secure peace in the world’, ‘the money spent on nuclear weapons is an unconscionable waste’... have not managed to move the Doomsday Clock one minute backward. The dominant narratives that were promoted then still hold sway. Under their persuasions policies such as MAD and non-proliferation have only succeeded to intensify the presence of nuclear weapons, create larger, more powerful weapons, enlarge existing stockpiles and, country by country, brought new players into the game. So the narratives on both sides as well as the rest of the world remain unable to do the one thing that needs to be done.

Thoroughly researched, carefully and thoughtfully rendered, perhaps Diehl’s examination, though localized as its intended compass required, can help add

the missing piece that will actually begin the conversation which needs to happen. His book is, by design, only a tale of two cities. And though he briefly mentions its ramifications for world-wide concerns and future implications of that history, it does open the way for others to carry out that extended examination now. Without it, no progress can or will be made.

Are there weaknesses in “Resurrecting Nagasaki”? Certainly there are. I nearly put the book aside after reading the first few chapters. It’s academic neutrality in laying out the strata of the dominant narratives began to look like some apologia for the ambitions of officials and the corresponding tortured logic of religious (Catholic) Urakami interpretations of the bombing as an act of “Divine Blessing and Providence”. I’m only glad I continued reading as I did. The bull-pen starts warming up in the fourth chapter and gets onto the playing field in subsequent chapters. Even so, I found the accounts of the alternative narratives much abbreviated and generally rendered in the context of the dominant narratives rather than given an extensive examination of their own as he did with the official and religious motifs of the first few chapters. For example, though he mentions the splits among local peace movement activists, he provides little about exactly what those factions and their stories were and how and why they were fixated to the point of defeating their own efforts. On the subject of alternative narrative themes (the hibakusha, themselves, must have had a dozen different ideas about the bombing and their own place in its story.) I would think a few chapters devoted to other competing narratives would have been at least as illuminating as the amount of material focused on Nagai Takashi and the Catholics of Urakami. Certainly this slender volume (176 pp) had room for giving a similar treatment to the methods, ambitions and failures of the

opposition; not implying more personal testimonials of tragedy, but an equal examination of their genre and methods. I think Diehl leaves much of that side to our common sense. I suggest it really needs the same research and exposure that he gave to the prevailing themes.

One other weakness, overall, was the absence of discussing the persistence of both the methods and content of these historical narratives in the present. True, we don't have occupation troops and a Supreme Commander of Allied Powers in the U.S. (though perhaps our current 'supreme commander' thinks of himself as such) to allocate paper supplies and suppress objectionable material. But Pellegrino is still hounded by self-appointed censors who use fabrication, deception and intimidation to obstruct information, censor his books and disparage his reputation, Harwitt got 'fired' (forced resignation) as the Director of the National Air and Space Museum, Abe and Obama did not say the things they said they wanted to say about getting rid of nuclear weapons during their meeting in Hiroshima and, Abe reversed his position and turned his back on his own U.N. conference and proposal to abolish nuclear weapons saying only, "I don't think this resolution will lead to the abolition of nuclear weapons." (And how on earth could he possibly know that. If Eleanor Roosevelt had said the same about her efforts, we wouldn't have a U.N. Declaration on Human Rights today. As recently as last week, NHK devoted the more than half of reportage on the Urakami Commemoration of the bombing with the the detailed history of returning a wooden cross to the rebuilt Urakami chapel —a "news story" right out of Nakai Takashi's playbook and the Catholic narrative of the Nagasaki bombing ("Exhaustive coverage," NHK called it. No critique, no opposing views and only one sentence given to Abe's refusal to support his own U.N. resolution.)

I had hoped Diehl's 'Conclusions' chapter would treat some of these matters and the linkage of his own examination of the history of the Nagasaki narrative to its persistence in present day obstacles to nuclear weapons abolishment. That, I suggest, is yet to be done by investigators that I hope will follow where Diehl and the resurrection of Nagasaki leave off. I still give a strong 5-stars to the book and its place among the important literature of post atomic war experience (for English readers. The Japanese have their own.) that must preface any real conversation on the subject of extinguishing nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, the Doomsday Clock keeps ticking and the unthinkable will soon become the inalterable.

The line that most sticks with me, and will probably do so for the remainder of my life is from the hibakusha poet, Fukado Sumako, in a poem that is included in the book (p.123), "Peace! Peace! I'm so tired of hearing that word." I regard her poem as one of the two greatest anti-war poems ever written (see below). The other was by a Japanese-American poet, Frances Kakugawa, who grew up in a small village on Hawaii's Big Island. She was 6 years old when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Its first stanza reads,

*Under the rising sun,  
The enemy came,  
Wearing my face.*

*- Frances H. Kakugawa*

## **Peace! Peace! I'm So Tired Of Hearing That Word.**

(An open letter-poem to the City of Hiroshima, 1955)

I have become disgusted with it all.

The giant statue towers over the atomic wasteland.

That's fine. That's fine, but

with that money, I wonder if something else couldn't have been done.

We cannot eat a stone statue; it will not alleviate our hunger.

Please don't call us selfish.

These are honest feelings of the victims

Who have barely lived the ten years after the bomb.

Sigh. I have no energy this year.

Peace! Peace! I'm so tired of hearing that word.

No matter how much one shouts or cries out,

there is a powerlessness, as if it disappears into the deep sky.

I am completely tired

of the unseen anxiety for whatever the reply.

- Fukada Sumako, hibakusha poet, 1955

## Why Wait?

What the occupying, post-atomic-bombing Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) and its psyops units handed us was a Pandora's box of gifts that would just keep on giving through the decades and future generations that followed. MAD and Nuclear Non-Proliferation were but two of a host of post-war narratives that could only intensify the threats that continue to push the hands of the Doomsday Clock ever closer to midnight.

MAD, of course, was a certifiable exercise in madness. It was the baseless claim that the fear of mutual nuclear annihilation would make the world secure from ever seeing nuclear weapons used. An irrational and certifiably insane conjecture in its own right. It depends on the assumption that the leaders who would be stayed by MAD are themselves sane and rational. This, as we have all seen is not the case.

Callous, sociopathic leadership has become routine among nuclear holding superpowers, and the smaller holding nations offer no greater assurance of stability. In addition, MAD presumes that when one has enough of these weapons of a certain caliber, the need to have more or bigger ones is moot. Yet the drive to have more powerful versions, larger stockpiles and capable delivery systems goes on unabated. From every direction, MAD is a policy that can only lead to mutually, or globally assured destruction.

Equally, the concept of Non-Proliferation depends on the demonstrably false assumption that only a few nations will become members of the nuclear club, and the rest can be kept in check by those few who already have them. As we have witnessed, decade by decade, membership by membership, nothing could be farther from the truth. And, there are plenty more nations hanging in the wings that are likely to show their credentials for membership in the not too distant future. The whole logic of asserting only a few nations are responsible enough and entitled to these weapons while all the rest are not, is absurd, as any non-holding national can tell you. There is nothing in the claims of a "privileged few" nations that doesn't equally apply to every nation.

If that were all that issued forth from the narratives of the Allied Powers' Pandora's box it would be more than bad enough. But those narratives have generated a whole host of other dangerous presumptions and mythologies which we all buy into and use to shape the narratives of nuclear weapons and war. 'Hiding under your school desk', or 'holing up in your backyard bunker', 'It was

an accident or glitch that has been corrected and can never happen again’, ‘We have a “hot-phone” to prevent any errors in judgment or understanding’, ‘This treaty will serve to keep things reasonable and safe’, ‘tactical nuclear weapons’ and a myriad of other fairy tale narratives that crank out new reasons to keep plodding down the road that turns the unthinkable into the inevitable. “Strategic Arms Limitations Talks”? What an oxymoronic Pandoric narrative that is. There is no ‘strategic’ in the need to rid the world of all nuclear weaponry. The threat is immediate, with nothing long-term about it. ‘Long-term’ means the catastrophic horror that lies just ahead; that these weapons will be used and we are likely to irradiate this planet put an end to all talk. And, this doesn’t even begin to touch on the demonic passion we invest in making that so, just as rapidly as we can.

New toys for 5 year-old minds are not just on the horizon. They are now being turned out in our demonic workshops of horror just as fast as the elves of destruction can imagine them. W80’s, B83’s, and shiny B61-12’s all packaged, gift-wrapped and delivered right to the doorsteps of our children and grand children (free, 30-minute express, priority shipping, of course.)

Narratives of *pika-don*, even in the numeric identities which these weapons hide behind to minimize the possibility more descriptive names might give away the real horrors that reside in those incubators, waiting to be born.

So how horrific and threatening is all this, really? Is it not possible that we will finally talk our way out of it, or arrive at some stasis which goes no further...? Is that not possible, is it not the intention of those left in charge of these matters?

Coded in that last paragraph are an endless string of *what if’s* and *if only’s* for which no answer can really be given by anyone. From the start, there is no such assurance in any of the narratives that have issued from the original scripts of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, not for the past three-quarters of a century.

For a moment, then, let us assume such assurances might be given. The necessary ambition on every side would still be to eliminate these weapons altogether. That remains true, no matter whatever blah, blah, blah is going on in the meantime. Give the long history of failure, what might actually bring about that desired conclusion —the permanent abolition of all nuclear weapons?

## THE ULTIMATUM AT THE END OF THE WORLD



*Only one narrative to replace all the ones we've tried comes to mind. It is, however, one that is at least as dangerous and risky as the narratives we now pursue. Perhaps more so. Yet, since the current policies of MAD and Non-Proliferation promise, sooner or latter, we will unleash the unimaginable horror of global thermonuclear war, this proposal at least offers an escape hatch:*

Suppose all of the non-holding nations agreed among themselves that the logic of non-proliferation was completely flawed, and unenforceable, for obvious reasons. Suppose they came to the conclusion that there was no justification for just a few nations claiming some right to have nuclear weapons, while saying it was dangerous to let anyone but themselves have them (which can't be enforced, in any case.) The predicate of non-proliferation, that only a few responsible nations should have nuclear weapons, has proven untenable in a world where mentally unstable individuals ascend to positions of leadership and are in control of their country's nuclear arsenals. To such individuals, global suicide is a conceivable option. M.A.D. is no longer a dependable means to prevent thermonuclear war.

Instead, consider that the remaining 186 countries (there are presently 9 countries known to have nuclear weapons), decide among themselves that, if there are any nuclear weapons in the world, they will no longer be left out of having them for their own security. That is, they assemble and draft the following ultimatum to the countries that have such weapons:

## **Preamble:**

We, the nations of the world that do not possess nuclear weapons, reject the notion that a few nations (9 at present) are permitted to have such terrible devices, while everyone else is prohibited from having any. Though it is, and always has been, our fervent wish to rid the world of all nuclear weapons, every attempt to do so for the past three-quarters of a century has utterly failed. We are no closer to that goal than we were in August of 1945. Indeed, every passing year sees us only moving closer to the day that we shall deliver the horrific promise that these weapons have in store for us. We can find no other way to end the nightmare of a world held hostage to the threat of a few, and their march toward global catastrophe, than to present to those few nations which have nuclear weapons the following ultimatum:

## **The Ultimatum:**

Either you, the nations of the world having nuclear weapons or the capability of making them, verifiably destroy all such weapons in your possession and dismantle your capabilities for making more or newer versions of such weaponry within two years from the date of this ultimatum or, We the undersigned nations of the world which possess none of these weapons nor the capability for making them, will form an alliance among ourselves to help each other make, acquire and possess our own nuclear weapons stockpiles and delivery systems until everyone of us has this capability. It is of no concern of ours how you accomplish this task. But that you do accomplish it within the next two years is a nonnegotiable ultimatum. Either you do, or we will begin irrevocably fulfilling our promise to insure that every nation has stockpiles of these weapons on hand. The clock is now ticking, and the only answer we will accept is to verify that the world is completely devoid of nuclear weapons, now and forever.”

***[signatures of 186 nations which have no nuclear weapons.]***

That’s it. Risky? Hell yes. Riskier than the present situation? Who can say, beyond the fact that the present course assures us of only one thing, we will eventually, by intention, misjudgment, human or technological error, or just plain bad luck accomplish our mutually assured destruction. The ultimatum really risks nothing more than that, but offers an escape clause if we wish to take it. Everything else is just blah, blah, blah.

## Update, July 2025:

*["In his essay, "The Ultimatum", Red Slider proposes that the nations which do not possess nuclear weapons present those that do with an ultimatum: either the holding nations get rid of all their nuclear weapons, or the non-holding nations will band together to insure that every one of them acquire their own nuclear arsenals. That essay was written 10 years ago. After reading The Atlantic Monthly's articles on nuclear war in their August issue, Mr. Slider wrote the following update to 'The Ultimatum',]*

**In the decade since I first contemplated 'The Ultimatum' as an unthinkable, yet rational reply to threat of global thermonuclear war, the dangers of relying on the postures of M.A.D. and Non-Proliferation have intensified by some order of magnitude. The idea that a few superpowers can responsibly refrain from mutual global suicide has proven to be a worthless assumption. At this time, a certifiably deranged individual has been put in charge of the largest nuclear weapons arsenal in the world, with little assurance that any rational fear of mutual destruction will prevent him from escalating some minor insult into a global thermonuclear conflagration. The mental stability of the leaders of the other two superpowers are also questionable, but unknown. All three, have demonstrated a sociopathic degree of tolerance for cruelty and sadism on a mass scale. Holders of smaller nuclear arsenals have shown an even greater disregard for human suffering and destruction if they think there is some selfish advantage in visiting it on some real or imagined adversary. Even a small nuclear skirmish among them could rapidly escalate into the threat of global extinction**



## **I Know How The World Ends**

I don't want to know how the world will end,  
I've already been there. I know how it happened.  
Spare the world on fire like the end of melt-downs  
quick frozen under your mattress, icicles poking  
from the edges of Depends, theories of makeshift  
post-habitable lands carried for a single stalk of viable wheat  
by arctic winds scorching the last page of inedible tundra.

I've been there, heard the stories a thousand times beating  
down the doors of every last swindling auto-mechanic demanding  
a fast way out of town at an affordable price. It ends here and now,  
not in ice or war, but as explosion of silence deep in the throat  
indifferent to distinctions between light and dark, day or night;  
permits no final say but to loom larger every morning, a reminder  
of the progress fire is making across fields we will never outlive;  
words brief as kindling; the night a pale fragrance of seeping blood  
and soon, all too soon, I will strip the mattress, open the front door  
and step out into the wind.

## **The Pika Don Song (ピカドン)**

It's Nagasaki Day!

It's Nagasaki Day,

The children couldn't stay,

They were all sent away.

It's Nagasaki Day,

The children couldn't play

When all was said and done

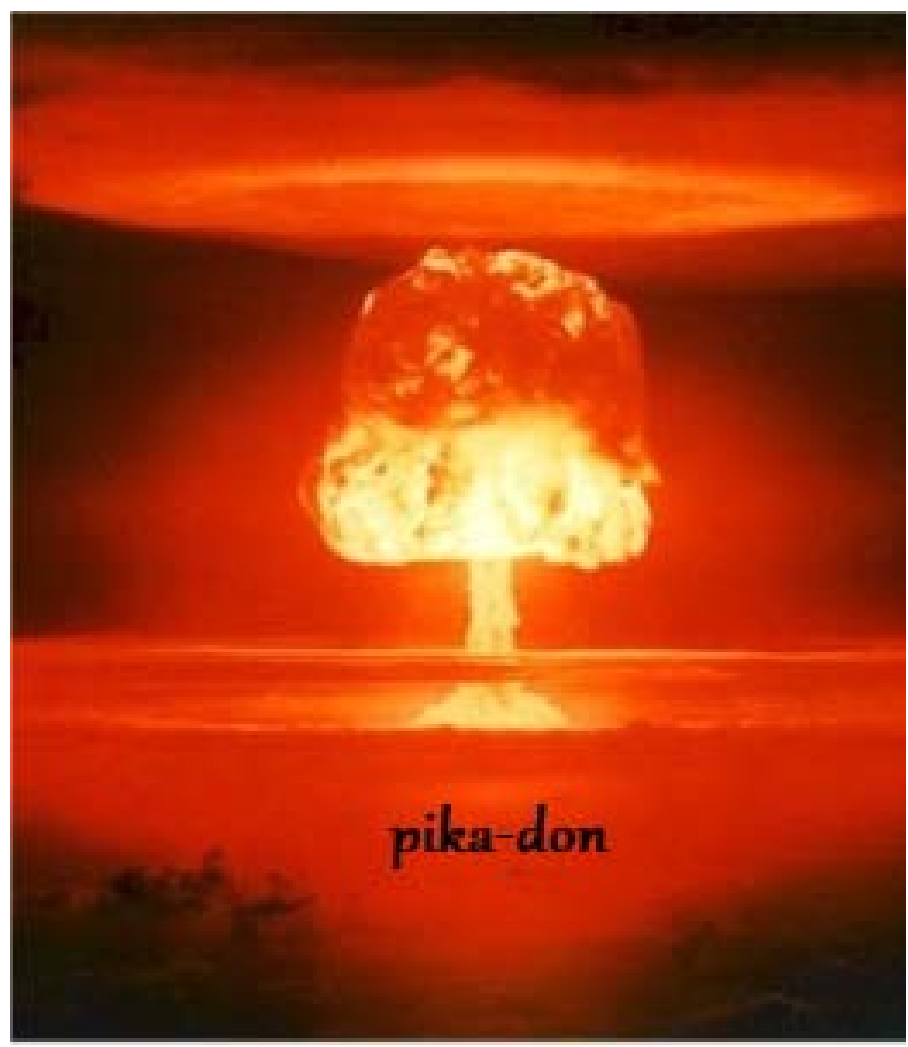
Then Pika Don would come.

We play the game that way

On Nagasaki Day

Whatever bet you choose

You play, you lose.



## ピカドン in Translation

Actually, it wasn't Nagasaki's Pika Don. It was Urakami, a district just outside of Nagasaki, separated from central Nagasaki by some low hills that protected the main part of the city from the blast. That's where the hypocenter of the bomb was, that's the city that died that day.

The hibakusha who survived wanted it be referred to as the 'Urakami Bomb', but that fact was soon lost in the Nagasaki City Council's rush to forget the reality of the event and turn the clock back to a time when the city was the center of international trade and culture.

Unlike the Dome and other historic sites left as reminders in Hiroshima, even the ruins of the Catholic Church in Urakami, which served 30% of Japan's Christian population, was razed to the ground and quickly replaced with a new church. The city planners wanted nothing to do with the fact of getting a nuclear bomb dropped on their heads. They wanted only messages of peace, rebirth and 'all new' and the forgetting of what happened in the past, to use as the lens for their future. Monuments of other ruins of historic sites were quickly removed.

The church helped them along, by declaring the bombing was "God's blessing to end the war." The message tailored for them was 'sacrifice, martyrdom and salvation.' The Allied Occupation helped them along by suppressing, censoring and spinning into obscurity every story they could about the victims, the devastation, the mass destruction of a weapon used on a population of ordinary citizens living in a community of no military importance.

The Nagasaki officials got their wish. We don't talk about the 'Nagasaki Bomb' today. Only Hiroshima holds our attention, with its Dome and Peace Park and cenotaph memorial. Today is Urakami Day. Today is ピカドン Day, a day that we celebrate by forgetting .

## Ash

We are all tired, always tired,  
sleepwalking around the edge  
of catastrophe, aroused from our dreams  
rising from the safety of our shock cocoons,  
the smoke of sleep still in our eyes, our skins  
paled under the fallen ash, we awake  
to the dim light of ruin, the ghosts  
of Vesuvius underfoot as we wonder  
at one another, reach out towards  
the lost dawn, guided only by the sounds  
of children we will never meet.

*THE END*

"Begin the Conversation" is a special limited edition printing by Red Slider for his friends, in remembrance of those who perished in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is hoped that by remembering and understanding how we acquired the narratives of a nuclear weaponized world, how those narratives continue to infect us nearly a century later, we will find our way to ridding the world of all nuclear weapons and end the threat they pose to future generations.

Others wishing to obtain copies of this edition, or wishing to sell or distribute copies to support their efforts to abolish nuclear weapons, should contact the author via [redslider@holopoet.com](mailto:redslider@holopoet.com) All materials in this volume are ©Red Slider and Out\_of\_the\_Loop Press, 2016, 2021,2025. All rights are reserved.



Always keep in mind the important words of Yasusada:

*“Practice your typing, and keep your sense of humor.”*

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*kodomo no tame ni*



Ikiru