



SOLENN FEATS OF THE
ATOMIC
TOURIST

A PEACE TOUR OF
NUCLEAR WAR IN JAPAN

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**Solemn Feats of the Atomic Tourist:
A Peace Tour of Nuclear War in Japan**

First Printing: August 2012.

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Published by Insignificant Press.



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Solemn Feats of the Atomic Tourist



Forward - We are all brainwashed, and our hands are dirty.

A lot of people don't hold on tightly to the facts of history. Instead, history for most normal people (those without advanced degrees in history) is a kind of impressionistic affair. They remember lessons and feelings. George Washington had wooden teeth. The first ten minutes of *Saving Private Ryan* are exactly what D-Day was like. Luke's father was Darth Vader.

For those outside of the historical profession, history is like the Bible - simple parables that provide an unchangeable compass for use in navigating one's place in the world. Tales of morality and vanquished evil make people feel good. World War II is less an event than a monument that they visited last summer in DC, when they posed for photos with the kids in the heat of the July sun. It was big and impressive and it was noble and it was limestone, and that is about all they can remember. It's all most people need to remember to get through the day.

For most Americans, the narrative of World War II is straightforward and simple. There was an unprovoked sneak attack on a U.S. military base by an underhanded enemy. That same underhanded enemy had no regard for human life, often fighting hopelessly to the death because they don't value life like we do. Finally, that enemy got what they deserved - a devastating bomb attack that at once avenged their original transgression and saved the lives of countless others by ending the war prematurely.

In this abstracted and grossly oversimplified narrative, the atomic bomb becomes a sort of baptism by fire - a redemption for the Japanese people, who then learned the error of their ways. The penitent Japanese have gone on to become polite, industrious citizens of the Americans' global hegemony - submissive allies who contribute high quality electronics and automobiles to the world economy. Diligent historians and anyone who has taken the time to really learn about Japan and World War II know that most of this story is caricature at best, and patently inaccurate at worst - but thanks to Hollywood and anemic American textbooks, most of the general public still believes some variation of this basic story.

So when someone comes at them with a torrent of facts drawn from newly disclosed research materials, facts that have withstood the toughest analysis in the most prestigious peer-reviewed journals, and those facts say that the United States was not a wholly selfless and noble player in World War II, that it committed its fair share of sins, that it dirtied its hands with the innocent blood of foreign women and children, that someone is speaking a language as foreign as Japanese itself. All they hear is - "your feelings are not valid. That wonderful memory you have of a sunny afternoon last summer on the National Mall is all a lie. Same with your grandpa's heroic service in the navy. That was a dirty joke. You should not feel warm and fuzzy about it. In fact, you should feel foolish for

being so gullible as to believe that your country was not self-interested like all the rest.”

And of course their reaction will be hostile when confronted with even the most persuasive evidence. Who wouldn't react like that? After all, you are assaulting a set of tacit nationalistic truths that for them exist in the same rarified realm as religious beliefs. Say it with me now: “God bless America. Let freedom ring. World War II was the good fight, and thank God we got the bomb.” These maxims are fixed in the stars, pure truth plain as the eye can see. And what is truth, if it is not timeless? It is remarkable how quickly the ink dries on the scripture of national history.

I get that. But I'm one of these critical folks who tends to come running, waving the latest evidence in my hand. A wannabe iconoclast, feasting on scraps, nipping at the heels of history's great men. Calling Harry Truman a bad name from the barstool.



This book is about a trip I took to Japan in August, 2011. That trip was called a “Peace Tour” or a “Nuclear Studies Institute” depending on which of its organizers you asked. I was present in my role as a grad student studying history, and also as a famed lover of travel. This book is about the two atomic bombs dropped by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan near the end of World War II. I’m going to argue that the first use of nuclear weapons in wartime was a cruel and unnecessary crime against humanity, carried out largely for purposes of international power politics. What I write will not be sentimental, except for the solemn reaction I have to the senseless, cynical loss of human life, which is always an occasion for sentiment. Even decades later.

That’s why this is a narrative in the first person – I take this all really personally, because as a citizen in a democratic republic, all of this destruction is done in my name, and I have a few questions about it. Like, why did we drop those bombs in the first place? Did we really need to? And what happened next, on the ground, for all those antlike people who are invisible in every really impressive photo you see of some bitchin’ mushroom cloud?

I love my country, and I can be critical of it at the same time. For me, it’s like a relationship between two people. When you love someone deeply, you are bound to have arguments with that person. From time to time, you will even be hurt by that person. You might think really bad things in their direction. But just because you are angry, does not mean that you no longer love them. In our hearts, we have room for a duality of emotions – for these rich, complicated feelings – in our relationships with people. Why should our love of country be any different? Why can’t we move past a simple, inflexible nationalistic love to a love that can withstand a little constructive criticism in the face of a brutal atomic massacre – can flourish from it, even. I don’t want to be stuck in a stagnant relationship where wrongs are left unspoken and stand without redress. That sucks, whether it’s your girlfriend or your government.

If our country were a real person, we wouldn’t hesitate to call that kind of situation out for what it is – an abusive relationship with bombs instead of fists and propaganda instead of words.

So let’s sort out a little of the bullshit that’s come raining down like so much fallout.

The atom bomb was no "great decision." It was merely another powerful weapon in the arsenal of righteousness.

- Harry S. Truman.

Prologue and Postscript from your president and mine

- President Harry S. Truman addresses the nation, August 6, 1945

"Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, an important Japanese Army base. That bomb had more power than 20,000 tons of TNT. It had more than 2,000 times the blast power of the British "Grand Slam," which is the largest bomb ever yet used in the history of warfare.

The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid manyfold. And the end is not yet. With this bomb we have now added a new and revolutionary increase in destruction to supplement the growing power of our armed forces. In their present form these bombs are now in production, and even more powerful forms are in development.

It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.

Before 1939, it was the accepted belief of scientists that it was theoretically possible to release atomic energy. But no one knew any practical method of doing it. By 1942, however, we knew that the Germans were working feverishly to find a way to add atomic energy to the other engines of war with which they hoped to enslave the world. But they failed. We may be grateful to Providence that the Germans got the V-1's and V-2's late and in limited quantities and even more grateful that they did not get the atomic bomb at all.

The battle of the laboratories held fateful risks for us as well as the battles of the air, land, and sea, and we have now won the battle of the laboratories as we have won the other battles

Beginning in 1940, before Pearl Harbor, scientific knowledge useful in war was pooled between the United States and Great Britain, and many priceless helps to our victories have come from that arrangement. Under that general policy the research on the atomic bomb was begun. With American and British scientists working together we entered the race of discovery against the Germans.

[...]

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We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war

It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth. Behind this air attack will follow sea and land forces in such numbers and power as they have not yet seen and with the fighting skill of which they are already well aware.

[...]

The fact that we can release atomic energy ushers in a new era in man's understanding of nature's forces. Atomic energy may in the future supplement the power that now comes from coal, oil, and falling water, but at present it cannot be produced on a basis to compete with them commercially. Before that comes there must be a long period of intensive research

It has never been the habit of the scientists of this country or the policy of this government to withhold from the world scientific knowledge. Normally, therefore, everything about the work with atomic energy would be made public

But under present circumstances it is not intended to divulge the technical processes of production or all the military applications, pending further examination of possible methods of protecting us and the rest of the world from the danger of sudden destruction.

I shall recommend that the Congress of the United States consider promptly the establishment of an appropriate commission to control the production and use of atomic power within the United States. I shall give further consideration and make further recommendations to the Congress as to how atomic power can become a powerful and forceful influence towards the maintenance of world peace."

Chapter One - Solemn feats of atomic tourism DC, JFK, Osaka, Kyoto

This China Airlines 747 has been parked on the runway at JFK for almost an hour. The air in the cabin is clammy and stale. The late July heat is invasive, leaving me somewhere between a sweaty nap and a coma. My head's not right. The video screen on the bulkhead in front of me shows our current position.

In addition to world capitals, it also displays the locations of history's most infamous shipwreck disasters. There is Washington, DC, where I live, and here lies the *Andrea Dorea*, R.I.P. 1956. An inauspicious and somewhat surreal dedication for an intercontinental flight. But it's a preoccupation with doom that seems fitting at the outset of a journey like this.

I'm on my way to Japan as part of my masters coursework in the history program at American University. For the next eleven days, I will be travelling through Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki with my professor, my classmates, and a couple dozen Japanese undergrads. To set the scene: Our so-called Peace Tour coincides with the 66th anniversary of the birth of the Atomic Age. On August 6 and August 9, 1945, Hiroshima and Nagasaki became the first and so far only targets of wartime nuclear destruction. These acts were perpetuated by my country on the overwhelmingly civilian populations of these cities in the name of wartime necessity.

An inauspicious dedication to the nuclear era. Punctuated not with an exclamation point, but with the ever-present threat of more total annihilation where that came from. A nuclear ellipsis.

Our purpose on this tour is to probe the human, political, and historical consequences of those attacks. In short, we aim to find out what the use of those bombs signified then and what they mean to us now.

A few related questions: What is it like to survive such an attack, for a *hibakusha* (Japanese for bomb-affected person) to overcome the hazards of radioactive exposure, loss of family, and the oppressive social stigma attached to bomb exposure in Japanese culture? What does it mean to be a citizen of the only nation to ever deploy an atomic weapon? What will be like for such an American citizen – the beneficiary of that technological triumph – to come face-to-face with one of those hibakusha?

These are the solemn feats of an atomic tourist. One part travelogue, documenting all of the strange experiences of an average American in modern Japan, the other part a meditation on the nuclear age through the lens of Japan's past.

The real drama belongs to the Japanese I will meet along the way. They are the ones who have paid the human cost exacted by the first generation of

atomic warriors and diplomats all those years ago. I am just your interpreter, a tertiary character unwinding a string to find his way home on a very dark path in human history, trying to relate what I see in the gloom and to make some sense of it all.

Americans came here sixty-six years ago as victors at the conclusion of mankind's most brutal war. I come with my colleagues in humility, to learn about that war in order to think about peace.

But first, I've got to deal with all the minutia and menace of international travel. First, I've got to stop looking at this depressing map. And this plane needs to get off the ground.

I moved to our nation's capital city in early 2011 to study at American University, but I'm still finding my way around. While trying to catch my flight to Japan, I find out the hard way that DC Metro trains don't run until 7 am on Saturdays. In a panic, I start out toward downtown on a bus, but that's just not going to cut it if I'm going to make my 8:30 flight. I take a cab that gets me way out to the west side of town before turning east again on the way to Reagan. Even as a guy who's not from around here, I know I'm getting ripped off. But I make it to the airport with time to spare, so whatever. That's all before a grueling five hour layover at JFK becomes seven hours of groggy runway-bound daze that yields the preceding pages.

This is followed by a fourteen hour flight.

I'm seated directly in the most intimidating seat on the whole plane: next to my professor, who inhumanly works on editing his latest book, coauthored with a major Hollywood director, double-fisting glasses of wine through the night while I watch the movie version of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and hope he doesn't look up at my video screen to see. Incredible stamina. If this is academia, count me in. Or at least intrigued.

Our flight finally arrives in Osaka at 9pm on a Sunday. My professor has sworn to the liability conscious administrators back at American University that our tour will go no farther north than this in light of the Fukushima nuclear disaster earlier in the year. We won't get to see Tokyo this time out, but the brief time we get to spend in Osaka will be a tantalizing taste of big city Japan. This is the third largest city in country, with about the same population as Chicago. The massive Kansai International Airport laid out on a purpose-built artificial island in the middle of Osaka Bay is deserted even this early in the evening. Lights are dimmed, and most shops are closed. Even immigration agents seem ready to call it a night. Their lonely white fluorescent bulbs seem all the more washed out in dim contrast to the Sunday shadows everywhere else.

Japanese Immigration takes my fingerprints and mugshot. Here's a question for all you non-Americans out there: how does this compare to the U.S.'s procedures? This is how ignorant I am (and most of my fellow Americans are, no doubt) of my own nation's immigration policies... I suspect many who come to vacation in the U.S. must submit to an interview and supply evidence of their financial and marital status in their home countries as collateral. The U.S. wants to make sure they have something to go back to... Fingerprints, too? Or do we settle for DNA samples...?

For dinner, I eat a mysterious salmon-filled rice ball wrapped in a triangle of seaweed – called onigiri, I learn later – from the omnipresent Japanese convenience store giant, Lawson. Even here in the airport, Lawson, like its fellow U.S.-imported competitor 7-11 is a Technicolor kanji cornucopia of Japanese snacks, manga, stationary, and surprisingly fresh and tasty foods like onigiri and sushi. No way would I ever risk my life buying raw fish from a convenience store in the U.S., but I think this fare is fresher than even the best American sushi place. Well, maybe not the best. But it's pretty good, since so many Japanese rely on convenience store onigiri and sushi for their daily meals.

An hour's ride on an aging but still impeccably clean commuter train takes us from Osaka to Kyoto. Japanese punks and hipsters on board wear designer Ts of some note. One is a vintage U.S. Marines logo – no hard feelings over the occupation and continued U.S. military footprint in Japan? Or maybe it's meant to be outré and shocking to conventional tastes, like Bart Simpson peeing on a Ford logo. The other cool T shirt that I see is a cartoon skeleton riding a giant retro fifties atomic bomb, Dr. Strangelove-style, with the word "Flyingmen" in bold letters. A Japanese band appropriating the imagery of nuclear holocaust? Imagine a band whose logo featured a plane colliding with a skyscraper. How many years will it take for Americans to develop a sense of humor about that one? The Japanese are doing pretty well on this front, it seems.

Our jet-lagged hazy train ride bleeds into a jet-lagged hazy taxi ride, but I've snapped to attention, drinking in the details of a foreign city at first sight. Outside the windows of our cab convoy, the city of Kyoto is green, even at night. Lots of trees and shrubs popping out of tiny residential plots. Plenty of cyclists, even though it's dark and nearly midnight. The street lights, where they are even on, are a dim fluorescent, casting off little extra light pollution. I'm later told that this is a function of the ongoing situation with Fukushima and the uncertain future of nuclear power in Japan, which accounts for something like one-third of the country's energy.

It's a heavy year to visit Japan. The specter of atomic disaster is omnipresent, leering with menace from the extinguished streetlights and the deep darkness of an untamed night. It's easy to find significance everywhere.

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As with every hotel we will visit on this trip, the Ritsumeikan University dormitory in which we're lodging features lights that are activated only when the room key is inserted into a special slot inside the room – thusly, when you are out, so are the lights. In the wake of that disaster, the power-thirsty country is running on diminished capacity, and everyone is asked to do their part to conserve, but some power-saving measures seem to predate the crisis.

Down the hall, a futuristic toilet cleans you and itself while warming both the seat and the water. An LED display near your thigh warns you when to spread 'em and when to get out of the way. I may do a supplementary photo essay to accompany this book: *An American's Field Guide to Novel Japanese Lavatories and Commodes, First Edition*. I snap a picture for posterity and he incredulous.

These observations are scattered, and so am I after nearly 24 hours of blurry travel. We're sharing rooms four ways for this leg of our journey. My roommates begin their evening ablutions. I brush my teeth noncommittally. Time to crash unceremoniously on one of the big, understuffed duvets graciously provided for the four bunk beds in our dorm rooms. Beneath the cushions seem to lie an unforgiving sheet of plywood. The toilets may be a futuristic extravagance, but these rooms are appointed in a distinctly plush kind of white cinder-blocked Spartan.

Perfect for projecting exotic dreams of travel-fueled sleep.

Chapter Two - *Hi bakusha*, zombies, and a cog in the wheel of the modern war machine

Kyoto

But it's a hard sleep, deep and dark. The alarm goes off at an unsympathetic 7 am. In Kyoto, I'm rooming with Andy, a Navy helicopter pilot and fellow American U. masters candidate who was previously stationed in Japan for several years. Tall and expressive, a fellow Hoosier, he's goofy and outgoing, Marmaduke as a man, but prone to moments of profound sensitivity and insight. And not just after a few Kirins. There's also Nick, an undergrad from Florida who claims to speak a little Japanese, but never demonstrates any practical ability in this department. Likeable and earnest, eager to make friends.

Together, we walk the narrow morning streets of Kyoto in a quest to suss out breakfast. It's quiet in this part of town, near the edge of the forest, with several large Buddhist shrines in the vicinity. The people here leave their bikes unlocked, right out on the narrow cobbled sidewalk in front of stores and their homes. The streets themselves are wide enough for a single car in most places – but they are not one-way, meaning that Japanese drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists must share this limited space safely and amicably. We see no blood, no bent fenders – not even a honked horn during rush hour, so it must work.

Everywhere that there is a tree, there are dozens of cicadas, which provide a deafening drone during our entire stay in Kyoto. Like a thousand buzzing dental drills revving up for a performance of *Metal Machine Music* deep inside your cranial cavity. If anything, this is an example of my propensity for florid understatement; there are several times, walking through a dense grove of trees that I fear damage to my ears.

Breakfast today is another salmon onigiri – which I'm still somewhat boorishly calling “rice balls” at this early stage in my travels – from the ubiquitous Lawson. What was unique airport food last night is a little less charming, though, at 7 am. Don't get me wrong, they're not at all bad – in fact, they taste pretty fresh and good – but I'm looking forward to some cuisine that is a little less... convenient. Other than sushi, Japan is pretty much a culinary blank slate for me, and I'd like to fill that in. Half the joy of travelling anywhere is sampling the local chow.

After breakfast, it's time to get down to work. We sixteen Americans are here for a reason, after all – on the most basic level, most of us will earn three hours of course credit for this field study of the atomic bomb. The first order of business is meeting our Japanese counterparts - a few score undergraduates, mostly from Ritsumeikan University, which is hosting our stay in Kyoto. These students will serve as our linguistic and cultural interpreters, providing a unique Japanese perspective on the bomb.

In return, all we have to offer them are our underinformed American perspectives – none of us can express ourselves in Japanese, so the burden of communication falls almost entirely on them. I am struck again by just what a fortunate accident it is that I was born in a country where English is the first language – the world is my playground, because almost everyone else in the world learns some functional bit of English. In a pinch, I can survive on “please,” “thank you,” and “I don’t know” in any of the world’s other languages, while my hosts do the rest of the work.

Speaking of underinformed American perspectives, let’s review your high school history. The traditional story goes something like this:

Conniving and duplicitous, the Japanese launched an unprovoked sneak attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor. Even though this was a staggering low blow, the Americans fought their way back against long odds, turning the tide of war through sheer pluck, tenacity, valor, and stick-to-it-iveness. The Japanese military was relentless, fighting to the death on air, land, and sea. The closer they came to defeat – the closer the war got to their homeland – the harder they fought to hold their ground. Japanese soldiers almost always fought to the last, finding no honor in surrender, only in death, taking as many Americans with them as possible. All for the frantic, frenetic glory of the Emperor, a living god to the fanatic Japanese people. In order to defeat their inscrutable enemy, U.S. soldiers would have to take the Japanese home islands by force (Operation Downfall), fighting for every inch of ground, losing half a million American lives in the process, plus five to ten million Japanese.

Bits and pieces of this resemble reality.

***Hiroshima* - In Film and Real Life**

After meeting our new Japanese friends, fresh-faced and initially shy after the national style, we file into our first Japanese university classroom. A first impression that is only confirmed and magnified over the ensuing hours: Japanese chairs seem to be some of the least comfortable in the world. First world problem. The room is a dozen rows deep and narrow, appointed in bland earth tones. There’s a large hanging projection screen in the front of the room.

The lights dim. We screen *Hiroshima*, a film from 1953, one of the first Japanese films to deal with the atomic bomb. It is dark and unrelenting, finding little beauty or hope for *hibakusha*¹ in those early postwar years.

¹ “Bomb-affected people,” the Japanese term for those who initially survived the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

The nightmarish portrayal of the minutes and hours immediately following the bomb's detonation – featuring shrieking, barely sensible survivors staggering through flame and rubble, their skin and limbs mangled graphically – prefigures American zombie films by nearly ten years, revealing the latter's roots in nuclear era paranoia. Leave it to Americans to so thoroughly sublimate this kind of atomic anxiety. This gritty, tragic stuff is a downer. We prefer blockbusters where the hero mows these depressing, disfigured creeps down en masse.

One of the most compelling storylines in the film follows a young hibakusha – a teenager who lost his whole family in the attack on Hiroshima. His teachers and classmates worry about his seemingly self-destructive melancholy. His grades are failing, and he's quit a decent job as a machinist at a local factory arms factory. In film's final moments, he is caught by the police – literally trafficking in the charred bones of the anonymous dead, dug from the rubble of the city and sold as souvenirs to American servicemen and tourists.

The authorities call this a heinous act, and the boy finally snaps, explaining himself – the heinous act is making bullets for use in future acts of aggression, and he wants no part of it. No, he would rather horrify supposedly polite society by trading in the casualties of the past than play a socially acceptable role as a cog in the wheel of the modern war machine. Maybe *Hiroshima* does offer some hope for the hibakusha... Who is truly self-destructive? Who is truly insane? It is the overwrought melodrama of your typical 1950s era film, but is there a more effective way to convey the larger than life devastation of the atomic bomb?

After the film, a slight man in his eighties steps before the class. He wears a blue tunic of rough fabric. Modest. Soft-spoken. Expressionless. Tetsushi Yonezawa is a hibakusha who was eleven years old when the Americans unleashed the bomb on his hometown of Hiroshima, not too much younger than the teenaged character from the preceding film. He was sandwiched in the middle of an overcrowded streetcar with his mother. Right in downtown just a few hundred meters from the hypocenter, he attributes his survival to his small size in the midst of this crowd who, along with a strategically-placed department store of modern stone construction, helped to shield him from the scorching blasts of radioactivity and heat. Many in the streetcar were not so lucky, dying immediately. Burnt and charred, coming down around his eleven year-old head in that crowded car. His mother survived for a very short time, but soon Tetsushi was on his own.

That day, as a child, Tetsushi witnessed grotesque scenes of carnage and devastation. When asked, he chuckles coldly – as hard as the filmmakers tried, what he experienced cannot compare to the sanitized film we just watched. Make

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up can only do so much, and you can't smell what's on TV. One woman somehow had her eyeball blown out of its socket. It remained attached to her head, however, by the ocular nerve, so she simply cradled it in her hand, hoping for medical attention that was in tragically short supply.

Tetsushi speaks about the impact that the bomb had on his own physical health, too. Almost immediately after the flash, he became nauseous, retching well after he had emptied the contents of his stomach. Within hours, he was also struck with a high fever. When the fever finally broke, he was overcome by nausea again, making it nearly impossible to even drink water in those first hours and days. Soon, like many hibakusha, the hair on his head and body fell out, leaving him completely bald for some months after the bomb. Already weakened from meager wartime rations, he barely hung on to life in an impromptu hospital in the rubble of a demolished Hiroshima.

Tetsushi made a strong recovery, likely due to his shielded position at the time of detonation. But he leaves us to speculate about the psychological impact that this type of traumatic experience would leave on child. Or anyone, for that matter. How many nights did Tetsushi wake up in a sweat from monstrous nightmares? Does he still do so occasionally?

Like many hibakusha that we will meet over the coming week, he is stone-faced and distant as he relates the events that day, including the death of his mother. Sixty-six years may have passed, but he recalls the story with less passion than most people would offer in telling about a particularly uneventful day at work. His most passionate assertion, again like many hibakusha we will meet, is that he has been inspired by his experience to become an outspoken critic of nuclear power in all its forms.

"The U.S. can have its gift of the atom back," he says with a dark chuckle.

Koko

Hibakusha Koko Kondo speaks next. She was just eight months old when Hiroshima was destroyed, so she has no direct memory of that day. Yet the bomb has shaped and defined her life in many unfathomable ways. Standing not much more than four feet tall with her salt-and-pepper hair pulled into a bun, she looks mild. But in relating the story of her journey from infant in the wrong place at the wrong time – the epitome of an innocent bystander – to peace activist and nuclear critic, she speaks with a stirring fervency, alternately translating her Japanese into fluent, vivid English.

Her father, the Reverend Tanimoto, featured heavily in John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, a seminal work of new journalism that, in 1946, helped Americans to put a sympathetic human face on the abstract statistic of 140,000 atomic deaths in that city. After heroically rescuing dozens of survivors from the fires that

ravaged Hiroshima in the wake of the initial blast, Tanimoto went on to become an originator of the postwar Japanese peace and hibakusha relief movement. Among many other things, he spent much of his time fundraising in the U.S. to finance reconstructive surgery for a group of young hibakusha girls. Those girls came to be known as the Hiroshima Maidens, and their youth and innocence simultaneously raised American awareness of the effects of the bomb. So dedicated was he to this cause that his daughter Koko, the kindhearted elderly woman before us, came to feel neglected and somewhat resentful her father's preoccupation from his family.

Before his death, Tanimoto revealed to Koko that his passion for humanitarian aid and peace was born in the firestorm that swallowed tens of thousands of Japanese trapped or otherwise incapacitated in the wake of the initial concussive blast. Hersey's *Hiroshima* documents Tanimoto's frantic sprint through the ruins of city to find his wife, his daughter, and his neighbors. Upon ascertaining their safety, his quest seamlessly changed into a heroic effort to help the wounded. They called out in a hellish chorus for help from those fortunate enough to be still mobile. But many calls were simply ignored by Hiroshimans engaged in the scramble to save on their own families or themselves. Which one of us could say with certainty that we would be different? But this understandable self-interest deeply affected Tanimoto, animating his life's work.

Koko's heart softened toward her father as she grew older, and she has since come to admire his deep selflessness. But her story makes me think of how easy it is to forget that all those numbers and statistics in history's great wars and massacres had families and loved ones... They carried the physical and psychological scars of the violence long after they became footnotes in someone's textbook.

Whew. Jet-lagged, I struggle to capture all of those details.

Dinner Party

The night ends with a catered party in the basement of one of Ritsumeikan's academic buildings. The sushi is plentiful, the fried octopus balls (as opposed to testicles) are doughy (called *tokoyaki*), and the beer is free-flowing from liter-large bottles of Sapporo.

An elderly woman who seems to be a companion of hibakusha Tetsushi Yonezawa favors us with a Japanese language rendition of "Blowin' in the Wind." Nguyet, a Vietnamese peer of mine from American University sings a revolutionary hymn from her country (she assures us it is only slightly un-American). Allen, a Canadian peer, sings his national anthem (though he struggles to remember all of the words), and some Chinese students share theirs, too, with much more patriotic gusto than anyone else could muster.

None of us know each other very well yet. Most of us met at the airport in New York, but I can already tell Allen's going to be a good friend. Something about his prematurely balding head suggests a sharp mind, belied by his unassuming Canadian benevolence. We sip tumblers of room temperature Sapporo, deconstructing the day's events from the party's sidelines, through intermittent bursts of laughter and cheers.

We're pleasantly drunk. The walk back to our dorm through the dim, silent streets of Kyoto offers some brief moments of solitude and reflection. It's only 9 pm, and most houses are already dark, but I have much heaviness on my mind. Not even an evening of celebratory song and drink, in strained juxtaposition with the afternoon's intensity, can obscure the reason we are in Kyoto.

This city, with its narrow, winding, ancient streets, is so beautiful and ancient for only one reason. It was a religious and cultural capital of Japan, and as such, Kyoto was one of the few cities left untouched by American bombs during World War II. Its many traditional prewar features, including shrines, residences, and forested parks with large, primeval trees stand in marked contrast to the more modern cityscapes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with their wide American-style boulevards and steel and glass construction.

The moonlight is the only thing guiding our path in the wake of Fukushima. But it's ample to find our way home, even in a strange city.

Chapter Three - "We have taken the act of making war on children and made it into a weapon"

Kyoto

I wake early. My roommates are still sleeping in the gentle morning AC. This is my favorite: I walk and wander alone through the city streets, finding out just how the place fits together. I don't think you can say you have been to a place until you have walked around it. On foot. Taxi rides don't count.

Outside, the sunlight is coming down, and the August air is hot and humid. So thick, my T shirt already sticks to my chest. Which is a problem, because I have exactly as many T shirts as I have days of travel. This shirt is sweaty and ruined, and it's before 8 am.

Kyoto is stunning on this gorgeous sunny day. Even during morning rush hour, it is subdued and civil by comparison to almost any of other country I have visited. Where's the raucous chaotic side of Japanese life? Out of sight or nonexistent, so far. The houses are packed together and close to the street, but most still sport a small courtyard with some neat greenery – ferns or palms, mostly, trimmed and tamed.

I'm told these are middle class homes, nothing very exceptional in Japan. They look like a 1980s vision of the future, like something out of *Back to the Future II*, and for that they are glorious. Inscrutable and distinct, most in shades of earth tone or gray. They features lots of striking angles; I don't think a single one is a simple rectangular prism. They appear beautiful and functional all at once.

Some of my favorites feature a single car garage, barely wider than the compact vehicle parked within and standing only as tall as my shoulder. To access the car, a driver must hunch over and clamber through a partially opened car door. My parents' detached two car garage suddenly seems like an unfathomable extravagance.

Kyoto Museum for World Peace

This morning, our group visits the Kyoto Museum for World Peace.

The museum is the work of Dr. Atsushi Fujioka, our fearless guide in Japan and one of the most gleeful human beings on the planet. Capering, holding high above his head an umbrella with a canary yellow Snoopy hand towel tied to it, he shouts with a lilting, nasally accent, "Follow my umbrella, please!" Offering a bow and sprinting ahead in short bursts, his stance a half crouch, peaking around corners and hedges and under benches like he expects enemy fire at any moment. He is the perfect guide to make a walk to the cafeteria seem epically significant.

Today he wears a navy blue American University Lady Eagles Hockey t-shirt tucked neatly into his khaki pants. It is whimsical and antithetical to the straight-laced professional appearance that one would imagine for a man of his station – he is a well-regarded professor of economics in Japan, brilliant by most accounts. All I can think when I look at him today is, “Is there a such thing as lady’s hockey anywhere?” If there is, it must be esoteric and beautiful, like graying Atsushi. He is a modest iconoclast – which is the best kind – who describes his Kyoto Museum for World Peace as a point of entry for real dialogue about peace.

This unique project sits in a modern marble building on the edge of the RU campus, mostly surrounded by those great middle-class homes. The exhibits within compose a critical reflection on the events of World War II in the Pacific with special attention paid to the violent and destructive atrocities wrought not just by the Americans on the Japanese, but by Japanese against other peoples and on themselves. In this formulation of atrocity, even the conscription of Japanese men into the army is an inhumane and unconscionable act. The people of the world would benefit to broaden their definition of heinous and intolerable to include such acts – they might find themselves living in a much better place.

What does it mean to be a peace museum rather than a war museum, like the Imperial War Museum in London or parts of the Smithsonian in Washington, DC? The best part of this museum is that it does not dwell only on the heroic hardship of soldiers or on the sacrifices of hardworking women on the home front – stories that are familiar in any nationalistic account of any modern war and are certainly important to understanding the story of the war – but on the less oft-told experience of victims. In the Japanese case, this includes those Koreans and Chinese who were subjected to forced labor, those women who were drafted into institutionalized sex-slavery as so-called *ianfu* or “comfort women,” the casualties of massacres such as the one in Nanjing, and the subjects of unethical biological and chemical experiments perpetrated by the wartime Japanese government.

The Japanese were not just victimizers; at the hands of the Americans, as the war dragged on, they came to be victims of civilian bombing on a scale never before seen in the history of the world. For months even before the atomic bombs, the U.S. was routinely leveling Japanese cities from the air, so the narrative of the Kyoto Museum for World Peace is gracefully dual in nature – the story of both victim and victimizer embodied in one people.

This is a complex idea to carry off, but the museum manages it well. I really like the underlying philosophy of this museum as well as its careful execution. It is a fantastic public act of pacifism that enjoys a broad base of support in Japan, but which would likely be considered subversive and even offensive by many in the U.S. Americans have little personal experience with

being the victims of war. Could they view a similar exhibit on their violent acts without reading it as an anti-American litany? Not to keep returning to 9-11, but imagine a museum piece of that not only memorialized the Americans killed that day, but situated the attack in context by exploring the American-perpetrated violence against civilians in the Middle East that helped to inspire the terrorists.

In the mid-1930s, under the domination of an expansionist military regime, the Japanese aggressively invaded China. Hoping to drag Japanese expansion to a halt, the United States imposed sanction against the sale of oil to Japan. With no supply of oil to call its own, Japan now found itself with its back against a wall – bow to U.S. demands and withdraw from China, or strike against the United States, destroying its much stronger navy in a desperate knockout blow, as part of a larger plan to gain access to key oil reserves in the South Pacific. So while the attack was unexpected when it came, the United States had already chosen sides in the Pacific.

It's true that the Japanese fought fiercely and to the death in the form of *bonzai* charges and *kamikaze* attacks. But this isn't the whole story. Even as resistance on the field of battle intensified in 1944 and 1945, the Japanese government began to approach the U.S. government in an attempt to broker peace. These peace feelers were secret and indirect, unknown to the general public until after the war. However, even at the time, the Japanese made it clear to the U.S. government that the major obstacle to peace was U.S. insistence on "unconditional surrender," which included no provision of safety to the Emperor, whom they believed to be divine. In fact, the president's advisors were aware that a simple modification of these terms allowing for the continuity of the imperial system would likely mean the immediate surrender of Japan. Even Truman himself was aware that the option for peace was in the offing, mentioning a "telegram from Jap Emperor asking for peace" in his diaries.² This undermines the traditional justification for the use of atomic weapons on the Japanese – that they were necessary to compel the surrender of the Japanese, thus saving the lives of millions of Americans and Japanese in the process.

The bottom line is – many historians have come to argue that Harry Truman did not exhaust all reasonable options in securing Japan's surrender before resorting to the atomic bomb. He insisted on unconditional surrender right through the attacks, then abruptly reversed himself thereafter, allowing the Emperor to retain power. It's almost as if he was intent to try out his new weapons of mass destruction whether they were necessary or not. But why would he do something like that?

² See President Truman's diary entry for July 18, 1945.

Shrines

Construction orange chairs and slate grey walls. We lunch on thick, gooey rice noodles with big hunks of fried chicken in the school cafeteria. Example one of the prevalence of fried food in the Japanese diet. I wash it down with traditional Japanese tea, packaged in a handy colorful carton by the good folks at Lipton.

We bust into smaller groups to visit various shrines around the city of Kyoto. The first leg of this excursion is a bus ride to Kyoto Station, a modern mirrored glass temple of commerce. It is shaped like a colossal set of stairs that reach ten stories up toward heaven. Each level is an upscale mall unto itself, in addition to being Kyoto's primary bus and rail hub. Ten staggered escalator rides lift you past ten lifetimes worth of the designer purses and jeans, transporting you to rooftop courtyard with green grass and beautiful trees. The roof offers a breathtaking panoramic view of greater Kyoto and the lush green mountains beyond – all spoiled by an eight foot tall dark-tinted glass wall. Only someone without a soul could ruin a view because they are afraid the sun might hurt your eyes...

A short distance away is the Hongwanji temple, a massive Shinto shrine some four hundred years old with gargantuan ginkgo trees to match. The twenty-fifth generation descendant of the founder of this sect lives on the premises. He is granted a beautiful sort of palace with rich manicured gardens in his inherited role as ceremonial leader. Seems like good work if you can get it.

We don't get to meet any spiritual royalty, but we do meet Ray, a Japanese-American adherent of this sect who also happens to own a killer head of Elvis hair. Ray tells us that its central tenants of this order stipulate that no one has to worry about whether or not they will be saved in the afterlife, because there is no such thing as a soul. Everyone and everything in the ten dimensions of reality is automatically granted salvation just for existing. All of that makes sense, and I want to know more, but there's no time.

We cross the street from this ancient center of pious serenity for a pre-karaoke dinner in a restaurant that features a vending machine instead of a menu. You make your selection at the machine, and it prints a ticket. Then you sit down at a table and a waitress comes, takes your ticket and minutes later returns with your food. It's pointlessly technical and takes more time and effort than just ordering from the waitress, but it's very popular in Japan. For dinner I eat a bowl of noodles with salty beef on them. The low point of Japanese cuisine so far, but the vending machine was a fun distraction from the fair service and questionable food!

Mention karaoke to an American, and you're likely to conjure images of a lone performer on stage, singing off key, caterwauling to a half-empty bar. On a Tuesday night. Check the thesaurus, and you'll come up with words like "humiliating," "pathetic," and "Asian business man." All of which may or may not be accurate in the States, but here in Asia, you'd be way off base. Except for maybe the Asian business man part.

Asian-style karaoke takes place in private suites, usually with a big flat screen TV, a deluxe sound system, and plush leather upholstery. It is cool and empowering and raucous and all of the things that American karaoke is not. There are so many of us tonight that we occupy several rooms up on the second floor, and I move periodically between them. The Japanese are generally unmoved by American music, and vice versa, so I'm one of the few cultural ambassadors, which is a shame. But I'm braver, because I lived in China, and I know that it doesn't really matter what language the music is in. We're all going to be laughing together if we let ourselves go.

All of this until Weezer's "Beverly Hills" comes up late in the evening. Everyone knows this song, especially Yuya, the hip Japanese with bleach blond hair. He takes the mic and sings every word from memory, intoning the lyrics with more passion than even Rivers Cuomo has mustered in a decade. The Japanese dream of wealth and success, like its American counterpart, is riddled with class angst that can be allayed only through popular song.



Chapter Four - Things heavy and light

Kyoto

I've spent the last several days in a low-level state of anxiety which had little to do with atomic dread. I can't believe it, but I've carelessly neglected to bring enough cash to Japan for the purposes of conversion to yen. This wouldn't be so dire if I could find an ATM that would accept my American debit card.

I've been to many dusty corners of the developed and developing world – Egypt, the Philippines, Poland, China, the West Bank – and not had so much trouble finding a working, globally-linked ATM.

For the last couple of days, I've been on the lookout for one that will work, and I've been turned down with confused and irritated electric kanji at least half a dozen times. But this morning I get lucky at 7-11. The payout is another 30,000 yen in spending cash – which will likely disappear quickly given the weak state of the dollar and general pricey-ness of Japan.

The good life is expensive, even when you're just sitting in for a week or two.

I'll be the first to admit that it might seem like poor taste to learn about nuclear devastation and to complain about an uncomfortable seat at the same time. But as we file back into the least comfortable classroom of all time, it's difficult not let my immediate discomfort get the better of me. Fucking Japanese desk chairs.

In front of me, Allen emits an audible sigh. Clearly I am not the only one grappling with this internal dialogue of shallow personal ennui and cosmic consequence. The mere sight of those hard wooden seats with their backrests standing violently erect, mocking us at near ninety degree angles has overcome his Canadian good nature.

When I attempt to shift my weight – to fidget in any way – I come into contact with the person to my right, my left, in front of me, or behind me. These days are proving to be transformational to both my outlook on nuclear weapons and the posture of my spine.

Fukushima

Today's session at Ritsumeikan features a firsthand report on life in Fukushima from a medical student named Yukiko. She attends university there, and on March 11, 2011, when a devastating tsunami hit the Japanese coast, she had just parted company with her sister. Confusion and panic ensued with these two girls, but in the end they were lucky. It turns out that both, by chance, were in safely elevated areas.

Good news was paired with the sort that sets one's stomach to churning. Relief turned soon to dismay. The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant was in a state of crisis.

Quite unexpectedly – because who wakes up in their bed thinking that today they will be exposed to potentially hazardous levels of radioactive particles? – Yukiko found herself at ground zero of the worst nuclear catastrophe since Chernobyl.

Details trickled out from a reticent Japanese government. In those early hours of disaster, two reactors actually exploded, kicking potentially dangerous quantities of radioactive dust into the air. Those particles have settled in the surrounding area, posing a threat to all living things, but most especially the weakest – the young and the elderly. All farming and fishing in the area has ceased, and the Japanese government, in an effort to minimize public outrage and panic, has been caught deliberately downplaying the gravity of the situation inside the failing reactors.

Three reactors at the plant suffered a full meltdown. A conservative evacuation of the surrounding area was ordered.³

At the same time, the government quietly revised its maximum recommended limits for radiation exposures, adjusting them upward – so that first the power plant technicians, and then the people around Fukushima would not legally require evacuation.⁴ The government has consistently downplayed concerns about exposure from local residents receiving abnormally high doses of radiation.

Shocked and angry, some of the mothers of Fukushima collected the radioactively-tinged dirt in which their children are supposed to be safely playing.⁵ They bagged it and brought it to the politicians in Tokyo with a bold invitation that, if it is supposedly so safe, they eat it the way a child might. I'm not sure, but I think the politicians declined...

The last bit of Yukiko's story – the defiant action of the Fukushima mothers – is theater, but it speaks to larger facts of life.

Is it dishonest to claim that a nuclear power plant is safe – that its neighbors are at no great risk? If that is true, then why go to such great lengths to situate it outside of major population centers? The plant at Fukushima, like most nuclear reactors, was built in a relatively remote area, just in case the disaster that was not supposed to happen happened. It is in Fukushima because

³ Norimitsu Onishi (8 August 2011). "Japan Held Nuclear Data, Leaving Evacuees in Peril". New York Times.

⁴ Associated Press (16 March 2011) "Japan hikes nuke workers' legal radiation dose". CBS News.

⁵ Watts, Jonathan (9 September 2011). "Fukushima disaster: it's not over yet". Guardian.

the local residents were not numerous or wealthy enough to successfully lobby against its construction in their backyard.

Now that things have gone wrong, business and government seem to be abdicating their responsibilities to these unfortunate people on the same grounds – that they are too few and too poor to warrant more dramatic efforts.

The designers of at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant did plan for tsunami. The sea wall was 5.7 meters tall. The wave that crested over it on 3-11 (as the Japanese call it) was considerably taller.

There's a lot going on here, but one lesson seems to be this: the only thing more sure than the fact that people cannot plan for every eventuality is that when the unthinkable does happen, it is entirely likely that the forces of economics and politics will mean that weakest among us will suffer the most.

Arashiyama

A great teacher friend of mine once told me that the best educational experiences are spent alternately diving below and then skimming along the surface, going deep and heavy, then coming up for some light and some air. Too much of one or the other, and the distinctive impression of each is lost. Our tour of Japan happens to be planned just like that. The afternoon is to be spent contemplating lighter things.

We file off the campus of Ritsumeikan University, all forty of us. Relying on our Japanese hosts is a new experience in helplessness for me. Usually when I travel – and certainly in the United States – I am used to doing everything for myself. No GPS or hired guides for this guy. So it kind of feels like cheating when Yuya comes around in his third Weezer t-shirt of the tour, telling us all the exact fare and protocol for riding the Keifuku Electric Railroad even before we board.

Our whole Peace Tour boards the tram from a nondescript, narrow concrete platform. There's not a piece of litter or graffiti in sight. Like most streetcar/electric tram systems that we encounter in Japan, the Keifuku is constituted of well-preserved cars of a heritage dating at least to the 50s or 60s. The exterior of the car is a rich forest green with some grey paneling for contrast. The cars are long, maybe fifty feet in length with little seating inside and a lot of handholds for standing. They run one car at a time in fifteen minute increments or so. This spur runs from near Ritsumeikan to the Arashiyama district on the west side of town, catering, it seems, to local residents and tourists headed to this scenic mountainside.

All of Kyoto is beautiful, trimmed with greenery and low-lying mountains. People go to Arashiyama for authentic Japanese souvenirs, green tea soft serve, and to experience these mountains up close. It's late afternoon, when the sun

makes colors appear most vivid. Its rays glisten on the broad surface of the Ōi River. We cross Togetsukyō bridge on foot, eyes aloft. At this late hour, I'm looking right into the western sun, in awe of the lush mountains a few hundred meters ahead of us.

Before proceeding into those mountains in search of a famously towering bamboo grove and the secluded shrines and temples within, we waded into the clear, carp-filled water below. In a fit of Japanese whimsy (or a stroke of brilliant marketing), someone has recently staged a sand sculpture contest on this bank of the river. The see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil monkeys watch over our abandoned socks and shoes, protecting them from some undreamed of harm. This place is just too beautiful.

The bedrock is slippery beneath our toes. The water is clear, mountain-cooled, and oh-so-pleasant on this hot, humid day. In up to our knees, any pretensions between us melt away. Between grown adults from all over North America and Asia, all that is left is a childish delight, a pure and intimate sensation that has nothing to do with words or cynicism or self-importance. Half a dozen local boys agree, jumping off of a smaller footbridge into a nearby spillway, skinny and laughing, reveling in the attention we Americans are giving them.

Up the mountainside stands the enormous Sagano bamboo forest, orderly and majestic, unmoving and unknowing in the calm air. It is thick, and there is cool shade here, with nearly no underbrush. On breezy days, these 40 foot tall bamboo plants supposedly rattle and crash together in an impressive cacophony. That must be menacing, all that cracking overhead. For now, though they are as still as the ancient stone cemeteries in their midst.

I separate somewhat from my friends, moving along the paved path at my own pace. I am convinced that you cannot walk through this place and fail to find some kind of peace with yourself, even if it is only momentary. This forest is nature in order, with humanity accepting its place in that order, on a lower rung, nearer to the ground.

Sushi Bar

A ride in the opposite direction on Keifuku Electric Railroad whisks us from primordial calm to a neon future. Allen, Andy, and some of the rest of us eat dinner in a sushi restaurant out of a particularly multicultural episode of *The Jetsons*. Also joining us is Amy, a fresh graduate student originally from California. Her love of Monty Python and geeky historical trivia make it easy for her to run with the boys. She's joined at our table by Elisa, an earnest and effervescent undergrad originally from Brazil. She does not study history, so

often asks the kind of disarmingly insightful questions that more specialized students of history might skip over.

When you go in: Your party is seated by a living, breathing hostess, and this is the last you see of restaurant staff until it is time to pay your bill. A conveyor belt carries the evening's fare in a steady procession past your table and everyone else's, and you just pull the plates that find appealing. If you want something specific, there is a touchscreen panel at your table on which you can place an order. It's all graphic with pictures of the food and a cartoon sushi chef who will also alert you when your special order is about to arrive via conveyor at your table. He shouts impatiently, pointing down, saying in Japanese something like, "THIS ONE IS YOURS, DOG!"

The plates act as both your receipt and your badge of shame later when the hostess returns and uses them to calculate your tab. There is a chute built into your table – after your bill is calculated, you feed your plates into this chute and the cartoon sushi chef appears on the touchscreen hitting homeruns for every four plates your table has produced. There is a small vending machine full of cheap plastic prizes that rain down on you based on these homeruns – you earn a reward for being fat and American here.

Two other notes about this restaurant:

Nattō is a popular Japanese breakfast food and sushi topping consisting of fermented (spoiled) soybeans on rice. It is as vile and nefarious as its reputation suggests. Nattō is one of the few things in the world that will live up to the hype. As one of our party puts it – someone who is far more eloquent than I can ever hope to be – "this tastes like it came out of a cat." I have a strong stomach and pride myself on tasting almost anything I encounter in a foreign country, including duck blood and chicken head. One bite of this is actually enough to end my appetite for the night, and I have to think of pleasanter things to avoid a steady stream of something coming out of me. Elisa boldly takes a bite of my leftovers, but this innocent girl is overcome even more quickly than I am by the foul brute nattō. Yukiko from Fukushima proudly and with a sweet smile tells me that she eats it three times a week for breakfast, with raw egg over it just because fermented soybeans don't taste bad enough on their own.

Secondly, and on a much brighter note, beer in this restaurant is dispensed by a futuristic robot arm. The head on top is emitted from a second nozzle, precisely calculated to foam just ever so slightly over the rim of the glass in one slight rivulet. This is naturally to remind patrons of the days when imperfect humans poured beer and listened sympathetically to your woes.

Chapter Five - Out of the atomic ash Hiroshima

Hiroshima is one of those words so laden with meaning, so heavy with history, that its mere mention, without elaboration or context, conjures a vivid story of victory and atomic devastation. Most people can tell you in general terms what happened there. But if you don't know Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen*, you don't know half the story. This masterpiece of the manga form relates a semi-autobiographical account of Nakazawa's experiences as a young boy growing up in Japan during and after the war. Nakazawa does not make many public appearances these days, but he's making a special exception for this collection of American students. We're going to be lucky enough to sit in on a private event in which he reflects on his life, including his brilliant and moving manga series.

So we're up early to catch the train to Hiroshima.

There's a little bakery outside the station where I get my breakfast. It's got self-serve tongs, and I select what appears to be some Japanese variation on a piggy-in-the-blanket. That is to say, it is a piggy-in-the-blanket. Hello. I just didn't expect to see you here, piggy, in the land of rice and fish with all your sausage and cheese and dough... At least you're not nattō.

I. Shudder.

The Peace Tour says goodbye to Kyoto on the high speed train to Hiroshima. Our Japan Rail passes guarantee us passage but not seats, so on this crowded train, we are congregated in the wood-paneled empty spaces between cars. It's cozy and intimate, even when bewildered Japanese squeeze into our midst looking for the bathroom.

I'm near loveable, goofy Andy, the fellow Hoosier who exudes a great fondness for Japan. He has taken every chance he can to reminisce about his previous life as an officer, stationed here as a Seahawk helicopter pilot for the U.S. Navy. He speaks lovingly of getting lost while driving in Japan, of outlandish Japanese fashion sensibilities, and of the inescapable Japanglish⁶ phrases emblazoned across t-shirts and billboards with little regard for grammar or coherence.

During the recent tsunami and nuclear meltdown at Fukushima, he flew search and rescue and aid missions. Before the crew of his carrier even had sufficient humanitarian provisions to distribute to the people of Fukushima Prefecture, they were loading helicopters full of their own personal food, cold weather gear, and medical supplies. He recalls dropping food to grateful Japanese clad in USS *Ronald Reagan* flight jackets. He notes, "This isn't as 'glamorous' as the work of a jet fighter pilot, but it is the best thing I've ever done as a person."

⁶ Attempts at English which are present in a surreal and disorienting variety of contexts throughout Japanese fashion, advertising, and hospitality.

There are cartoonish air quotes around the word “glamorous,” and you can tell he was sincerely moved by the experience.

In fact, his experience and his comment are reminders that a significant portion of the U.S. military’s responsibility is humanitarian. The military is marketed, however – through heavy metal TV ads – as a vehicle for young men to gain glory through combat. How offensive to human decency! Why can’t you become a hero through virtuous service of your fellow man rather than through his destruction? It is not only the military’s fault, as our media perpetuates this idea through movies and video games, too.

So much of our culture at large is aimed at dehumanizing and depersonalizing others so that they are easier to ignore or to kill, rather than easier to value and love.

Allen, as I’ve mentioned, is a fellow AU history grad student and a Canadian. He tells us that in his country, the military *is* marketed as a primarily humanitarian force. In fact, something like nine-tenths of the Canadian military is devoted to aid missions, while the remaining tenth is combat ready. The men in these combat units choose to serve in this fashion under the auspices of the United Nations. As if the contrast between Canada’s forces (it hardly seems appropriate to call them armed) and U.S. forces weren’t large enough, Canada very strictly does not award soldiers medals based on sharpshooting or any other form of killing. Guess who does offer such awards, though.

John, with salt-and-pepper hair and soft-spoken demeanor, is a university professor along for the Peace Tour. Back in the U.S., he shows his students a trailer for the video game *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* and the Wikileaks clip of the crew of a U.S. Apache helicopter firing on unarmed Iraqis. Both videos revel similarly in the loss of human life – except one is fiction and the other fact. Is life imitating art, or art imitating life?

Outside the train, the countryside blurs past in a run-on sentence of rice paddies and soybean fields, lacking punctuation but for the occasional village. The coast of the Inland Sea yo-yos in and out of sight, and the omnipresent, awe-inspiring mountains of Japan rise in the distance. It’s my first glimpse of small town Japan, places that don’t even warrant a whistle stop from this high-speed Shinkansen train, and for all the majesty of these surroundings, all I can think is – the kids who grow up here are probably as bored as I was in my Indiana hometown. They probably want to get out just as badly as I did.

The modern glass structures and broad boulevards of Hiroshima rise up around us as the train banks through its final arc. Here is the giant baseball stadium where the Hiroshima Carp play. There is the trendy downtown full of nightclubs and contemporary dining. We unload our bags at the Toyoko Inn, just

a short walk from the central train station. The air conditioning is an American-inspired godsend in this stifling August heat.

My roommate in Hiroshima will be Mike, another navy man who worked on nuclear attack subs. He's of Mexican-American descent, and he loves beer, punk rock, and conservative politics. We're amused together by the complimentary blue-striped unisex nightshirts on our beds. Before we head out to see the city, we naturally have a little fashion show. Mine hangs down past my knees, and I feel like the father out of a 1920s Christmas poem. All I'm missing is the old timey nightcap. This is coming home in my bag. Some lucky American ladies are going to be very impressed and possibly very turned on.

Hypocenter

Midmorning, the Peace Tour reconvenes in the hotel lobby. I gang up with Allen and Andy, who are quickly becoming good friends. Also fitting into our little gang is Amy, the sarcastic California girl who looks like she doesn't care for the sun. Together, the four of us make a pact to pop the insular protective bubble wrap of the Peace Tour whenever it is feasible. We want to get a better taste for what Japan is actually like. No alley will be too dark, no restaurant too out of the way, no menu too incomprehensible for us to wander forth in search of Japanese adventure.

We flit onto a street car waiting outside the nearby station and head toward central Hiroshima. Our first stop is the hypocenter upon which sixty-six years ago this coming Saturday, an atomic bomb was used against human targets for the first time. Aimed at the T-shaped Aioi Bridge near the geographic center of town, a moderate wind blew the bomb slightly off course some 500 meters to the southwest where it detonated over Shima Hospital.

In the prologue of this volume, you heard President Truman explicitly call Hiroshima a military base, then invoke Pearl Harbor in an effort to remind Americans that the Japs had it coming. Contrary to the assertions of President Harry Truman and the U.S. propaganda machine, Hiroshima was not a military base by any real stretch, and its bombing was the not the moral equivalent of the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. Hiroshima was a city of about three hundred thousand. Of that number, only a few thousand were soldiers. That's about as intellectually honest as calling New York a military base. The very fact that U.S. military planners were willing to leave the city untouched for so long testifies to its irrelevance as a military target – it was so unimportant that military planes could afford to leave it untouched for the last, grand act of the war. As a result of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, seventy thousand people died instantly. Nearly one hundred fifty thousand more died from radiation, burns, and other injuries by the end of the year.

If it wasn't a military base, why Hiroshima and not some other place?

During the Second World War, aerial attacks against civilian populations for the deliberate purpose of damaging morale— of causing terror— became a central tactic of American warfare. Americans, of course, did not originate aerial bombing of civilian targets. During the 1930s, it was largely a reviled method of fascist forces. The United States declared its moral outrage, but by the end of World War II, with the help of the United Kingdom, had killed at least 800,000 and possibly more than one million people using this method.⁷ As one celebratory public-relations release issued by the United States Army Air Force put it, “For five flaming months [at the end of the war]... a thousand All-American planes and 20,000 American men brought homelessness, terror, and death to an arrogant foe, and left him practically a nomad in an almost cityless land.”⁸

In early 1945, in the midst of extensive, ongoing firebombing raids, Hiroshima was singled out as a potential target for the soon to be operational atomic bomb. An empirical demonstration of the bomb's power was a primary factor in the selection of Hiroshima as a target. The pure accident of the city's geography – on a wide river delta – was an attractive feature in this regard. The atomic blast – detonated at an altitude of 1,900 feet – could expand over this relatively unimportant city, unimpeded by natural barriers. Military strategists wanted a pristine target to measure the true destructive capabilities of their new weapon, both for their own benefit and as a display of power to their postwar rival, the USSR. A test on a desert island wouldn't do; they needed to see incontrovertible, measurable damage on an inhabited though previously pristine city.

Residents of Hiroshima invented sadly misguided explanations for why their city was spared the devastation that rained down on so many other cities that summer. They speculated that they were granted mercy since a large portion of the Japanese population in the U.S. had emigrated from Hiroshima. Such explanations speak to the eternal optimism of the human spirit – and a tragically false sense of security. It was not out of any sense of mercy, but in the name of empirical science, that Hiroshima was spared destruction by incendiary or other conventional bombs. As the more pessimistic residents of the city predicted, the U.S. was saving something special for them.

Today, the hypocenter is a narrow street where the reconstructed Shima Hospital stands. A block over is the Hiroshima Peace Park featuring the T-Shaped bridge, the Hiroshima Peace Museum, and, for Americans, the most iconic

⁷ John W. Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9-11/Iraq*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010)., 161.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

A-bomb-related image aside from the mushroom cloud itself – the Atomic Bomb Dome, formerly known as the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall. As a concrete structure designed and built by Europeans in 1921, it was one of the few buildings left standing in the otherwise wooden city of Hiroshima. Today, though the city around it is modern steel and glass, it stands in ruins, slightly reinforced but largely in the same apocalyptic condition it was in by the end of the day on August 6, 1945. A lot more grass grows around it these days, underscoring the fact that time has passed and that for many, even in Hiroshima, life goes on.

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

The sobering interior of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum stands in stark contrast to the serene 120,000 square meter park surrounding it. Exhibits featuring photos, artifacts, and thorough Japanese and English-language captions guide the visitor through the history of Hiroshima in the late 1800s all the way through the post war years of reconstruction and economic boom.

The first floor of the museum goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Hiroshima had a military past as a staging ground for the army and navy in the late 1800s. However, it is vague about the fact that this was no longer true by the time August 1945 rolled around. The overall effect seems to justify Truman's specious claim that Hiroshima was a "military base." In a museum designed to be critical of the atomic bomb, the implication is kind of troubling – this is subtle form of apology, that Hiroshima and its civilian population in some way deserved their fate.

The top floor of the museum is the must-see exhibition. It is the reason this museum packs such an emotional wallop. The bomb detonated at 8:15 am on August 6, 1945, so the exhibit displays watches and clocks – all charred and distended – each frozen exactly at that fateful moment. The story of the bomb's effect on Hiroshima continues, becoming more intimate and personal. There are display cases full of tattered, singed clothing, much of it from children.

One mother saved the peeled and blistered skin of her only son, killed in the attack, to show to her husband, a soldier, when he returned from the front. This pile of roasted human flesh, brown and leathery with age but still recognizable as human is on display in a glass case near the middle of the exhibit. It is hard to look at these items even in the sterile, secure environment of a museum. It must have been another thing entirely beyond our modest capacity to imagine, seeing these horrors in the original context of that day...

Barefoot Gen

Solemn Feats of the Atomic Tourist

That is why hibakusha Keiji Nakazawa wrote and illustrated the popular manga series *Barefoot Gen*. This comic book relates a semi-autobiographical account of his experiences as a young boy growing up in Japan during and after the war. Leavened with cartoon humor and touching characterization, its centerpiece is a gruesome depiction of the atomic bomb and its aftermath. He has translated righteous anger into powerful art with a profound message of peace.

We're meeting in a small conference room in a high-rise office building across the street from Hiroshima city hall. Nakazawa is seated before us at a long conference table. Like most of the aging hibakusha population, Nakazawa's health is in decline these days. His rare public appearance to meet with my small touring group, arranged through some lucky personal connections, is worthy of television news coverage in Japan. Nakazawa begins his story. Cameras click and film crews jockey for just the right shot. It's like some surreal world where the sixty-six year old story of the atomic bomb is breaking news.

As he relates the story of what happened to him as a six year-old on August 6, 1945, Nakazawa's eyes are fixed in the distance. Wherever he is, he is not in this conference room with us. Even as he explains that he survived the bomb blast by sheer luck – the stone wall outside of his school collapsed on him, saving his life. It failed to crush him because it also fell on a tree, which partially propped up the section of the wall next to which he was standing. A grown woman who he had been speaking with at the moment of the blast was instantly charred to death right before him – she happened to be standing not in front of the wall but in front of the schoolyard gate, which offered her no protection. He is distant, even as he describes in lurid detail the sounds of his father and brother's screams for mercy and help. They burned alive, trapped under the rubble of their own collapsed home while Nakazawa and his mother watched helplessly. Our translator is weeping, sobbing to the point where she needs several moments to compose herself before he can continue his story. But he is impassive, still seemingly a world away.

A lot of hibakusha tell their stories this way, in a droll matter-of-fact tone that belies the urgency of their message. I guess, how could you recount such traumatic events repeatedly over the years without bracing yourself to their emotional effects? Who would want to relive the emotional distress of an atomic bomb blast day in and day out for almost seventy years?

Many Japanese think of the nation's current constitution – the so-called Peace Constitution with its controversial Article Nine barring an offensive Japanese military – as a foreign document devised by a victorious U.S. intent on keeping its former enemy weak. Not Nakazawa. Perhaps his most profound formulation is this: the Peace Constitution is an opportunity to be embraced,

earned by the Japanese people through their sacrifice under a brutal and militaristic government.

Similarly, Nakazawa welcomes the postwar constitution's freedom of speech guarantee. Such a thing would have kept his pacifist father from suffering physical intimidation and jail time for his public opposition to the war. Reflecting on this, he says, "After the war, we can say what we want. This is democracy. But what have people learned from Hiroshima and Nagasaki?"

He says that he wrote *Barefoot Gen* to document the unique experience of the hibakusha and to pass the torch of world peace and nuclear abolition on to a younger generation. Turning to the prospect of nuclear abolition, he becomes more animated, speaking with a sudden passion that transcends the language barrier. "What can't people understand? We are living with the danger of total annihilation... What a stupid thing. We want a world without nuclear weapons, and we hibakusha pass this torch on to you. I am 72. I will die. Go back to the U.S. and tell a lot of people what you learn here."

I'm trying, Mr. Nakazawa.

Escape from the Peace Tour

I usually travel solo or with one other friend. My only tether to life at home is my trusty backpack with only one or two changes of clothes inside. This Peace Tour is quite different. I've got a duffle bag with enough clothes for every day of the trip – representing almost the entirety of my personal wardrobe. With so many Americans and because so much is planned by our professor, I feel like I exist in a travelling American bubble that just happens to be drifting over – but is not quite in – Japan.

After our last session, Allen, Amy, and I make a break for it. We're escaping the bubble. Our Japanese friends seem quite alarmed, but we assure them that, armed as we are with a cartoonishly simplified tourist map of the city that we snagged in the hotel lobby (two Toyoko Inns in this city and five McDonalds!), we can communicate our needs to any cabbie, language barrier be damned. And dammit, we need beer.

We find ourselves adventuring down a narrow pedestrian alley that probably houses an energetic street market during the day. Tonight, one of the few places still open is a restaurant that seats guests on pillows on the floor, offers no pictures of the food on its menu, and, instead of a robot, has a seven year-old boy serving beer. Needless to say, no one seems to speak English here – and why would they, because how many tourists would wander this lonely way?

We take off our shoes and take our seats, cross-legged around a low table. Through an improvised pantomime, we order four items of the waiter's choice off of the menu, plus some beer in case our mystery meal needs help going down.

That adorable seven year-old boy is experienced, tilting the mug as he pours each beer. Just the right amount of foam.

Any worries about the palatability of the food prove to be unfounded, as every dish is fantastic. I can identify none of it by name, but most of the individual ingredients we can recognize. Lots of noodles. Chicken. Seaweed. Egg. Onion. Pork. All in various configurations. All rich and delicious and affordable. The four of us agree that this is the best thing that has happened so far on this trip – and that we must escape the American tourist bubble by any means possible.

Kampai for kindred spirits in the haphazard exploration of foreign lands.

Chapter Six - Atoms for peace

Hiroshima

The Mayor of Hiroshima

The Peace Tour has rented a private bus for today because our travels within Hiroshima are so far flung. It features some fancy ceiling lighting, kind of like fixed chandeliers, and some clever extend-o benches that slide out into the aisle from under the existing seats to accommodate our large party. These also seem like they'd make a tremendous catapult in case of an accident. Hold on tight, Yuya!

After a quick drive-by tour of the medieval Hiroshima Castle, where the few thousand troops who were actually in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 were stationed, the first item on today's agenda is a visit with Hiroshima mayor Kazumi Matsui. At city hall, we are received in a large white room full of polyester-upholstered lounge chairs. It feels like the space station from *2001: A Space Odyssey*; it's a 1960s vision of the future where we put our collective scientific expertise into better polyester upholstery instead of microchips and the internet. With his nuclear optimism, this actually seems to match Matsui's vision for Hiroshima at large.

Despite the city's devastating nuclear heritage, he advocates the construction of nuclear power plants to meet the city's energy needs. In fact, a plant is set to begin construction less than 80 miles away. Matsui's stance on nuclear power has drawn heavy criticism from the world's antinuclear movement, which has pretty much always centered on Hiroshima and has long counted the city's mayors among its closest allies and most outspoken proponents. Especially in light of Fukushima, the proposed plant is something akin to sacrilege on one of their most hallowed sites, like building a Darwin statue in the garden of Eden.

As he addresses our Peace Tour, Matsui argues that there is a clear distinction between nuclear weapons and nuclear power. Nuclear technology has too many useful applications to be simply be abandoned out of fear. Until a disaster occurs that is too great for the best minds to deal with, the world needs these benefits. Somewhat disingenuously, he suggests that radiation treatment of cancer would come to an end without nuclear power plants.

On the other hand, during this trip, some critics of nuclear power have compared it to setting up a nuclear bomb in the middle of a population center. I don't think this a fair summary of nuclear power, either. The truth is, meltdowns are truly are unlikely. When they do occur, they are incredibly dangerous, but they don't produce a Hiroshima. That is just not an honest comparison. However, the mayor's assessment is not honest, either. Radiation treatment of cancer patients could continue independent of nuclear power plants. If that went

wrong, one patient who had willingly submitted to the procedure would be in jeopardy, not a whole region as in the case of Fukushima or Chernobyl.

But his larger point cannot be dismissed so easily. We live in a world where carbon emissions from traditional energy sources are dramatically altering the Earth's climate, threatening severely life as we know it. Doesn't that make nuclear power, which is far more efficient than wind and solar, one of the best clean options available?

Nuclear power may produce zero carbon emissions, but it is far from "clean." Its byproduct is nuclear waste, some of which will remain hazardous one hundred thousand years from now. I'm not convinced that burying this waste deep in the ground is a responsible or safe way to "dispose" of it. Humans simply cannot guarantee its containment on such a long term scale. A lot can change in that time. One hundred thousand years ago, Neanderthal man still walked the Earth and there's a good chance *homo sapiens* were still local to Africa. So on these grounds alone, for any virtues it may have before even considering the possibility of a Chernobyl or a Fukushima, I am reluctantly opposed to nuclear power.

Of course, there *is* the possibility of a Chernobyl or a Fukushima, too. So there's that.

The mayor's argument, like that of many proponents of nuclear power, seems to hinge on the fact that the world needs alternatives to carbon-emitting power sources, and it needs them soon. Most reasonable people will agree with this sentiment, so they have seized upon this logic as justification to push their own nuclear agenda. That wind, solar, and hydroelectricity are too inefficient to meet the world's power needs is their rebuff of these energy alternatives. This may be true today, but heavy investment in these areas is likely to improve these technologies, making them more cost-effective and efficient in the future.

Investment in nuclear power is a half-measure that would not only put current and future generations at risk, but distract from investment in truly safe long term solutions.

Or we could just say fuck it and watch the world burn from the front seat of an air-conditioned SUV.

Just something to think about.

Fukuromachi Elementary School

The Fukuromachi Elementary School is just a few hundred meters from ground zero. Built in 1937 with a solid concrete frame, it is one of the few prewar structures left standing in Hiroshima. The school itself has since moved to a more modern building on the same grounds, but a portion of the original

school building stands as a powerful, if diminutive peace museum. After traditional Japanese custom, visitors are asked to remove their shoes upon entry.

The museum tells the story of survival and recovery in the wake of the atomic bombing, with a special focus on the role this very building as medical station in the months following the attack. Nearby Shima Hospital had been leveled at the hypocenter – along with almost every other hospital in the city – so schools like this one played a valuable role in the weeks and months following the bombing.

The centerpiece of the museum is the wall near the staircase. It is filled with haunting notes written in chalk, clipped kanji messages from students and teachers conveying their whereabouts to their families should any survivors come to the school looking for them. Some 160 students died that day, making these notes especially chilling... Some parents may have survived the blast and trekked through the smoldering rubble of the city outside only to see these messages. Imagine the panic – Imagine the tightening in your throat – to find out that your children was not one of the 160 to leave a note.

Radiation Effects Research Foundation (Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission)

The Radiation Effects Research Foundation (RERF) was founded in 1946 at the order of President Harry Truman as the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC). Its purpose was and is to study the late effects of the atomic bomb on its victims, the hibakusha, and their descendants in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. From its mountaintop compound overlooking the ruins of Hiroshima, it is devoted strictly to its research mission, offering no direct treatment to those who it studied.

Primarily for this reason, it has been criticized as insensitive to the needs of survivors. Koko, our hibakusha friend, was only eight months old at the time of the bombing, but she remembers being paraded naked as a teenager in front of an auditorium full of curious research scientists. Such humiliating experiences were common at the ABCC.

For our visit, an American scientist has prepared an educational presentation about the work of the RERF, as well as about the health and environmental hazards posed by the ongoing Fukushima disaster. He is direct and unflinching, knowledgeable and seemingly credible, able to field any question offered by our Peace Tour, which has been primed to be critical of his work. He is unconcerned about the Japanese government's decision to raise maximum limits for exposure to radiation. He says he would let his grandchildren live in near Fukushima. Whether that is true or not, I don't know, since his

grandchildren probably live half a world away in the U.S. Maybe it is the fact that all of the scientists here wear white lab coats, but he makes a good impression.

Standing here on one of the few days of the year when the RERF campus is open to the general public, I feel as though I have stepped onto the set of a 1950s sci-fi b-movie. C-shaped Quonset hut roofs, dedicated radio towers with esoteric measuring devices atop, and lots of not-so-cutting-edge anymore but still highly specialized equipment – all on a subtropical mountaintop at the end of a winding private drive. It's a relic of another time, which makes me wonder about the chief criticism of the ABCC.

I don't mean to minimize the experience of Koko and thousands of others – I believe that it was traumatic and humiliating. But historians are constantly reminded not to judge historical actors by modern standards. Is this what we are doing in the case of the ABCC? What were the professional standards in other research hospitals at the time?

Given this controversy, have the scientists of the ABCC ever spoken out of their own behalf? In 1946, in the minds of many, the next war was sure to be nuclear. Devoting one's career to a project like the ABCC would have had a moral urgency on par with climate change or cancer research today. For these scientists, it was probably not a matter of dissecting the U.S.'s great crime against humanity. It was about learning how to help humanity in this strange new nuclear age. Even Sumiteru Taniguchi, chairman of the Nagasaki Council of the A-Bomb Sufferers, one of the leading hibakusha advocacy groups, concedes the long term value of this research.

It's somewhat ironic that the very data that is now used to quantify how horrible the ABCC was – the number of people in need of treatment, the number of people exposed to radiation, the level of radiation to which they were exposed, the sorts of maladies they have suffered as a result of their exposure – is a product of ABCC research. Maybe the ABCC seemed cold-hearted, but it is important to remember that their work has been applied to the victims of Chernobyl, Fukushima, and even to the hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki through treatment at other hospitals in those cities. The same humanitarian impulse that drives any doctor – which is the same impulse that drives any outrage over the lack of treatment given at the ABCC – probably drove the scientists who worked there.

We pile back onto the bus, eating a mobile lunch of sushi and onigiri from Lawson. The convenience store is almost as ubiquitous in Japan cities as the vending machines, which sell everything from coffee to beer. It's hard to walk a block without seeing one. My favorites are the Suntory vending machines. A bold, primary blue with a white logo and lettering. The logo depicts a

mustachioed man smoking a pipe, gazing intently into the distance, perhaps squinting against the sun, well-coiffed, his face weatherworn with wrinkles near his eyes. There's no Japanese anywhere on it, and in English the machine reads: *SUNTORY COFFEE BOSS. BOSS COFFEE. SUNTORY BOSS is the boss of them all since 1992.*

From this machine, I buy a bottle of my new favorite drink, Calpis Soda. It's a milky white carbonated drink that tastes something like vanilla yogurt diluted with 7-Up. It's a Japanese staple, and it's awesome – the taste I never knew I wanted, but don't want to live without.

Koko's Tour

Koko provides us with a narrated tour of her father's Hiroshima as it is featured in John Hersey's seminal book of the same name. In the book, Koko is just an infant in her mother's arms, but her father is the Reverend Tanimoto, a somewhat larger than life hero. We visit the location of his former church, the bridge where he meets his wife and daughter alive and well, and Shukkei-en, a beautifully manicured garden where many sought refuge from the fires and destruction wrought by the bomb.

The park is four hundred years old. Peaceful, and the shade of ferns and ginkgo trees is cool in the late summer heat. From the central pond, two-foot long carp beg for our attention, their fish lips breaking the water's surface, gasping out into the air, hoping for a bite of lunch. Dirt pathways lead over foothills from one pagoda or stone bridge to the next. This is the cleverest, most tranquil park I have ever seen.

For that reason, it drives home the point that for however much I read about atomic bombs, area bombings, and other indiscriminate atrocities of war, I simply *cannot* imagine them. The power of my mind is not equal to the task of upending the apparent balance of everyday life. People go about their business, buildings keep on standing, and life goes on... I cannot imagine what it is like for all of those things to end in a single moment.

I have heard it said that we as Americans are culturally deprived of the firsthand experience of war, so it is easy for us to allow our leaders to wage capricious bombing campaigns against our "enemies." But Hiroshima makes one point abundantly clear. Women, children, the elderly, the sick, civilians, even men conscripted into the army are not our enemies. They are us in a mirror. They are the ones who suffer and die. This is why *Hiroshima* made such an impact nearly seventy years ago. This is why *Black Rain* and *Bells of Nagasaki* are still so powerful. Through vivid prose and rich characterization, these books reveal certain human truths about our so-called enemies.

The regime is our true enemy, and time and time again our enemy has proven that it doesn't matter how many cities we level and civilians we kill. These things only strengthen the enemy's resolve, as they would strengthen the resolve of our own government. Our leaders are selfish and prideful, and they do not stop fighting until they are personally ruined and discredited. They respect international conventions that say assassinating the leader of another country is evil, but disregard the ones that say killing civilians is wrong.

I hate my country for so eagerly striking against the civilians of other nations simply because our technology makes it so easy. During World War II and in every conflict since, aerial warfare is the signature American style of war. Our bombers and missiles and drones enable us to wage war without putting our own soldiers in harm's way. We have perfected it and put our faith in it. I hate that places like Shukkei-en –this beautiful place – are destroyed in such wars. Thousands of people died next to this pond while seeking the same cool of this shade. I hate that when I am surrounded by all of this peace, all I can think of is that violence. I hate that I look a tree and think of it burning; my country is not God, as righteous as it pretends to be.

That's a lot of negative energy to belch up on such a pretty day, and I wish I had somewhere more useful to put it than my little notebook.

The Hiroshima Carp

Aside from a brief stint at American University in Washington, DC to earn her bachelor's degree, Koko has lived all 66 years of her life in Hiroshima. She remembers when, in 1950, just five years after the bomb, in the lean years when families still lived in temporary housing and school was held outside for lack of standing buildings, the people of Hiroshima scraped together their yen to start a proper baseball team in their city. A testament to the human spirit as well as to the unrivaled Japanese love of baseball.

The Carp are still going strong 61 years later, playing their home games in picturesque Mazda Zoom Zoom Stadium. Most American stadiums are surrounded by several square miles of concrete wasteland devoted to parking every individual spectator's car. The Carp's stadium is within easy walking distance of the Toyoko Inn, and instead of passing row after row of cars, we pass a much more compact though very densely packed bicycle lot. It's so full that it's actually got double-decker mechanical racks to handle all of the spectators' bikes. What a great thing!

We've got the cheap seats, and I wouldn't ever want to pay for the more expensive ones. From here, you can watch the salmon pink sunset over the mountains that enclose Hiroshima on three sides. The city lights come up, and

modern bullet trains come gliding silently to rest in nearby Hiroshima Station. This is where the true action is.

I'm seated with Andy, Allen, Amy, and Mike in the pep block. There is almost no canned music at a Japanese baseball game. Instead, a bare-bones band leads the rabid fans whenever the Carp are up to bat. Bleating trumpets and pounding drums, elaborate sing-song chants with prescribed movements. The crowd cheers, "Bonzai!" then lapses into a pointed silence when the Tokyo Giants are up to bat. They reel their energy in again, least it accidentally offer encouragement to the other team. This is unrivaled in American sports anywhere; American sporting fans should be ashamed at the level of pure enthusiasm these fans in the upper deck have for their sport.

I look around, and Japanese are eating French fries with chopsticks. Others just enjoy a nice bowl of hot soup at the ball park. Beer-vending women carry backpack kegs with hoses that spout frothy, chilly intoxication. I, myself, sup on Philly cheese steak as interpreted by the Japanese. It is a strip of actual steak, well-done, on a hard roll drowning in nacho cheese. *Oishii!*

Every attendee has received a green sheet of paper with a prayer for world peace printed on it. When John Lennon's "Imagine" plays over the stadium sound system, the whole crowd waves their green papers high over their heads. This is the eve of the sixty-sixth anniversary of the bombing. That experience and a subsequent commitment to world peace are fundamental to the identity of this city. There is no escaping it, even in the midst of an epically contested ball game. Coming from a country that responded to 9-11 with a bludgeon of reactionary violence, it is encouraging to see so much idealism spring from such negative roots. Even if it takes seventy years.

Maybe there's a green hope for the dirt I spewed into my little notebook this afternoon.

Chapter Seven - This is what peace looks like.

Hiroshima

This story has been told thousands of times, but most of us haven't really listened. We may know the details. A sunny morning in early August. A single plane. No one sounds the air raid siren because, after all, it's just one plane. This happens all the time. It's probably just a weather plane. A reconnaissance mission headed for some other city in the north. Plus, no one has ever bombed this city before. Why would it happen today? Especially if it hadn't happened one of the two times that the air raid sirens actually did sound last night? A false sense of security coupled with a sense of justified foreboding. Because Hiroshima's luck is out and its time is up at 8:15 am, right on schedule.

The crew of the *Enola Gay* aims for the distinctive T-shaped bridge in the busy heart of downtown. There is a blinding flash. A searing heat. Burning flesh and melting glass. Microwaving your insides. Instant desiccation. Instant blisters. Instant mortality. What used to take hours with old bombs is now achieved in mere seconds thanks to the American penchant for convenience. The birth of the atomic age. The death of hundreds of thousands. The lucky ones will die now. The rest will suffer first.

Yes, we know the general outline by heart, but what lessons have we learned from it? What's the moral of the story?

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony

Kurt Vonnegut wrote that there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre.

But at the massive memorial ceremony in commemoration of the sixty-sixth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, that is exactly what Japanese leaders from all levels of government attempt to do.

It is already a dangerous hot outside, and it's not even 8 am. Thousands gather in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, solemn and reverent in the ubiquitous Japanese formal uniform of white collars and pressed black trousers. There's a children's choir, and the orchestra plays an ominous processional for the assembled dignitaries of the world. The mayor of Hiroshima welcomes the prime minister of Japan, contrite in the wake of the recent Fukushima disaster which has brought up uncomfortable nuclear memories for the Japanese people, especially for the hibakusha in assembly here.

At 8:15, a bell tolls in honor of the dead. If you are wearing a headset for simultaneous translation of the proceedings, it rings in your ear with a sorrowful feedback between each deep, deliberate chime. An eerie synthetic echo of atomic decay.

Hundreds of doves soar skyward, released from near the shell-shaped Memorial Cenotaph. Finally, there is silence, broken only by the craven calls of black crows and the incendiary protests of those malcontents outside the ceremony who resent the pacifism that the atomic bomb has come to symbolize for most Japanese. For these nationalists, the bomb represents defeat and deserves a different sort of memorial than this one, as steeped as it is in desire for a more just, nuclear-free world.

The speeches continue, and I am struck by how much these leaders are concerned with the present rather than just the past. "Fukushima" gets as much attention as "Hiroshima." This event is almost like a state of the nuclear union address – a living commentary on an ongoing issues rather than a simple memorial for a discrete historical event. There is some appropriateness to that, but only because I am sympathetic to the cause. Others would say this is politicizing the past. But is there a past that isn't politicized? Beyond the flowers and the doves, there is little that was sentimental or personal about the official memorial ceremony.

The ceremony comes to an end, and the gathered crowd makes an offering of white flowers, each member filing past the Memorial Cenotaph. That same ominous processional music – a kind of deconstructed, post-modern *Star Wars* "Imperial March" – keeps the mood grounded, suggesting that something evil is still hanging in the air over all of us. Just biding its time.

Afterwards, I wander alone around the peace park. The park is still full of people, and there are many opportunities to observe more personal expressions of hope and harmony. The hibakusha were not heard from during the formal speeches, but they are out in large numbers recalling their stories in English and in Japanese. Japanese middle school students approach me, testing out their English and their messages of peace. They have made construction paper doves and are offering them to foreigners as totems of universal goodwill. I will display mine proudly, I promise.

I fear I'll lose it in some drawer in my room at home.

Miyajima Island

This is a heavy morning, solemn and bracing. Allen, Andy, and I decide to get out of the city this afternoon. Miyajima Island is a quick ferry ride away from Hiroshima. It is an island of striking natural beauty with a deep cultural and religious heritage. And your Japan Rail pass will get you onto the ferry at no additional charge.

So you know that in addition to being sacred, it's also got a massive tourist economy. Lots of kitschy Japanese souvenirs can be had for twice the price as on the mainland. Even the pygmy deer that inhabit the island have been

Solemn Feats of the Atomic Tourist

corrupted. They are overweight and lethargic from their diet of trash, and they are totally unafraid of tourists who pose for pictures while hugging them around their plump bellies. Apparently monkeys can be found higher up on the hillside, but the cable car to the top is out of service, so I can't confirm it. I wonder if they are similarly girthy. I wonder if they'd let me squeeze their plump monkey tummies.

The main visual attraction is the torii of the Itsukushima Shrine, which is built right off shore in the waters of the Inland Sea. Someone has an idea to swim out to it, but thinks better of it. Would that be more disrespectful than eating a green tea ice cream cone on the steps of the shrine itself? Maybe not, but everyone else is eating the ice cream, and no one is swimming.

For me, the chance to walk on trails through unspoiled Japanese wilderness was worth the trip. Walking these narrow footpaths, I can't help but feel like I've stepped into a Kurosawa film. Until some taxi cab comes rushing down a cross street. Then I'm reminded that this island's *mélange* of highbrow and lowbrow is more like something out of Tarantino.

The Lantern Ceremony

There is a spiritual sense of communion, a union of the intimate and the universal found at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park this evening. The park is the site of the *tōrō nagashi*, or lantern ceremony, a traditional Japanese memorial service for the dead. It is by far the most moving part of the day. The morning ceremony was for and by the government, but this is clearly of the people. The skeletal A-Bomb Dome glows bright in the dark, its reflection dancing and shifting shape on the dark surface of the river like some Rorschach test of tragedy, an all-purpose steel and stone reminder of the fragility of even the most durable of man's accomplishments.

By this light and the light of the primeval moon, people gather to write messages of peace and love on colorful paper, which they proceed to fold into lantern shades. I join several of my new Japanese friends to decorate one, adding the message, "No nations, just people. Peace." This is written beside the kanji script peace messages of my Japanese friends. This is beautiful, because when you think about it - our grandfathers were trying their best to kill one another.

We place a lit candle inside our lantern and join thousands of others - Japanese, Americans, Asians, Europeans - on the banks of the Ōta River. Lanterns of dozens of colors, the collaborative work of many hands, drift like luminescent souls toward the unknown sea. This communion is profound. Your feet get wet, and you cannot help but feel connected on a spiritual level to what happened here. Suddenly the people who died here are your own people. They are your mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters.

For years, it was easy enough to justify their deaths in the name of the greater good. The war in the Pacific was brutal. The bomb mercifully hastened its end. Tens of thousands died here, but millions were spared because there was no invasion of Japan.

But now that story is complicated. Historian Gar Alperovitz argues that the decision to use atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was motivated almost entirely by power politics. For months, the Japanese had been sending out peace feelers through various channels, and decrypted Japanese communications suggested that the primary obstacle to peace lay in the U.S. insistence on unconditional surrender. Beyond victory, beyond honor, the Japanese were concerned with the preservation of their divine emperor. He could not be put to death or put on trial in the way that the leaders of Nazi Germany were. Had Truman reformulated U.S. demands to allow for continuity of the emperor's rule as many of his own aides suggested, and as he ultimately did after the bombs were used and the Soviets had entered the war, it is likely that Japanese surrender would have come even before the first atomic bomb was tested in July of 1945.

Lots of Japanese don't like the things I've just said any more than Americans do. I wonder if it is because it casts those who died at Hiroshima and Nagasaki not only as victims, but as props in someone else's play. They didn't die to save Japan, they died as an example for the Soviet Union. An implicit threat – this is what happens when you fuck with the United States.

That's hardly noble or heroic. It's just kind of pathetic, whether you're the Japanese who died or the Americans who dropped the bomb.

Not in the mood for a big group dinner, Allen, Amy, and I stake out a spot on the river. We sit in the shadows of the night, watching the lanterns drifting slowly past our position downstream. The three of us reflect in sparse language on everything we have seen and done these past few days, but mostly the silence does the talking. This Peace Tour is so much more than just a class. That much is apparent, even if we can't articulate just how we are changing from what we have seen.

Eventually we find ourselves in Hiroshima's downtown nightlife district for our last night on the town. It's not very busy for a Saturday night, but that is probably understandable given the date. We're just looking for a quiet dinner, and we're rewarded in a tiny place serving contemporary Japanese cuisine and the smoothest sake I have ever tasted. We stick our shoes in the little cubby by the door and find a booth near the bar.

Chapter Eight - I drank it just as it was.

Nagasaki

This time we've reserved seats for the train ride from Hiroshima to Nagasaki. The ride is much more comfortable than last time. While I've got a better view out the windows, the stimulating conversation is gone. My seat number is half a car away from the next American, and the Japanese around me don't seem very interested in talking. Mostly, they're asleep at this early hour.

So I content myself to watch the countryside race past. We're moving farther south now, from the largest island of Honshu to the southernmost island of Kyushu. The transition is seamless, and even though I'm watching, I can't tell when we leave one island for the next, though. Hiroshima was a big, modern city. Nagasaki seems smaller and more working class. Befitting its status as a hub of manufacturing and shipping, the buildings are gritty and industrial, like some Japanese outpost of the Rust Belt.

The train deposits us at the train station in Urakami, the neighborhood on the north side of Nagasaki where we will be staying. Due to an error in targeting on August 9, 1945, it was this primarily residential, primarily Christian neighborhood that received the brunt of the American nuclear attack on the city. The houses here are reminiscent of those idiosyncratic designs seen in Kyoto, though noticeably a little less fancy.

The whole neighborhood is set on a mountainside overlooking a narrow valley. This fact makes everything we experience in Nagasaki steeper than flat, low-lying Hiroshima. The Peace Tour will be staying in a little hotel within easy walking distance of the Nagasaki Peace Park, which is home to the hypocenter and all of the attendant memorials to the dead.

Nagasaki Peace Park

The Nagasaki Peace Park straddles a steep terraced hillside. The lowest level of the park is a broad, open brick-paved yard. It is rimmed with trees and statues offered as gifts of goodwill and peace from many nations of the world to the people of Nagasaki. Notably absent is a statue from the United States, which has never made even such a small gesture to the people it bombed. At the height of the Cold War, the USSR, East Germany, Cuba, and even Japan's bitter World War II enemy, China decided to offer up statues as tokens of their solidarity with those who suffered at the hands of the great capitalists of the west.

At the center of this space, a tall black column, a solemn obelisk as black as carbonized death, marks the exact hypocenter – the point over which the bomb detonated, leveling the city around it. Concentric concrete circles radiating outward and intersecting with the last extant ruins of the Urakami Catholic

Cathedral illustrate this point with all of the power of a well-designed (and especially stirring) infographic.

A flight of stairs takes the visitor up to the next level of the terraced park, which features the Fountain of Peace. In its general seclusion from the outside world, the broad, circular Fountain of Peace invites introspection and reflection. The sound of rushing water seems to wash away any outside distractions. If one can read Japanese, they will be struck by the black stone plaque in front of the fountain which contains an inscription from Sachiko Yamaguchi, a hibakusha who was nine at the time Nagasaki was bombed. Her words read: "I was thirsty beyond endurance. There was something oily on the surface of the water, but I wanted water so badly that I drank it just as it was."

Beyond the Fountain of Peace lies the Peace Statue. Whereas much of the public art commemorating the bomb is abstract and nonrepresentational, this statue depicts a powerful man at odds with himself. His right arm points to the sky, a haunting reminder that as long as they exist, nuclear weapons pose a threat to each and every one of us. His left arm is outstretched, palm downwards suggesting a desire for calm and peace. It's like he's saying "Hold it. Hold up a second," in his own cosmically enlightened way. One leg is folded, tucked into a meditative pose. The other seems ready to support his weight, signifying his willingness to stand up and save the people of the world from nuclear madness. He is simultaneously a spiritual figure, begging cosmic peace, and a superhero for the nuclear age, born like so many others in the heat of an atomic blast.

I really like this park because it is a complete experience. It is nowhere near as large as the one at Hiroshima. It is nowhere near as green. But it is beautiful and laden with symbolism. The Hiroshima park is multifaceted, including many smaller monuments that attempt to give voice to everyone with a stake in the tragedy. At times it feels piecemeal. The Nagasaki park was clearly conceived as a unified whole – with peace and the abolition of nuclear weapons in the name of those who died here as its central thesis.

Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum

Adjacent to Nagasaki Peace Park, the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum is a comprehensive presentation of all issues surrounding the atomic bombings. Exhibits weave a multifaceted narrative explaining science, politics, sheer devastation and loss of life, and the ongoing history of nuclear weapons. A visitor could conceivably enter the museum knowing little about the bomb and leave with a fairly well-rounded understanding. The museum's analysis of the geopolitical landscape of 1945 is astute, pointing out the U.S.'s desire to impress the Soviet Union with a demonstration its new super weapon. This is an idea so controversial that the Smithsonian, which chronicles the "official" version of U.S.

history does not even mention it in its own measly exhibit on the bomb. Instead, it sticks to the myth that bomb was a necessity for ending the war.⁹ In the midninties, when the Smithsonian made an attempt to include the story of Japanese bomb victims in a special Enola Gay exhibition, there was so much outcry from veteran's groups and conservative politicians that the exhibit was canceled and the curator lost his job.

If a museum is about the *presentation* of history, the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum has to be one of the best in the world, not because it tells a side of the story I am already sympathetic with, but because it tells all sides of the story, including the official U.S. line as reflected in Truman's address. This museum certainly wins out over the much simpler, though emotionally-affecting Hiroshima museum. It is dramatic and engaging while offering a great deal of historical and scientific content. It is proof that a museum can have high production values, immersing its audience in an experience, and be intellectually rigorous at the same time.

You enter into a dark corridor... Indistinct shapes loom overhead. Sorrowful music swells and so do the lights, positioned low and tinted orange like flames. This is an effect, but everything else is real: You are surrounded by twisted metal and shattered brick. These are not props, but the result of the second atomic bomb ever used on a civilian target. The centerpiece of this simulation is the crumbling façade of the Urakami Cathedral which stood at the hypocenter of the bomb's explosion. Stone angels burnt in the fires of an atomic inferno stare down at you, lit from below as if the flames might rise again at any time and swallow you whole.

One of the best designed exhibits consists of an inverted pyramid standing on end with its point on Nagasaki. Each of its three sides documents the three intersecting vectors that led to the use of the bomb in Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. One side offers a brief outline of the course of the Pacific War starting with Japan's invasion of China and continuing through its aggressive, desperate war against the United States. Another is a summarized story of the scientists whose breakthroughs made the bomb possible and whose fear of a Nazi bomb prompted them to lend their talents to the production of a U.S. bomb. The third side outlines the political debate at the top of the U.S. government which resulted in the decision to actually put the bomb to use, not against a hypothetical nuclear-armed Germany, but against a Japan that was by most accounts weeks away from surrender.

⁹ For more on this important and often misunderstood point, including recommendations for further reading, please see "Why did Truman do it?" at the end of this volume.

I'm a museum geek, so I'm frantically snapping photos of all of this, hoping my memory card doesn't fill up.

Next to the museum is the Nagasaki International Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims. The visitor descends through a series of ramps into a deep chamber, quiet and dimly lit. The chamber resembles an ancient pharaoh's tomb, all tall ceilings and massive rectangular columns. At the far end of the chamber a large glass case holds an incredible list – thousands of sheets of paper containing the names of every victim of the Nagasaki bomb. Here, the spiritual element, while vital to the memory of a massacre such as this, is carefully conceived of as a separate experience from the historical memory presented in the museum proper.

While the Nagasaki museum has its share of emotionally loaded personal effects from those who died in the bomb, this is not its primary focus. In this way, it is significantly different from the Hiroshima museum, which relies heavily on the impact of these artifacts to make its argument against nuclear weapons. That is a strength of the Nagasaki museum over the one in Hiroshima. In both places, a reasonable person will conclude that nuclear weapons are terrible. The visitor to Nagasaki, however, will be able to make an informed and cogent argument to a skeptic who has not had the emotional experience of seeing, say, a charred tricycle firsthand at Hiroshima.

Tonight, Allen, Amy, Andy, and I sneak off for beer and dinner at a restaurant that serves yakiniku. Yakiniku is meat and vegetables roasted by the customer over a little hibachi grill right at their table. It's delicious and ordered from pictures right off the menu. Kind of like self-serve Benihana, without any of the cool onion volcano moves. The place combines a traditional Japanese experience with a barroom rock and roll vibe. Some aging Japanese bikers are drinking heavily across the restaurant from us. They offer us enthusiastic thumbs up and fist pumps, reveling in the fact that we're clearly not from around here.

I've got shaggy blond hair, after all, and I've never seen a Japanese as tall as Amy or Andy. I love to travel in countries with homogenous populations to which I clearly do not belong. It feeds my ego and makes me feel more revered than I could ever possibly be in real life. Thank goodness for the basic kindness and curiosity of local populations the world over. Well, I'm sure the beer helps to make them kind of friendly, too.

Chapter Nine - My message is my life.

Nagasaki

Atsushi is our guide for this whole trip. I don't mention him much in my writing, because he's typically so far out ahead, leading the pack, waving his Snoopy towel high in the air to be seen even in a crowd. The Americans have come to think of him as a sort of adorable mascot, with his thick glasses, his thick accent, and his idiosyncratic turns of phrase. But he's more than that to me. I'm kind of captivated by him. What drives this older man?

I manage to corner him at breakfast this morning. We're alone at a small table in the hotel lobby when I say to him, "Atsushi, you're so passionate about what you do. Leading this group, curating the peace museum in Kyoto... What inspired you to take this path in life?"

He looks me in the eye, suddenly very solemn, speaking in an uncharacteristically hushed tone. "My father went to war in Manchuria. He said he never killed a man and never could. After the war, there was great malnutrition in Japan because it was so poor. My brother and I were born, but after six years, my mother died of a lung disease."

He pauses, looking for the English word. "Pneumonia?" I offer, my breakfast forgotten.

"Ah, yes, pneumonia. This, I think, is a kind of violence, too. This poverty and devastation, it is a kind of war. And this has inspired me to teach against war." He pauses for a long moment to let this deeply personal revelation sink in.

Atsushi continues, now with his familiar ebullient smile, "Also, I am like the Dracula. I draw energy from the young."

The reason I got up so early today – the reason I got to speak with the normally in-demand Atsushi alone – is that I plan to visit to a very special torii, which is one of the traditional gates often made of stone and associated with shrines and temples in Japan. Think of your stereotypical Japanese gate, and you know what I mean. This one was blown in half by the atomic attack on Nagasaki. It now stands on just one leg not far from the hypocenter or the Alpha Inn, our firetrap hotel in Nagasaki. Half of the torii was shielded by a larger, denser object, the other half was exposed to the blast, and therefore crumbled away like it was made of paper. In the early morning, it is evocative of just how chance survival or destruction is in this life, especially in the face of a force like the atomic bomb.

Sumiteru Taniguchi

The Hibakusha Shop is a knick-knack shop that sells souvenirs to visitors of the Nagasaki Peace Park. What makes it so cool is not just the green tea soft

serve that it also plies, but that it uses its profits to provide financial aid to aging hibakusha. In the retro-seventies basement, which boasts a large banquet hall that the shop has graciously given over to the Peace Tour during our visit, Sumiteru Taniguchi tells his story.

On August 9, 1945, he was a mailman riding his route on bike in the Urakami district of Nagasaki. At 11:02 when the atomic blast struck him from behind, he was exposed directly to a wave of 3000 degree heat. His skin hung mangled off of his body as he staggered around in a daze, seeking in the ruins of Urakami the safety and shelter that didn't exist.

After some time, he found a temporary medical station – but had to wait almost a month for treatment. His back, buttocks, and arms were burnt so badly that doctors didn't think he would live. A photo taken by a U.S. marine of Taniguchi as he lay on his stomach, his terrible wounds exposed, bloody and shredded, has become one of the most famous images of the bombings. A nurse would pass his bed every morning and in surprise remark, “Oh, he's still alive.”

Taniguchi was bedridden for a full year and nine months, laying on his stomach the whole time and developing a bedsore that he still carries today in the form a wretched scar. The skin of his chest has formed a mass of scar tissue around his ribs on the left side of his body. He shows us a gruesome recent photo to confirm this. Finally, in May of 1947, he was able to get out of bed. He has had twenty-three reconstructive surgeries since 1945, and his body is still obviously disfigured. He recalls that at one point, when he was alone – the rest of his family dead in the blast – he contemplated throwing himself in front of a streetcar. “Even after I left the hospital, I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to work again. But soon I went to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and this movement, I think, kept me living.”

Today, Sumiteru Taniguchi is chairman of the Nagasaki Council of the A-Bomb Sufferers, advocating and speaking on their behalf and in favor of the abolition of nuclear weapons. After sixty-six years, he says, people are still suffering from the bomb. His own experience is an abject lesson in just how nefarious a weapon the bomb is. This year, he is heartened to learn that the U.S. will send a low level envoy to the Nagasaki memorial service on August 9. This is a departure from past practice in that they usually send no one. In general, the U.S. has avoided any behavior that could be construed as an apology of even an acknowledgement of responsibility for the bombing.

Someone asks how he feels about Americans. Taniguchi replies in measured tones, “There are many in the U.S. who agree with me in their feelings on nuclear weapons, so it is hard for me to generalize my feelings about the U.S. I did have very negative feelings for a long time. Even those who make nuclear

weapons... I don't begrudge them their humanity. I hope one day they can regain it for themselves."

A Mysterious Meal

We eat lunch in a Chinese restaurant near the hibakusha shop. The food is interesting in that it is unlike authentic Chinese food and unlike American Chinese food at the same time. It really most resembles a variation on the Japanese fried noodles and fish that we have been eating all over the country. But this style of Chinese food is identified by most Japanese members of our Peace Tour as one of their favorite kinds of food ever. Apparently, just as in America, it is dirt cheap here. The Japanese are astonished to learn that Chinese restaurants outnumber McDonalds in the U.S. Forever and for always, ours is a land of hamburger eating fatties.

But I digress. The point of me mentioning all of this is to relate one startling and bone-chilling maybe-fact. At this meal, I may or may not have eaten dolphin.

There is a plate of unidentified pink meat with a cherry on top. It seems raw. It's sitting in front of me throughout the whole meal. I ask Atsushi what it is. He searches his brain for the English word, finally settling on "sea-pig."

That doesn't seem right... "Sea-pig? Are you sure...?"

He nods confidently and makes a sort of wing-flapping motion. "Yes, sea-pig."

I laugh – what the hell is a sea-pig? And I take a bite. It's a little salty, but not bad.

Flash forward a week, and I'm home. I've related this story a few times to coworkers and friends, but it always has this open ending. I finally decide to consult the wise and all-knowing sage of our times. I google "sea-pig" and find out that is in fact a real term.

It can refer to a dolphin or some sort of unclassifiable (by me, but then, I am no expert) sea creature with a great number of antennae emanating unpredictably from all over its lumpy, amorphous form. Additionally, the literal translation of the Japanese word for dolphin is "sea-pig."

I'm not sure which alternative is more plausible or less palatable. But I don't know anyone else stateside who can say with reasonable confidence that they have tasted of the flesh of the pig of the sea. That includes anyone else who went on this trip – what the hell, guys, was that little delicacy set out on the table just for me?

Dr. Nagai Takashi Memorial Museum

After lunch, members of our Peace Tour visit a museum dedicated to Dr. Nagai Takashi, which is just a short walk from the Hibakusha Shop. Dr. Nagai is a folk hero in Nagasaki. A physician and, like many residents of Urakami, he was diagnosed with leukemia just over a month before the bombing. By a fluke, he survived the blast when the atomic bomb "Fat Man" missed its mark in downtown Nagasaki and struck his residential neighborhood directly. Despite his illness, serious injuries, and the death of his wife as a result of the bomb, Dr. Nagai continued to treat atomic victims throughout the early hours and days of crisis.

The wave of humanity just kept pressing in. So many people were in need, that Nagai just did not take time out to rest himself. He collapsed, and his already poor health deteriorated steadily, eventually confining him to bed and ending his medical practice – but launching his writing career. In the remaining six years of his life, he wrote some dozen bestselling books about his life, the bomb, peace, and nuclear disarmament. Nagai used the royalties he earned from his writing to replant trees in Urakami and to build a new library for the local children.

The museum is a shrine to his life and features his artwork, selected quotes from his writing, a timeline, and even his modest three meter square home. Amidst the sometimes relentless gloom of an atomic tour, the incredible idealism and selflessness of Dr. Nagai is refreshing. The museum presents his story well, if uncritically. Then again, this man is no Truman deciding the fates of millions. He is an eloquent philosopher of peace, a physician, and a philanthropist. What purpose does a critical look at that kind of life serve? Sometimes a kind and selfless man is just that. His story is inspirational and well worth the short walk from the hypocenter.

Oka Masaharu Memorial Peace Museum

Just a quick streetcar ride away, nearer downtown Nagasaki, the Oka Masaharu Memorial Peace Museum documents a different kind of World War II era violence. Tucked off a winding side street near the cat-filled Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan Park (a Christian monument reflecting Nagasaki's deep connections to the Portuguese as a port of trade), this small, private museum tells the story of Japan's own wartime atrocities.

The museum's stated mission is "to remember..." but for many of its visitors, this may be brand new information. The walls are filled with photos and captions depicting Korean slave labor in the Japanese homeland, the staggering rape, murder, and subjugation of hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians, and the government sponsored sex slavery of thousands of "comfort women" by the

Japanese army. The images are highly graphic and almost without exception very disturbing. Many photos on display were taken in delight by the very Japanese who perpetrated these atrocities. They stand in the foreground, posed proudly over the Chinese women they have just raped and slaughtered.

That said, I would highly recommend this museum to anyone except small children. Forget Hollywood efforts like *Saving Private Ryan*, forget the Smithsonian's own exhibits on World War II. They solemnly declare that war is ugly, then proceed to glorify its participants. The Oka Musaharu is unflinching in its portrayal of the repulsiveness of war. Take the hike up the steep hill, proceed past the Twenty-Six Martyrs and their congregation of devout cats. Bear witness to these horrible acts, read the economical yet brutal English captions. Ask yourself, "How many Americans would be willing to confront their own past in such an uncompromising way?" If we opened the scope beyond World War II to include all of the U.S.'s history, we could probably fill a museum twice this size, after all...

I ask some Chinese girls who are part of our Peace Tour what they think of all of this. In China, struggle against outside oppressors is a fundamental theme that runs through all of its national history. The Oka Musaharu may be a unique museum in Japan, but it's not entirely different from the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution in Beijing. These acts are as fundamental to the Chinese narrative of World War II as Pearl Harbor is to the American story. These girls have grown up seeing these same brutal images in their textbooks and hearing about Japanese war crimes from their grandparents.

The girls tactfully say that they think the Japanese government has made mistakes in the past... They don't elaborate beyond that. From my experience, many Chinese will speak much more passionately about the barbarism of Japan with much less provocation than this exhibit offers. The memory of World War II is still very much alive there. These two Chinese girls go to college in Japan, so it is possible that their opinion of the Japanese people is significantly more nuanced.

I ask some Japanese boys similar questions about how the Oka Masaharu Museum made them feel. Of course, those Japanese who choose to visit this museum in the first place are probably more sympathetic to the message it sends – that Japan was criminally wrong for perpetrating these acts on the people of Asia. But they readily concede that these actions get no mention in standard Japanese history textbooks, and that most Japanese are only casually aware that things like the Rape of Nanjing or the mass enslavement of Koreans occurred.

The boys I speak to perceive a distinct split between Japan's wartime government – the one culpable for the crimes they've just learned about – and its postwar government. This means that the people of modern Japan have no material responsibility in redressing the wrongs that the wartime government

committed. This seems to be a popular point of view in Japan. It isn't without precedent in the U.S. where little enthusiasm is likely to be found for reparations to the descendents of former slaves, Native Americans, or, more to the point on this Peace Tour, the hibakusha that it so horribly victimized. At what point does a nation's responsibility to those it has historically wronged – recently or not so recently – come to an end?

Yukiko, our soft-spoken and slight medical student friend from Fukushima speaks of her reaction to the Oka Masaharu Museum. She says the museum instilled in her what she calls a “perpetrator consciousness.” Contrary to the opinions of many Japanese, she clearly feels a sense of responsibility for the historical crimes of her people. This inspires her to definitively identify herself as a peace activist for the first time in her young life. This, more than any kind of material compensation, is what she feels she owes to the world as a citizen of the nation that once used its military might to victimize most of Asia – a commitment to future world peace.

Nagasaki Lantern Ceremony

At dusk, Nagasaki holds its own version of the lantern ceremony for the 80,000 or so victims of the atomic bomb who died there on and following August 9, 1945. In Hiroshima, the hypocenter and peace park are on the banks of the river, square in the middle of the broad delta that is home to the city. In Nagasaki, however, the hypocenter and peace park are on a steep hillside far from the river and part way up a mountain. From an analytical, historical standpoint, this is why the plutonium bomb dropped on Nagasaki was less deadly, despite its higher yield – so much of its force was absorbed straight into the hills and mountains rather than dispersed over a flat, open, populated area as in Hiroshima.

For the purposes of the lantern ceremony, it means that Nagasaki's lanterns don't float in any river. Rather, they are arranged along the hundreds of stairs that link the hypocenter and peace park, which sits a few hundred meters higher up the hillside. It's like thousands of points of light guide the way to heaven for the many Catholic victims of the bomb. The lanterns themselves are wax, decorated colorfully with messages of peace and remembrance by local schoolchildren.

Thousands of people move about, and the attitude is much lighter than at the corresponding ceremony in Hiroshima. A succession of children's choirs and folk guitarists perform in front of the candlelit Fountain of Peace, providing a lively, hopeful pulse and giving this ceremony an almost festival atmosphere. Outside of my fellow travelers, I see only one or two other non-Asians during the whole evening. That's also in stark contrast to Hiroshima, where some percentage of those in attendance were from outside of Japan. Everyone here looks so

happy. No one seems sad or angry, despite the solemn occasion that has brought us together. Maybe this is what peace really looks like.

For dinner, Allen and I pick a local joint at random. It sits deep on one of the narrow streets of Nagasaki in the general vicinity of the Alpha Inn. The entrance is a traditional wood lattice sliding door, the kind you picture when you think of a Kurosawa samurai movie. The inside turns out to be the most minimal sort of working class bar. One tired patron sits alone at the bar, nursing a Sapporo and a bowl of noodles.

We remove our shoes, which is custom any time you're about to sit on the floor in Japan. There are bamboo mats on the floor. Plain white walls. A TV with the evening news. The only decorations are a few action figures and some life-size plastic die cuts of cartoon women with larger than life three-dimensional breasts.

There are no pictures on the menu – actually, there is no menu at all, so we gesture to the bartender that we'll have whatever the guy at the bar is having. That's a good choice. I think it's the only dish for sale, because it's also all that any successive customer orders with their Sapporo. It's a soup with gooey noodles in a fish/soy broth. There's also some seaweed in there and a thin round of mystery meat. Possibly pork. Definitely not sea-pig.

The bartender is hard up for English, but he knows one word well. "Gift!" he says, as he brings us a bottle of beer on the house. He is a kind host, also attempting to assure us through stilted English and pantomime that in Nagasaki, one of the southernmost cities in Japan, we are safe from the Fukushima disaster far to the north. He then leans back against the bar, grinning, full of pride that Americans have chosen his modest bar out of all of the others on the block.

I'm embarrassed – not for the first time on this trip – to be an American. In my home country, if foreign customers came into a restaurant and tried to order through gesture and pigeon English, the server would mostly likely be impatient. He'd harrumph when these foreigners fumbled with unfamiliar currency while trying to pay the bill. He'd relate the whole story to his girlfriend later at home as evidence of how exhausting his day was.

Or maybe I'm wrong.

Maybe he'd shake hands with his foreign customers and with a big grin thank them for stopping by. I'm sure some Japanese are jerks, but I haven't met one yet on this trip.

Chapter Ten - Make music, not pleasure.

Nagasaki

In the annals of history and in the minds of the outside world, Nagasaki will always be second to Hiroshima, and therefore tragically dispensable. When people hear the name "Hiroshima," they are most likely to cluck their tongues in pity. When they hear the name "Nagasaki," they are more likely to say "Oh yeah."

Today is the sixty-sixth anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki. It's the day that people from the outside world are more prone to take note of the city. But here, the whole city seems dedicated to repeatedly, every five minutes or so, nudging its citizens and reminding them – it happened here, too. There are the peace park and the museum, of course. The hypocenter marker and the one-legged torii. It's easy to encounter any of these by chance while walking around the Urakami neighborhood. But there are also the decorative tiles placed sporadically on the sidewalk which cherry blossoms – the Japanese symbol of peace and friendship.

And then there is Shiroyama Elementary School.

Shiroyama Elementary School

Rain falls gently in starts and stops.

Our Peace Tour has been invited to the memorial convocation at Shiroyama Elementary School. The campus sits half a kilometer from the hypocenter, high on a hill, at nearly the same altitude at which the bomb detonated. There were no other structures in a line of sight to deflect or absorb the fury of the bomb. As a result, the school was hit with the full force and heat of the blast. But the school had a strong concrete construction, so the building still managed to survive partially intact. It may have actually been worse, then, that the students were outside of its protective walls, enjoying their summer break. Outdoors or in their wooden homes, they stood little chance of survival.

Unlike Hiroshima, Nagasaki requires their municipal schools to hold session on the anniversary of the bomb's blast. The idea is, as time passes, to not let this become just a day off, but to ensure that the memory of the bomb is not lost. It is a savvy move on the part of a city attempting to ensure that as a symbol of peace the bomb is not forgotten, either.

The bomb is an integral part of this school's identity. It holds a similar memorial ceremony not just annually on the ninth of August, but on the ninth of *every* month. Between that and the nuclear museum housed in a preserved portion of the bombed-out 1945 school, and the massive shrine of paper cranes in the school courtyard, these kids are confronted almost constantly with the memory of a bomb that was dropped six decades before they were born.

At this young age, they probably spend more time thinking about weapons of mass destruction than most Americans will in their whole lives. Sitting on the gym floor in neat, even rows as their classmates on stage offer messages of world peace, do these children's minds wander to lunch or baseball? Does the repetition of the horrible render it mundane in the same way that the

casual violence of a video game desensitizes American children? I wonder, what is the point of diminishing returns for all of this remembrance?

That said, as I look around me, there are a number of my fellow Americans moved to tears at the spectacle of hundreds of somber schoolchildren, their voices raised in unison. When asked to contemplate the dead, they respond by singing songs of peace.

Nagasaki Peace Memorial Ceremony

The clouds that have hung menacingly overhead since yesterday finally break open. The rain clears and the sun appears, much as it did sixty-six years ago today. It was similar cloud cover that spared the primary target for the "Fat Man" bomb, the city of Kokura. The people who lived there went about their day, maybe grumbling about how cold and wet it was, oblivious to the fact that a rainy day had saved their lives. But conversely, those rays of sun that appeared in the skies over Nagasaki forecasted its doom. Our fortunes are made in the heavens.

As we queue up near the Nagasaki Peace Memorial Park, the heat is sweltering and the humidity is oppressive. The crowd is large, but still only a fraction of the size of the crowd at Hiroshima. It seems to be a much older crowd, too. One imagines that many of these people aren't here exclusively out of an interest in the antinuclear or peace movements, but because they have some personal connection to the bomb. They are hibakusha or know someone who is or was.

The form of the Nagasaki Memorial Service is familiar from Hiroshima. Superficially, they are very similar, featuring a large congregation around the city's central memorial to the dead, speeches from politicians, and the release of doves. This feels like a ceremony more for the people than for the politicians. Quite noticeably, in Hiroshima, no hibakusha speak during the formal ceremony. In Nagasaki, a hibakusha offers the most moving speech of the day, recounting her personal experience as well as articulating a message of peace. In Hiroshima, individuals were invited to lay flowers on the memorial for the dead, but this took place after the conclusion of the ceremony, while the attendees were filing out. In Nagasaki, this is one of the central acts of the ceremony, giving survivors and attendees the chance to participate directly in the proceedings.

Well, attendees aside from our Peace Tour. We've been shut out of the main ceremony due to lack of seating, so we watch the proceedings from a television monitor set up outside of the park, in front of the hibakusha shop. The sun beats down from a clear sky now. An old woman nearby faints in the simmering heat. Japanese cops, capable and without guns, rush from four or five directions to come to her aid. They carry her prone form into the air-conditioned cool of the hibakusha shop.

The symbolism here in Nagasaki centers on what was absent sixty-six years ago. The memorial statue itself is a man extending one arm in prayerful mourning and the other in prayerful peace, two impulses that, if they had been heeded in the final summer of the war could have avoided the tragedy of the atomic bombs all together. Large wooden pails of water are laid before the memorial to acknowledge the dying pleas of the bomb victims for *mizu* – water. At 11:02 am, the precise time that the bomb dropped, a woeful air raid siren sounds over the city. As in Hiroshima, that alarm was never raised all those years ago, but would have saved many more lives if it had been.

I have stopped sweating, a sure sight of oncoming heatstroke, and I take refuge with Allen and Amy inside the shop, too. The ceremony is coming to an end, in any event. Amongst the shops blown glass cranes and fine china rice bowls, I find a set of postcards featuring scenes of the atomic devastation of Nagasaki – the mushroom cloud, the ruined buildings, even the dead and wounded... It's the convergence of the grandiose and the mundane. I have to buy it because I can't believe it. What are you supposed to do with these? Are you supposed to send a card with a picture of a bombed-out elementary school serving as a makeshift field hospital full of the wounded, miserable people and a note like, "Thinking of you in Nagasaki?"

Kitsch is possible even when the theme is massacre, it seems.

So did the atomic bomb work?

Of course we know that two bombs detonated killing a combined 150,000 by year's end and leveling the better part of two cities in the process. But for all that death and destruction, it's not clear that this display of power convinced the Japanese government to surrender. The United States had been routinely leveling Japanese cities through the use of conventional bombs for months by the time surrender came on August 15, 1945. For example, the infamous March 9-10, 1945 raid on Tokyo left 16 square miles of the city in rubble and 100,000 people dead, an attack easily on par with the immediate destructive capacity of the atomic bomb.¹⁰ Why would the Japanese care if the United States could deal this kind of devastation from one bomb or a thousand? Indeed, in the declassified memos detailing the Imperial leadership's decision to surrender, the entry of the Soviet Union in the Pacific War on August 8 is of much greater note than the atomic bomb, which warrants precisely no mention in those documents.¹¹

¹⁰ David McNeill. The night hell fell from the sky. *Japan Focus*, March 10 2005.

¹¹ Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth*. (New York: Knopf, 1995).

Maybe the atomic bomb didn't work on the Japanese. But the Soviets got the message loud and clear. Truman's closest advisor, Secretary of State James Byrnes famously forecast that the bomb was not going to make the world safe for democracy – it was going to make it safe for America. The United States tried to keep its development a secret from its supposed ally, though Stalin knew of its existence thanks to the infiltration of the Manhattan Project by Soviet spies. He understood the implications of Hiroshima quite clearly, responding to the bomb's detonation – and this American duplicity – by jumpstarting the Soviets' own nuclear program. This tension would ultimately contribute to a breakdown in postwar relations and a dismal arms race that would last for over fifty years. But for five years in the late 1940s, the United States was the only nuclear power in the world, and as such, enjoyed a position of dominance in international relations. The atomic bomb was not the last shot of World War II. It was the opening shot of the Cold War.

Errata and Party

Following the ceremony and a brief reflection session, we have the afternoon off to explore Nagasaki. A few in our Peace Tour are so tired from days of travel and events that they spend their time resting back at the hotel. I'm pretty tired, too, but there is no way I'm spending one of my last days taking in the sights and sounds of my hotel room.

Though, the toilets in our hotel are great, I have to admit. Like many other toilets in Japan, they are both state of the art and works of art. These feature heated seats and infrared sensors that lift the seat when you enter the bathroom. Other models contain, built right into the tank of the toilet, a sink that runs when the user flushes. If he is quick enough, he can wash his hands in water that is then recycled into the next flush. This is econo-grey water recycling; what would require a complex overhaul of the bathroom involving lots of extra pipes and safety inspections in the U.S. is accomplished here with one clever fixture. Two things the bathroom of the future doesn't include are soap or hand towels. But who really needs those things, since Japanese bathrooms are generally cleaner than my kitchen table? Yes, I would gladly and willingly eat off of a Japanese toilet. Even the public ones.

As impressed as I am by all of that, I'd rather hit the streets with Allen, Amy, and Andy. We wander on foot toward downtown, stopping into malls and shops along the way. In the U.S., young people are fond of getting tattoos of Chinese or Japanese characters that supposedly say something like "Love" or "Butterfly." In Japan, young people like clothing lettered with English words. Any English words, regardless of syntax or sense. Some highlights from our

afternoon in and out of Japanese boutiques include: "Make music not pleasure," "American Eagle," and "I take your breath away to cool my porridge."

At one point Andy sees a sign for what he thinks he recognizes as a 100 yen store – what we'd call a dollar store back in the States. Hoping to find some cheap Japanese curiosities for souvenirs and gifts, we pile in. Finding ourselves in a buttoned down bank lobby, Andy naturally concludes that the 100 yen store must be *behind* this bank. He, Allen, and Amy bum rush a corridor that leads directly toward a darkened conference room, and beyond that, to the vault. A stern voice starts shouting Japanese over the intercom, and a frantic man in a white shirt and tie leaps over the bank counter. He's making a giant "X" with his arms and shouting, "No exchange! No exchange currency!" Four tall Americans bursting through the door, charging the safe. In the minds of foreigners, this is exactly how it goes down with those violent Americans. In the movies, the next thing that happens would involve lots of guns, shooting, and if the bank is lucky, Batman. There was probably one aging, action-ready security guard in that bank who had just been waiting for this day...

Thankfully no one hits the silent alarm, and we're free to meet up with the rest of the Peace Tour for an all-you-can-eat, all-you-can-drink (in two hours) end-of-tour party. We tear it up with the Japanese, downing pitchers of beer and scarfing curry, tokoyaki, yakiniku, and, incongruously, mini-corndogs. It's a fantastic bookend to the opening banquet on our first night together. After weeks of sharing beer, hotel rooms, and some very emotional experiences, everyone is much more comfortable with each other, and therefore more ready to have fun.

Atsushi, our fearless guide, he of Snoopy towel and curator/creator of the Kyoto Peace Museum offers a profound farewell: "My message is my life." Words I'd like to live my own life by.

Karaoke

When the meal ends, the party moves to a karaoke bar near our hotel in Urakami. At first, all of the Americans find themselves in one pleather upholstered room, the Japanese in another, and the small Chinese minority in their own. The Americans are riffing on Beatles classics as they attempt to further decipher the Japanese song catalogue that's longer than a Chicago phonebook. I have to admit, singing "All You Need is Love" and "Imagine" with my new friends at the end of such an energizing anti-war-themed tour is pretty incredible. Especially when our professor takes the mic and leads the song.

But no one knows how to do karaoke like Asians do. I learned this firsthand during the months I spent living in China. For Asians, this is an actual art form – one that has no real analog in American culture. The Americans are sedate and comfortable in their seats. And just a little self-conscious. Think

about the contexts in which Americans sing along to music. It's usually in the shower or in their cars. And when someone in the next car sees them, Americans usually stop immediately and try to play it cool.

But this is simply not enough. Karaoke asks you to forget all of this self-repression and just let go. Asians, the Japanese included, answer this call with gusto. I am the first American to get up and go to join my Japanese friends in their room. I don't know any of the songs, but the fact that they are on their feet, sharing mics, jumping on the tables, and generally tearing it up is enough to keep me more than entertained. The contrast to the American room could not be greater. All of this, and the Japanese kids aren't drinking anything but water. Most Americans need serious chemicals before they can get this far gone.

Slowly my American companions begin to filter over, and the segregation between the rooms disappears, as do many of the American inhibitions. Yuya's wearing yet another Weezer t-shirt, and together we belt out "Buddy Holly." He loves it, because no Japanese can sing this song with him. They don't know the words. Singing like this with another person is a naked, intimate act. We are hugging by the end of the evening, Yuya and I and all of us together.

I have a theory – completely untested, but I'll stand by it – that music is the origin of spirituality. Our primitive ancestors, sitting around a fire on the African savannah, pounded out a rhythm with their hands and with sticks. They found that when they played together, there was something greater and more complex than themselves at work. Call it a polyrhythm or call it God. Music breaks us down and builds us up. For the second time on this trip, as I look around the room at my Japanese and American friends, I am struck by the thought – our grandfathers were trying as hard as they could to kill each other, and just look at us now.

Silence

Still drunk on beer, with our ears still ringing, Allen, Amy, Elisa, and I visit the hypocenter one last time in the still of late night. Its tall black monolith is completely unlit, as is the whole park. All we get is a little light pollution by which to see. Maybe this is only because of the ongoing nuclear energy crisis in Japan, but I think it is incredible that this place is left dark at night. In Washington, DC, all of the monuments are lit as bright as day the whole night long for fear that they will be defaced; the innate sanctity of this place means it's safe in the dark. How many places are there like that in the world?

There is this little orange kitten that is just sleeping with its belly up in the air, right out in the middle of the brick pavilion about twelve feet from the hypocenter. Allen and I each in turn almost step on it. Neither of us even notice; it is by sheer chance that we miss crushing the thing underfoot. Amy is the one who points it out.

Allen and I are shocked, and all we stop to look down at this little creature that we almost destroyed through our own carelessness. It's just barely

stirring, barely awake, barely aware of us, completely unthreatened by these figures towering over it in the dark. I bend down and pick it up, cradling it in my right arm and stroking its ears with my left. The rest all gather round, petting it in turn. It's purring audibly now, a stray kitten immediately taking on its born role as the fluffy, cute object of human affection that it seems designed to be.

Everyone is cooing dumb things like, "Can you stay quiet for a thirteen hour flight back to the United States as part of my carry-on luggage? I know you can!"

When Elisa begins to weep. Quietly at first. And suddenly she is sobbing and sitting on the ground. "Just think... of all the bodies... right here... surrounding this place. Everyone who died. Right on this spot."

We all fall silent and collapse to the bricks beside her. I set the cat down, and it eyes us expectantly, but none of us move or say anything for a long time.

We are consumed by this place. Surrounded by the dark and the silence, we are all suddenly able to imagine 150,000 dead, dying, or wounded radiating in concentric circles from the exact spot where we are sitting. This is the most evil of places.

I tell Elisa that I envy her ability to feel so deeply. I wish everyone in the world had the same ability, because I think that if they did, nuclear weapons would be over – they would be history – by noon tomorrow.

(I think if everyone came here in the dead of night, they would feel that way. This is the most important moment of the whole Peace Tour. But without everything I have seen and heard and learned, this moment could not contain half of the impact that it does me – and I daresay Allen, Amy, and Elisa, too.)

We fall back into silence for what feels like the better part of an hour. The sounds of sparse early morning traffic drift listlessly in on the still air.

I stand, leaving the others where they sit. I approach the black monolith before us. In my effort to understand everything that I have seen and heard these last two weeks, I want to engage all of my senses. I want to feel it, like the stone in front of me, still warm from the day's sunlight and the thick night air, is suddenly going to help it all make sense. But ultimately, I can't bring myself to do it. It's just marble, and to touch it would actually take me farther away from understanding, putting a contrived experience between me and the actual devastation of an atomic bombing.

Marble is not an atomic bombing.

I don't want to associate the cleanliness of the marker with the rough edges of violence.

We already do too much to numb and misdirect ourselves from the violence that we inflict upon the world.

So I return to my seat on the ground next to my friends. We sit still and in silence, taking in the magnitude of everything we have learned in the last week, humbled but empowered to spread word of what we now know.

It strikes me that mankind has hubris enough to address so many of its natural problems with clever technological solutions. People are sick, so we invent medicine. People are hungry, so we devise genetically modified crops. Rivers flood, so we conceive complicated levee systems. People have wars, so we invent nuclear weapons.

I guess nuclear weapons were originally conceived as the answer to a problem, but the moment they were used, they *became* the problem.

Given our willingness to address complicated natural problems in bold, inventive ways, are we really incapable of substantially addressing a problem that we ourselves created?

Some say that the only time nuclear weapons have been used as a weapon was in 1945. That is true only in a sense, because every time the United States makes a threat, a request, a suggestion, or goes anywhere or does anything, it is backed with an implicit nuclear truncheon. The fact is that nuclear weapons are used every single day as a matter of our foreign policy, just as they are by every nation that possesses them. TR said to speak softly and carry a big stick, and the power to destroy whole cities with a single swing makes for the biggest stick of them all.

In time, each of my friends approaches the hypocenter. I can't speculate on what they are thinking, because in marked contrast to the rest of the trip, we are now completely silent. One of my friends leaves a letter that she has written on a sheet torn from her notebook. Symbolically, another offers a bottle of water, the item most asked for by those who died near this spot sixty-six years ago.

I don't talk to any of them the rest of the night. We eventually depart one by one and wordlessly, taking solo routes back to our hotel.

It's less than a kilometer, but I take several detours. I approach a small playground and in the gravity of the moment, I ride the slide in the pitch dark night, getting sand in my shorts.

It just seems like the only thing left to do.

Afterward

Coming Home

Back in Washington, DC, I'm a grad student, but I'm also an assistant preschool teacher. I work 40 hours a week for pretty low pay to teach five year-olds right and wrong and how to put their shoes on. This the most fun I've ever had at work in my life. I love those kids. The day after I come home from Japan, jet-legged and exhausted from nearly twenty-four straight hours of travel, I go immediately back to work. I'd love to say that this was purely out of a deep sense of duty. But grad school doesn't pay for itself, and neither did Japan.

When I walk into the classroom at nine that Friday morning, Phoebe, Sophie, Nicolas and Jacob run toward me. They tackle me in the biggest bear hugs that they can manage, wrapping themselves around my legs. I stagger under the full force of four five year-olds giving all of the love and affection that they know how to give after my two week absence. I get chills, and I start to cry. But just very softly, because I don't want to upset the children. So many of the hibakusha that I met on my trip were this age when the bomb fell on them, burning them, poisoning their bodies, killing their families, subjecting them to horrors of sight and sound and smell that I as a twenty-seven year-old can't even imagine.

After Japan, it's hard to listen to the president or some military hawk talk about the strategy in bombing, to claim that it is a smart and humane way to wage a war. It is hard not to also see it from the perspective of a Japanese civilian, as something cruel and barbarous, as the crudest manifestation of our darkest selves. We like to imagine that the other side in any war is the true monster, whether his name is bin Laden, Hussein, Hitler, or Hirohito. The sick fact is that we are monsters, too. Like Truman, we worship the gods of science and technology, mistaking our cleaner hands for greater virtue. We package our massacres into sterile metal packages that don't get messy until they're far out of sight, delivered in bulk from 20,000 feet up. Our massacres are just as bloody as ever on the ground, and this why an informed and empathetic population is more important than ever.

I have visited the Enola Gay at the Dulles Air and Space Museum outside of Washington, DC. I've taken these very preschool students of mine there for a field trip. The little plaque in front of it says nothing about the hibakusha, and everything about winning the war. So I call it a nationalistic distortion, a poor alibi for mass murder.

I think that those hibakusha – old and wrinkled now – were once fresh and innocent like my children. Some of them were on their way to a school not much different from the one I teach at. They were full of the same undiluted love and affection as my children are. It's horrible. And the hibakusha are

arguably the lucky ones, too, because so many other little five year-olds just plain died.

The point of all of this isn't to condemn Harry Truman as an evil man for making the outrageous decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan. In fact, the point is that he was just the opposite. He was a pretty normal man who – in the statement republished as the prologue to this volume – made an outrage seem reasonable. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had little to do with enticing Japan's surrender, though it could be justified that way by invoking Pearl Harbor and the stiff Japanese resistance throughout the Pacific.

It had everything to do with the perceived threat of the Soviet Union, which in 1945, in the wake of a world war that had left upwards of 60 million dead, seemed dire and menacing in ways that hard to comprehend in the modern day. To Truman and to many others, the lives of a few hundred thousand Japanese civilians were a small price to pay for American security in the postwar world. Of course Truman didn't acknowledge that openly, because that would have been considered crass and inhumane. But it's a similar calculation that is made every day by those in power, with each every one of us "little people" as the variables on either side of the equation.

Nuclear weapons raise the stakes of a miscalculation. One touch of a button, and a city is gone, along with all of the love, hopes, and dreams within it. It's clean, unlike fielding troops or firing a gun, both of which are messy and immediate and require face-to-face interaction with those you are about to slaughter. Face-to-face interaction, and time for the better angels residing within us to intercede on behalf of common sense.

Nuclear weapons are scary because they make that decision so abstract. Nuclear weapons are scary because they are most effective – most terrifying – when aimed at a group like my preschool kids. Nuclear weapons are scary because a reasonable man can calmly rationalize just such a use in a statement to the American people. And then he can be lauded as a hero.

Maybe he's a hero, and maybe he isn't. But I'd at least like to live in a world where we can have a conversation about it – without the sacred truths of nationalism and propaganda silencing those of us who'd like to speak up on behalf the other guy's innocent kids as well as our own.

Some Final Thoughts

I often think about that early morning excursion in Nagasaki to the site of a torii left with only one leg. It is broken and battered in the wake of the atomic bomb. The shrine it formerly guarded is gone, but the ruins of this torii stand, perhaps elegiac but no longer functional. It is dead stone, a marker for all that died with the atomic bomb.

Nearby stand two massive camphor trees, killed dead, too, by the bomb. Or so it seemed. As trees sometimes do, they returned miraculously to life a few years after the war. New growth swallowing a dead core. Here is memorial and here is hope. It is really perfect. The new growth is emblematic not just of the hibakusha who have carried on with their lives quite courageously. It is not just the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that have rebuilt themselves into flourishing, modern metropolises. It is me and you and anyone who has been affected by these bombings to commit themselves to peace and to life, rather than to conflict and annihilation. The past is dead, but it is alive as well. It is as immovable as the dead trunk of a tree, a sober and immutable reminder of the depths to which we can descend.

But if we have courage, it is also a firm foundation on which to build a new future for all mankind.

Oh yeah. And make sure you go to a Japanese karaoke bar if you ever get the chance. Be sure to sing along.

Peace and Calpis,

Tom

Washington, DC, 2012

Why did Truman do it?

A Brief Overview of Historiography

Regarding the Decision to Drop the Bomb

For a decision of such epic proportions, the rationale for using the atomic bomb on Japan at the close of World War II has long been ambiguous and largely a matter of conjecture. The players involved in making that decision were few and were fairly quiet or oblique and arguably self-serving about the subject in public during their lifetimes. Ultimately, the final decision lay in the hands of President Truman who, from the point of view of the historian seeking more complex answers, somewhat unhelpfully asserted that he never regretted the decision to use the bomb.

Historian Gar Alperovitz argues that the decision to use atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was motivated almost entirely by power politics. For months, the Japanese had been sending out peace feelers through various channels, and decrypted Japanese communications suggested that the primary obstacle to peace lay in the U.S. insistence on unconditional surrender. Beyond victory, beyond honor, the Japanese were concerned with the preservation of their divine emperor. He could not be put to death or put on trial in the way that the leaders of Nazi Germany were. Had Truman reformulated U.S. demands to allow for continuity of the emperor's rule as many of his own aides suggested, and as he ultimately did after the bombs were used and the Soviets had entered the war, it is likely that Japanese surrender would have come even before the first atomic bomb was tested in July of 1945. Alperovitz suggests that Truman's primary interest in the use of the bombs was not its effect on the Japanese ability and willingness to fight – indeed the systematic large-scale firebombing of Japanese cities had already been as immediately devastating in at least the first regard – but in developing a postwar situation that was favorable to the United States.

Alperovitz cites the contemporaneous assertion of Truman's closest advisor, Secretary of State James Byrnes, that the bomb was not going to make the world safe for democracy – it was going to make it safe for America.

Alperovitz argues that Truman's actions in the spring and summer of 1945 demonstrate a seemingly deliberate attempt to prolong hostilities with the Japanese until such time as the atomic bomb was ready for offensive use. Decrypted Japanese transmissions as well as notes from high level Japanese war planning meetings and Truman's own diary demonstrate that not only were the Japanese considering peace if continuity of imperial rule was guaranteed, but also that Truman *knew* this and ignored it. At the same time, Truman, once desperate for Soviet involvement in the Pacific to hasten the end of the war, suddenly cooled on this idea when it became apparent that the atomic bomb functional and not just theoretical.

While Alperovitz attempts to delve deep into Truman's decision-making process through use of personal diaries, memoranda, and personal accounts, in *Cultures of War* John Dower develops a broader cultural thread that encompasses the racialized momentum of wartime mass destruction. The United States at first associated aerial bombing with fascist regimes, declaring moral outrage and

deriding the practice. As the war continued, however, the tactic was adopted and essentially perfected by the United States, gaining cultural acceptance along the way. Dower cites the systematic way in which U.S. military propaganda along with internal documents attempted to deemphasize the human cost of aerial bombing through euphemistic terminology such as “dehousing” or “strategic bombing.” The times when candor seeps into official statements are telling – comments by a general that highlight human loss of life or a piece of official Air Force literature that brags about reducing Japan to desolate wasteland. They are shocking in that they reveal the true extent to which Americans were removed from the carnage of World War II as a function of propaganda, geography, and the technology of aerial bombing. It is hard to believe that the carefully cultivated anti-septic nature of the war did not provide Truman with some moral cover in his decision to drop the bomb. How many Americans would object to a mushroom cloud when there had been so little outrage over the standard practice of firebombing?

This fascination with technology forms another thread in the historiography on this topic. Dower highlights the persistent American belief that superior technology and firepower will prevail against any enemy, seeing it at work not only in Truman's decision to use the bomb, but also as recently as in the “shock and awe” strategies of the latest war in Iraq. Wills develops this idea in his *Bomb Power*, portraying Truman as so taken with the concept of a nuclear armed United States that he suggested replacing the arrows in the presidential seal with lightning bolts to emphasize this new implicit threat of nuclear potency.

In his essay, “The Decision to Risk the Future,” Peter Kuznick recalls a chilling scene that takes place soon after the war. The bomb's symbolic father, Manhattan Project chief Robert Oppenheimer meets by special appointment with Harry Truman in the oval office. Oppenheimer is openly emotional, expressing guilt at having unleashed such a force upon the world. The President is so repulsed by Oppenheimer's moral recriminations that he later told an aide that he never wanted to see the scientist again. This could be Truman trying to avoid a confrontation that would reveal his own moral uncertainty about his personal culpability for the carnage unleashed by the bomb. But if it is, the President left no evidence to that effect. Instead, it seems that Truman remained steadfast in his decision to use the bomb, a decision predicated on international dominance over the Soviet Union as described by Alperovitz and a moral acceptance of mass destruction sanitized through the use of technology as described by Dower and Wills.

Further Atomic Reading:

Gar Alperovitz , *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth*. (New York: Knopf, 1995).

John W. Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9-11/Iraq*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

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John Hersey, *Hiroshima*. (Bantam Books: New York, 1946).

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Takashi Nagai, *The Bells of Nagasaki*. (Kodansha International, 1994).

Garry Wills, *Bomb Power: The Modern Presidency and The National Security State*. (New York: The Penguin Press, 2010).

Other Zines I've Done:

Transmissions from the Emperor's Heavenly Ford: Notes on Life as an American Teaching English in China (volumes one and two, 2011).



In August 2011, I journeyed to Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Kyoto in Japan to study the legacy of my country's use of atomic weapons on a civilian population. *Solemn Feats of the Atomic Tourist* is one part travelogue - detailing the often surreal experiences of an American in modern Japan, singing karaoke, attending baseball games, gagging on nattō - and one part historical tract asking: Why did Harry Truman decide to drop the bomb, and was it worth it?



\$5

"We package our massacres into sterile metal packages that don't get messy until they're far out of sight, delivered in bulk from 20,000 feet up. But our massacres are just as bloody as ever on the ground."