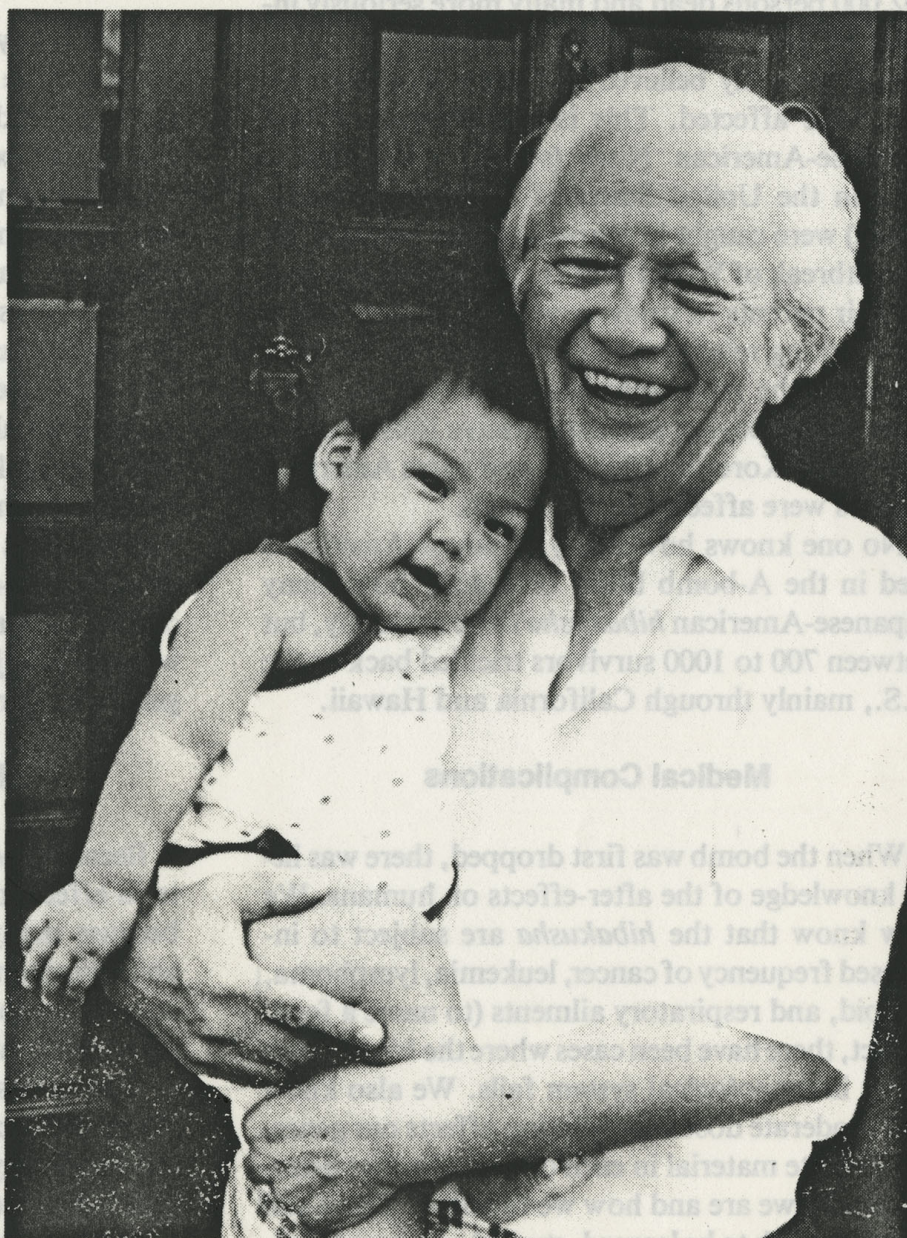


HIBAKUSHA

An international economic crisis, world tension and a military/nuclear arms race reflect our difficult times. Responding to the escalating arms race, an international voice has sounded, and echoed over and over again. Whether the chant is, "No Nukes!" or "Stop the MX!", the U.S. anti-nuclear, anti-war movement has added its voice to the chorus. Almost unnoticed within all this are the hibakusha, survivors of the first use of nuclear weapons against a people.

Since 1982, Concerned Japanese Americans has been an active participant in the campaign to learn from and educate about the hibakusha. We have raised over twelve hundred dollars for their relief and support. CJA offers this educational document with two intentions. First, that it be part of a medium for discussion within and among Japanese, Japanese-Americans, and other Asian communities and peoples. It is our hope that this will initiate and encourage support for the *hibakusha*, and a louder, united voice against the destructiveness and waste of nuclear weapons development and proliferation. Secondly, CJA presents this as a first step towards what we hope will be a significant and long lasting effort in concert with anti-nuclear organizations and people, both internationally and domestically. It is both appropriate and significant



Reverend Kyoshi Tanimoto, principal character in John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, and friend.

that Asians participate visibly and actively in the current motion to bring peace and justice to our world.

WHO ARE THE HIBAKUSHA

In August 1945 the United State government unleashed a weapon of devastating destruction on the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The atomic bombs that decimated these cities left more than 102,000 persons dead and many more seriously injured by burns and radiation sickness.

It is generally believed that only Japanese citizens were affected. This is not the case. Many Japanese-American Nisei (second generation—born in the United States of Japan-born immigrants) were caught in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the outbreak of World War II. Some had been sent by their parents to study or work in Japan, others were visiting relatives, and some had left the U.S. to escape the racial discrimination that had kept them in low paying and exploitative jobs. Besides Japanese—Koreans, Chinese, and some American soldiers were affected by the bomb.

No one knows how many Japanese-Americans died in the A-bomb blast, or exactly how many Japanese-American *hibakusha* there are today, but between 700 to 1000 survivors trickled back to the U.S., mainly through California and Hawaii.

Medical Complications

When the bomb was first dropped, there was little knowledge of the after-effects on humans. We now know that the *hibakusha* are subject to increased frequency of cancer, leukemia, lymphoma, thyroid, and respiratory ailments (to name a few). In fact, there have been cases where the *hibakusha's* entire immunological system fails. We also know that moderate doses of radiation affects our genes, the delicate material in each of our cells that determine who we are and how we function. There still remains much to be learned, studied and researched.

Almost forty years later, the *hibakusha* continue to experience the long-term effects of radiation and blast exposure. The scars and deformities, cancers, leukemias, neurological and emotional disorders,

as well as the constant fear of being at high risk for these diseases have all had their toll. The *hibakusha* struggle, endure, persevere. It is no exaggeration to say that they are individuals of exceptional character and strength.

Economic Hardships

Since many of the diseases associated with radiation exposure show no outward symptoms, *hibakusha* must undergo regular comprehensive medical testing and examinations. If a cancer or other disorder is diagnosed, the costs for specialized testing and treatment are astronomical. Even if medical insurance is available, the *hibakusha's* medical expenses can sometimes exceed \$500 per month. Some *hibakusha* have lost their homes and almost all their possessions.

Consider also, that should it become known to their medical insurance company that they are *hibakusha*, they loose their medical coverage. The "rationale" is simple: since the *hibakusha* are victims of a war-related incident, their illnesses are not covered. Even everyday injuries and illnesses, that we are all subject to, are not covered because of the generalization of insurance policies.

Psychological Effects

Because there is limited knowledge of the long-term effects of high level radiation exposure, and because many related sicknesses carry indiscernable symptoms, every sneeze, cough, or itch becomes ominous. As one *hibakusha* said, "We live with the bomb inside us."

Add to this the pressure of existing and impending medical expenses, and we see a situation where the continuity of both personal and professional relations are extremely taxed.

The question of whether or not to have children adds to the *hibakusha's* emotional stress. Since the radiation genetically affected the *hibakusha*, there is every likelihood that their children may suffer similar medical consequences. In one family, two

of the three daughters contracted leukemia at an early age. The third is still too young to tell.

Consider also, their personal need to tell others what it's like to be a victim of a nuclear bomb. The *hibakusha* conceal this experience, fearing the risk of becoming public figures and losing their medical insurance. Despite these consequences, one *hibakusha* feels that the reason she survived was so that she could tell others about the horror of nuclear weapons.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

In 1957, after considerable research, Japan enacted a bill giving free medical care to Japanese *hibakusha*. Later, the bill was expanded to include all *hibakusha* regardless of citizenship or national origin. The U.S. government though, has turned a deaf ear, refusing to recognize the right of the *hibakusha* for medical support. For the past 11 years, legislation has been introduced to try to give aid to the *hibakusha*. For the past 11 years, Congress has refused to pass a bill. The most recent attempt didn't even make it to the committee's agenda. The rationale was that there was not enough support in Congress, and that the military lobby was too strong.

It is contradictory that so much attention and resources are used to develop increasingly potent nuclear weapons, while so little is being done to alleviate the suffering caused by those weapons.

We can no longer rely solely on the legislative approach. Friends of Hibakusha in California has initiated two fundraising drives. One is for direct medical attention (mostly testing and examinations) and the second is a travel fund to send those *hibakusha* with no other course to Japan for free medical treatment. Concerned Japanese Americans supports both these efforts.

For the past seven years, a medical mission from Japan has visited the United States. In its bi-annual excursions, the team has conducted medical examination for the *hibakusha* living in the United States. The increasing support from Japanese-American communities made their last visit this past summer a rousing success. Over 500 *hibakusha* were able to receive testing in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle and Hawaii.

In Japanese-American communities, August 6 and 9 (the anniversaries of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) have been observed as days of memorial. As a result of increased education, the Hiroshima/Nagasaki commemoration is now observed by a broad sector of churches, social service



A young child of the atomic age.



Photo by Steven Okazaki

Hibakusha medical exams at University of California at San Francisco; June 12, 1983.

and professional organizations.

The recent release of the documentary film *SURVIVORS* by Steve Okazaki has given further recognition to the *hibakusha* issue. While the initial response has been positive, more work needs to be done to broaden the film's exposure. (An interesting sidenote: In 1955, 25 women who were Hiroshima atomic bomb survivors came from Japan to the United States for one-and-a-half years of reconstructive surgery. The "Hiroshima Maidens" were featured in all the media—*TIME* magazine ran a cover story; *REDBOOK* and *COLLIERS* ran feature-length articles and the Maidens were on television, radio and newsreels. The Maidens' visit to the U.S. was promoted as a reconciliatory act of good faith rather than to educate about the negative effects of the bomb and the need for its elimination.)

CJA SUPPORTS THE HIBAKUSHA

The circumstances that prevailed prior to the outbreak of World War II and prior to the dropping of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs seems

to parallel our contemporary conditions. CJA believes we have cause to be deeply concerned.

In the past, the U.S. was climaxing a period of severe economic depression. Feelings of militarism were on the rise. Anti-Asian sentiment was being propagated and encouraged by the mass media. We can see the similarities in our current domestic situation. War seems increasingly possible. The development and deployment of nuclear and "conventional" arms by the U.S. and Soviet Union reflects increasing militarism. There is a recent rise in anti-Asian feelings and an increase of violence against Asians. As our economy worsens, Asian-Americans and Southeast Asian refugees become scapegoats for the frustrated and unemployed. This situation makes it particularly difficult to win support for the *hibakusha*.

The world will not survive a World War III. Our present precarious international situation makes it that much *more* imperative that we educate our family, friends, church, social and political groups about the *hibakusha*. They survived the massive doses of radiation and are a living testament to the destructiveness of nuclear weapons. They are also a memorial to those who died—*nothing like this should ever happen again*.

Organizations like Concerned Japanese Americans and Friends of Habakusha have initiated support campaigns. We need your feedback and participation in:

1. support for a new legislative bill which hopefully will be introduced in the next Congressional session.
2. keeping a watchful eye on the media to oppose prejudicial Asian images.
3. bringing the *hibakusha*'s plight to the attention of the general public and encouraging support.
4. raising funds for tests, treatments and travel expenses to Japan.

As concerned and caring people, we need to help the *hibakusha*'s financial burden. The government has been deaf to their pleas for medical aid.

CONCERNED JAPANESE AMERICANS

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