Hiroshima survivors worry the world will forget

By Mari Yamaguchi
Associated Press

HIROSHIMA, Japan — The atomic bomb that exploded over Hiroshima 75 years ago didn't just kill and maim.

The survivors have also lived for decades with lingering shame, anger and fear. Many in Japan believed radiation sickness is infectious or hereditary.

Some hid their status as survivors. Some harbored thoughts of revenge. Some watched as loved ones died, one by one, because of radiation from the bombing, and wondered — Am I next?

As they grow old — their average age now exceeds 83 — many now feel an urgency. They are desperate to rid the world of nuclear bombs and share the horror they witnessed on Aug. 6, 1945.

Here are some of the stories of survivors interviewed by The Associated Press.

Photo by Eugene Hoshiko/AP

Michiko Kodama, right, assistant secretary-general of the Japan Confederation of A and H Bomb Sufferers' Organizations, narrates her experience on a livestream of "Kataribe" or story-telling session Sunday, July 12, in Tokyo.

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KOKO KONDO, 75

Koko Kondo had a secret mission as a girl: Revenge.

She was determined to find the person who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the person who caused the suffering and the burns she saw on the faces of girls at her father's church — and then give them a punch.

Kondo

She got her chance in 1955.

Ten-year-old Kondo appeared on an American TV show called "This is Your Life" that was featuring her father, Rev. Kiyoshi Tanimoto, one of six survivors profiled in John Hersey's book "Hiroshima."

Kondo stared in hatred at another guest: Capt. Robert Lewis, co-pilot of the B-29 bomber Enola Gay that dropped the bomb. While Kondo, who survived the bombing as an infant, was wondering if she would act on her fantasy and punch him, the host asked Lewis how he felt after dropping the bomb.

"Looking down from thousands of feet over Hiroshima, all I could think of was, 'God, what have we done?'" he said.

Kondo saw tears well in Lewis' eyes, and her hatred melted away.

"He was not a monster; he was just another human being. ... I knew that I should hate the war, not him," Kondo told The Associated Press. She said she was grateful she met Lewis because it helped the hate go away.

Still, she suffered years of humiliation and prejudice that she had to overcome as she grew up. One day as an adolescent she was told to undress except for her underwear at a medical conference in an auditorium.

On the eve of Thursday's memorial at the cenotaph of Hiroshima Peace Park, Kondo held a moment of silence and prayed for the victims, and for Lewis. That meeting changed her way of thinking and helped her overcome the difficulties later in her life, she said.

Now, Kondo is following in her father's footsteps, busy telling her stories to younger people.

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LEE JONG-KEUN, 92

Lee kept his secret as an atomic bombing survivor for nearly 70 years, not even telling his wife, always fearing people might notice the burn marks on his face.

Lee

But today Lee, a second-generation Korean born in Japan, is training young people to tell survivors' stories. He also wants them to learn about the difficulty that Koreans have faced in Japan.

"Survivors won't be here 20 years from now, but our stories must be," said Lee, who will meet Prime Minister Shinzo Abe after Thursday's memorial to demand Japan do more to ban nuclear weapons.

Some 20,000 ethnic Korean residents of Hiroshima are believed to have died in the nuclear attack. The city had a large number of Korean workers, including those forced to work without pay at mines and factories under Japan's 1910-1945 colonization of the Korean Peninsula.

At a memorial Wednesday for Korean victims, Lee laid flowers and prayed for those who perished.

"I ask younger people to never forget us and to understand the tragedy, absurdity and cruelty of the war so that nuclear weapons will be eliminated from the world as soon as possible."

On the morning of Aug. 6, 1945, 16-year-old Lee watched the blue summer sky turned yellowish orange. He suffered burns on his face and neck that took four months to heal.

When he returned to work, co-workers stayed away, saying he had "A-bomb disease."

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MICHIKO KODAMA, 82

The external scars from the atomic bombing have faded, but Michiko Kodama says her heart hasn't healed.

"For me the war isn't over," Kodama said in an interview. "Even 75 years later, we continue to suffer because of radiation. ... And nuclear weapons still exist."

On Aug. 6, 75 years ago, the 7-year-old Kodama saw a flash in the sky from her classroom. Shards of broken glasses rained down on her.

She lost her favorite cousins within weeks of the bombing, then her parents, brothers and even her daughter. All died of cancer or from the radiation exposure. Kodama has lived in fear that she would be next.

There were also years of discrimination and humiliation.

One day, when she went to a clinic and showed her medical certificate, a receptionist noted her status as a bombing survivor out loud, and another patient sitting next to Kodama moved away.

"I still feel hurt from the discrimination," she said. "That is what sits the heaviest in my heart."

Map shows where the peace trees are in Oregon

The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Oregon Department of Forestry launched a map on its website of the 30 Oregon cities that have planted peace trees — trees from seeds that survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, 75 years ago today, Aug. 6. The link to the site is available at www.oregon.gov/ODF/ForestBenefits/Pages/Hiroshima-peace-trees.aspx.

La Grande and Elgin are the two eastern-most Oregon towns with peace trees. Bend, Redmond, Klamath Falls, Ashland, Medford, Creswell, Roseburg, Salem and Hillsboro are other cities that have had trees planted. In all, communities planted 45 trees from the ginkgo or Asian persimmon seedlings.

Hideko Tamura-Snider, Hiroshima survivor and co-founder of the Medford-based peace group One Sunny Day Initiatives, launched the tree-planting effort in Oregon. According to the forestry department's press release, she convinced Oregon Community Trees Board member Michael Oxendine to obtain and grow seeds from Hiroshima.

Oxendine contacted Green Legacy Hiroshima, which collects the seeds from trees known to have survived the 1945 blast, stated the press release. The seeds arrived in 2017, and Oxendine germinated them and potted the seedlings. He also reached out to fellow OCT board members in late 2018 to find homes for the young trees.

Staff photo by Ronald Bond

The Hiroshima peace tree at Riverside Park, La Grande, is among 45 that communities planted in Oregon. The trees are from seeds that survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima 75 years ago today on Aug. 6, 1945.

La Grande has peace trees at Eastern Oregon University and Riverside Park, while Elgin's tree is at the Elgin High School Memorial Garden, according to the weblink where the map is featured.

Spiritual Life Highlights

Submissions
Churches and faith-based groups are encouraged to submit Highlights for the Spiritual Life page by 4 p.m. Tuesday for publication Thursday. Submit by email to news@lagrandeobserver.com (with Highlights in the subject line).

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH

LA GRANDE — The sermon this Sunday at Faith Lutheran Church will expound on concepts in Matthew 14:22-33, which contains the account of Jesus walking on the water. The disciple Peter proclaimed, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come," and "Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus." This teaches us that when we welcome Jesus' commands and keep our focus on him, he empowers us to accomplish things he desires. This makes our life both more exciting and comfortable.

ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH & ST. PETER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

LA GRANDE — Due to COVID-19, in-person worship is not being held at either Zion Lutheran Church or St. Peter's Episcopal Church, both pastored by Rev. Roberta Smythe. On Saturday, links to Zion's online worship service will be posted on the church's website and Facebook page, and a link to St. Peter's online worship will be available on its Facebook page. The congregations will not meet in person until after Labor Day.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

LA GRANDE STAKE — The inspiring story of the 2,000 stripling warriors is central to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' "Come, Follow Me" lesson for next week, Aug. 10-16. This lesson completes the study of the book of Alma, which is found in the Book of Mormon and covers chapters 53-63 during the time period of 64-52 BC. These chapters relate how the Nephite people finally obtained peace in the land and how the faith of these young warriors, as "taught by their mothers" (Alma 56:47), preserved and protected them in battle.

Individual wards are now holding condensed sacrament meetings every other week. Members are asked to contact their ward leaders for information on local plans. No other meetings are being held at this time.

Northeast Oregon Directory of Churches

Services This Week

First Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
901 Penn Avenue 963-2623
lgdisciples@gmail.com
Worship 10:00 a.m.
~Join us at The Lord's Table~

FIRST LANDMARK MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
1812 1st St. La Grande
Pastor Dave Tierce • 541-605-0215
We use the King James Version Bible
Sunday School - 10:00 am
Worship 11:00 am
Sunday Evening Bible Study - 3:00 pm (Effective June 10)
Wednesday Evening - 6:30 pm
"Where you can find TRUTH according to the scriptures"
www.flmbclagrande.com

CHURCH Service DIRECTORY

Zion Lutheran Church
(an ELCA church)
902 Fourth Street, La Grande, OR
(541) 963-5998
9:00 am - Worship
10:00 am - Fellowship & Refreshments
10:30 am - Classes
Pastor: Roberta Smythe
www.zionlagrande.org

First Baptist Church
SIXTH & SPRING, LA GRANDE
541-963-3911
Building Together On Christ Alone
All services have been temporarily cancelled. Live-streaming Sunday mornings at 10:00 am. People can watch at: lagrandefbc.org

UNION BAPTIST CHURCH
1531 S. Main St. Union
541-562-5531
www.UnionBaptistOregon.org
Sunday Morning Worship Services 9:00 am & 11:00 am
Birthing, Building and Being the Body of Christ

LA GRANDE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
"OPEN HEARTS, OPEN MINDS, OPEN DOORS"
1612 4th Street – 963-2498
Pastor Taylor Gould
lgumc@eoni.com
www.lagrandeumc.org
Office Hours: Mon-Thur 9am-Noon
Worship 10:00 am
Fellowship Coffee Hour 11:00 am
- Nursery provided -

Amazing Grace Fellowship
1316 T St., La Grande, OR
541-568-4567
Sunday 10:30 a.m.
2 Cor 12:9 My Grace is sufficient for you.
IS 40:31

COVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
1708 Jasper St., Cove, OR
NORTH POWDER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
390 E. St., North Powder, OR
JOIN US... *Catch the Spirit!*
Worship: 9:00 a.m. Cove
Worship: 10:00 a.m. N. Powder

St. Katherine's Catholic Church
Fr. Thomas Puduppulliparamban
301 E Garfield Enterprise
Mass Schedule
Sundays:
St Pius X, Wallowa – 8:00 am
St Katherine of Siena, Enterprise – 10:30 am
Saturdays
St Katherine of Siena, Enterprise – 5:30 pm
Weekdays
St Katherine of Siena, Enterprise – 8:00 am
(Monday – Thursday and First Friday)
All are welcome

La Grande CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
109 18th Street • 963-3402
Sunday School 9:15 a.m.
Sunday Worship 10:30 a.m.

GRACE COMMUNITY LUTHERAN CHURCH
The Place
62848 Philynda Loop in Island City
"We are called to Serve"
Sunday School for all ages - 9:00 am
Sunday Worship 10:00 am
Phone: 541-568-4230
grace.lutherancove@gmail.com

IMBLER CHRISTIAN CHURCH
440 Ruckman, Imbler 534-2201
www.imblerchristianchurch.org
Sunday Services
9:00 a.m. Sunday School
10:00 a.m. Worship Service

SUMMERVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday Services:
Sunday School & Adult Bible Classes 9:45AM
Children's Church & Worship Service 11:00AM
Family Worship Service 6:00PM
Wednesday:
Prayer Mtg, Children's Bible Club, Youth Group 7:00PM
A church for your whole family
Visit us at *summervillebaptistchurch.org*

La Grande Seventh-day Adventist Church
A Place where hope is found in Jesus
Join us in Fellowship & Worship
Saturday 11am
Outdoor Worship
2702 Adams Avenue, La Grande
963-4018
lagrandeor.adventistchurch.org
Learning for Today and Eternity
Little Friends
Christian Preschool/Childcare 963-6390
La Grande Adventist Christian School
K-8th Grade 963-6203