

'Paradise to paradise, and in between'

*A childhood in Hawaii
and adulthood in Oregon
bookend a decade in Hiroshima.*

*Ed Kawasaki is a hibakusha,
a survivor of the atomic bomb.*

BY LEONORA KO
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Ed Kawasaki, born and raised in Hawaii, was visiting Hiroshima in 1945 when the U.S. military exploded the atomic bomb 2,000 feet overhead. It immediately destroyed five square miles of the city. While Hiroshima was chosen for its military and industrial operations, most of the estimated 90,000 to 150,000 people killed were civilians.

Kawasaki, one of the hibakusha, or atomic bomb survivors, returned to the U.S. after the war and became a successful businessman with numerous awards for community service. On Aug. 6, he will be the keynote speaker at the Wholistic Peace Institute Lunch at Concordia University as part of the 70th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing.

The Wholistic Peace Institute is collaborating with the Hiroshima Ground Zero Museum to bring the "Educating for Peace: Never Again" traveling exhibit to the United States. It will be on display at the George R. White Library & Learning Center at Concordia University in August and September.

Street Roots met with Ed Kawasaki at his home just outside Portland to talk about his experience and how it has shaped his views on nuclear policy today.

Leonora Ko: *How did you happen to be in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb was dropped?*

Ed Kawasaki: My dad emigrated from Japan to Hawaii in 1906, over a hundred years ago. In 1941, he took the whole family back to Japan to see my grandfather, who was ill. And in 1941, we got stuck. We stayed there during the war and postwar, from 1941 to 1951, when I was 11 years old to 21 years old.

L.K.: *Could you describe some of your experiences when the atomic bomb was detonated?*

E.K.: Just a few days before the atomic bomb, I had a ruptured appendix. My dad called a surgeon, who was one of the top surgeons at Shima Hospital in Hiroshima. It just so happened that the telephone didn't connect to that surgeon.

And so we went to a (different) hospital, which was a military hospital. Even though it was a military hospital, I was accepted there because I was in the student mobilization. During the war, students in the



PHOTO BY ISSEI KATO/REUTERS

The gutted Atomic Bomb Dome, now the site of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, is silhouetted in Hiroshima, Japan.

ninth grade used to work in the ammunitions factory. The students were mobilized because there were not enough workers in the factories.

The bomb was dropped on Aug. 6.

It flashed on the opposite side of the hospital. Heat and the flash travel about the same speed. I saw the flash; I didn't feel the heat. There was a chimney right outside of my window, about 25 yards away. Nobody can explain this, but the chimney reflected a rainbow color. And it was very unusual. I said, "Wow." I stood up from the bed because I thought something was happening. A few seconds later, the blast came through the hospital.

The hospital was about 2 miles from the epicenter. The buildings, the glass doors and the windows were all blasted through, and I was hit by shrapnel. So I had some blood trickling down. That was the extent of my injury.

The nurses came around and said to get into the bomb shelter. It was a real crudely built bomb shelter, with some wood, just like you're going through some coal mine. As I was going to the bomb shelter, I could still see the blue sky and the shiny bomber was passing by. I was in the shelter for half an hour, and they said it's clear.

When we came out of the bomb shelter, the people coming from the epicenter started to trickle into the hospital. They were burnt, and they were trying to get help from the hospital. Shortly after that, the nurses came around and said we all have to go home because there are no facilities. The

equipment was blasted through, and that was it. So they told us to go home.

There was no ambulance or transportation to take us home. So they put a new bandage on my (incision), and I walked home for 2 miles. I had to rest in between because of the ruptured appendix. I had two holes in my stomach, and the pus was still coming out of the tube.

Our home was about 3 1/2 miles away from the epicenter. The damage was not as severe as the hospital. But the glass windows were broken; in some places the walls were caved in and the tile roof blown.

Fortunately that day, two of my sisters were sick and they stayed home. So nobody in our family was injured.

I had to go back to the hospital to change my dressings on a weekly basis. We lived in the country, so I had to walk through the rice paddies in the farmland. They had piles of wood, and they put corpses on the wood. They burned the corpses, and that was the crude way of cremation because there was no way of cremating the bodies properly.

Going in the morning, I see it burning, and on the way back, the fires are done. But some of the corpses — there wasn't enough wood to completely burn the bodies — so part of the body was hanging over the ashes. Going through those things, the smell is awful. I don't know if you've smelled your fingernails or hair burning. The whole body smells the same way. So you can imagine rows of corpses