

## “Without Doubt Trust Each Other”

**Emiko Okada-san, Hiroshima Bomb Survivor (Hibakusha), in dialogue with Peter Nixon, International Negotiation Consultant, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2008**

I have been privileged in my work to travel far and wide and meet people to discuss their challenges, fears, joys and sadness's. I have drawn spiritual inspiration from Cathedrals in Paris, Reims, Canterbury and Krakow. I have come to understand the world and myself a little better by meditating in Buddhist, Aztec and Hindu temples. I have marvelled at our collective history as told on the walls of Mosques and Churches around the world. I have been awed at the majesty of nature in the Himalaya and Rockies and felt invigorated at the industriousness and innovation of mankind as demonstrated in the markets and factories of China, India and Vietnam. My confidence for humanity grows when I visit great health centres, courts and universities where the best resources money can buy is devoted to social, environmental and health concerns facing our human existence here on earth.

Fortunately, so as not to gain a false perspective, my travels also take me to the sites of terrible atrocities. From the war graves in Europe to the Killing Fields in Cambodia and the concentration camps in Poland, time and again we fall backwards into genocide in the name of some selfish objective.

The more I travel and the longer I live the more I realise our enemy becomes our friend when we understand how they see the world. Do we love or hate Germans, French, Japanese, Khmer, Afghanis, Iraqis and Communists? It seems to depend how much we learn about each other so how is it that we can be so good at engineering bridges and space craft but so bad at dialogue with our neighbours and living peacefully and sustainably on our only earth, the third planet from the sun?

These were some of the thoughts running through my head when on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2008, US national day and my father's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, I was given the opportunity to dialogue with Emiko Okada-san, one of the few remaining survivors of the atomic bomb dropped on the City of Hiroshima by the American Air Force on August 6<sup>th</sup> 1945. As a group the survivors have been called Hibakusha meaning explosion affected persons. My father was enlisted in the Canadian Air Force at the time the bomb was dropped and he lost friends at the hands of Japanese so I was also thinking my meeting with a Hibakusha might be somehow disrespectful, especially on his birthday and the US national day.

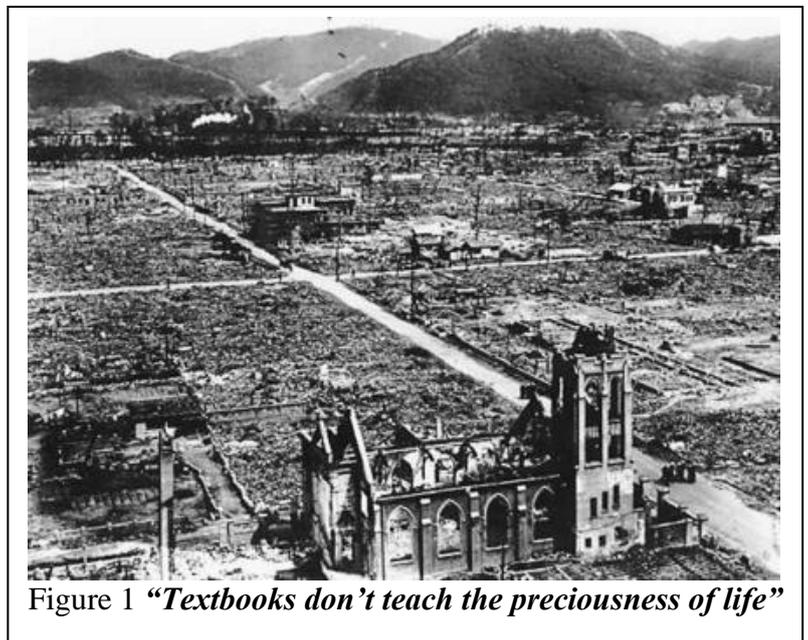


Figure 1 *“Textbooks don't teach the preciousness of life”*

I was born in Montreal in 1961 towards the end of the baby boom which resulted from the return of the soldiers from the war. It was a period of rapid economic expansion as Canada and the US took on their new found importance in the Post WWII era. The Cold War was out of mind for someone my age and instead I often played with little plastic soldiers re-enacting the heroic battles of WWII which were being portrayed in ever more exciting movies on our black and white television set each evening. In these years



Figure 2 *“Without doubt trust each other”*  
The Hong Kong War Memorial in Ottawa

people said they would never buy a German or Japanese car. The heroes of our community would march at the Cenotaph every November 11<sup>th</sup> to commemorate their victories and to remember their fallen comrades.

I was raised in a culture of good versus evil not necessarily one of understanding the enemy’s side of the story. Until the era of emigration and globalisation the enemy was always “over there” but in the ensuing years the enemies of WWII, Korea, Vietnam and even Communist China had become our neighbours and friends.

My work had taught me that dialogue, not bombs and aggression, was where the optimal outcomes would eventually be found for the problems of today. I had learned that killing made dialogue a whole lot harder so I sought out the chance to meet Emiko Okada because I felt her personal story somehow made her so much more credible as an international spokesperson for dialogue.

I had heard that Emiko was an international peace advocate and one of the best speakers amongst the remaining Hibakusha. As I waited for Emiko to arrive at our appointed meeting place in the museum situated at ground zero where the bomb exploded all those years ago, I couldn’t help but remember the Canadian Hong Kong war vets that I had met over the years and how tears still well up in their eyes 70 years later when recounting the atrocities the Japanese inflicted on them at the start of War II.

My conversation with Emiko was facilitated by Sachiko Hiraoka, a young translator and historian who is part of a team of people capturing the living history of A-Bomb survivors before it is too late. Sachiko was fascinated by my work and had briefed Emiko about my professional interest in what she was about to say. Our dialogue was joined by two American teachers who were collecting information to use in their secondary school history class in the US.

Emiko shared her story in Japanese, taking time to show us drawings of the important moments before, during and after the blast. Sachiko, clearly moved herself at what she was hearing, would translate Emiko’s story into English while we gazed into Emiko’s eyes and sensed her pain as if it was yesterday. Emiko was stoic while telling her story, typically Japanese and I realised she must have told her story thousands of times in the years since 1945. I knew that she would have her way of telling her story both to protect herself and her emotions while sharing what people typically wanted to hear.

Emiko smiled and looked at me when I asked if she could tell us more about her family especially her mother and sister. Emiko was 8 when the bomb was dropped and her life changed forever. She admired her mother and especially loved her ten year old sister. She also had two younger brothers and her father worked at a school the other side of the hill near where they lived.

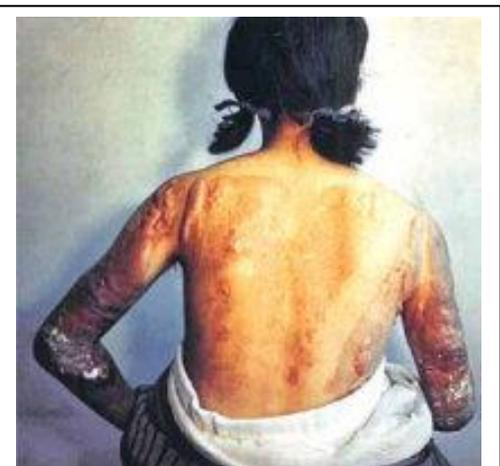


Figure 3 Few wars are good, all wars leave scars and make dialogue difficult

Although all children over 3 years of age had been evacuated to the country-side as the war intensified, just two days before the bomb Emiko was brought back to the City to say goodbye to her cousin who was leaving for battle. By this stage in the war all boys over 15 were being sent to battle. The next day, August 5<sup>th</sup>, Emiko saw a lot of American bombers flying high overhead but they weren't dropping incendiary bombs and so people in the city were happy [little did she know at the time that it was decided to spare the city from fires so as to better understand the effects of the Atomic Bomb].

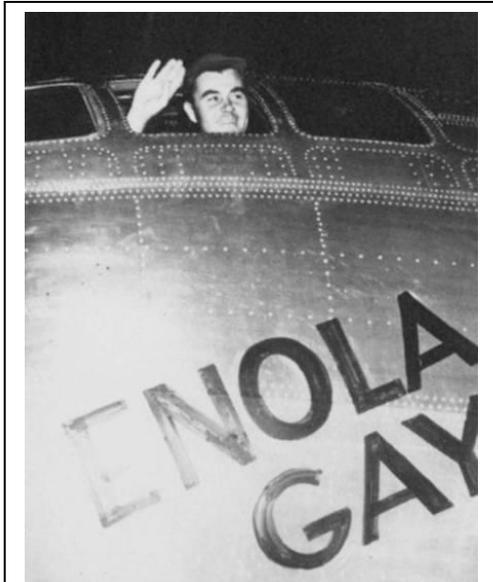


Figure 4 *“Everyone asks someone else to be the solution”*

Hiroshima is a beautiful city surrounded by green hills on three sides with several rivers descending from the mountains through the city and opening out to the ocean. [The hills on the three sides of the city were another reason why the Americans chose Hiroshima - the blast would resonate even stronger through the city]. Emiko's family lived east of Hiroshima Station and on August 6<sup>th</sup> she remembers a beautiful blue sky. She heard planes but when the all clear sounded, her sister said “Good-bye, see you soon” and departed to work in the vegetable garden at her school playground where the little food that was available was being grown.

Next thing Emiko heard was another plane glistening through the blue sky and thinking it must be Japanese she and her brother waved at the plane. It was however the Enola Gay carrying the Atomic bomb which was about to unleash the worst explosion the world had ever seen. When the bomb detonated (at a

predetermined height for maximum kill) 70,000 people were killed instantly within a 2 kilometre radius of the blast. [The co-pilot of the Enola Gay, Captain Robert Lewis, later admitted his response at the time was “My God, what have we done?”

Emiko said that within minutes of the blast people were running from the fire storm, unleashed by the convection of the bomb, which had engulf the entire city. She ran past a boy whose eyeballs were hanging from his head and saw hundreds of people with skin falling off their bodies. The dead and dying were everywhere. People were running towards one of the 7 rivers that wind their way through the city to the ocean but when Emiko arrived at the nearest river the water was red from blood and filled with dead bodies. 3 days later another bomb fell on Nagasaki and 10 days later the Emperor surrendered.

People at the time said the city would be dead for 75 years but within days green shoots were blossoming up through the charred foundations and fields causing Emiko to cry uncontrollably at the sight of rebirth.

For the next 3 months Emiko's mother searched the entire city to find her oldest daughter but the school where she was last seen and most of the students were now gone.

Emiko never saw her cherished sister again. While searching the city for her daughter Emiko's mother miscarried her last child. Upon sharing this news with us and thinking about the state her mother must have been in as well as the loss of her older sister, Emiko



Figure 5 *“Nothing will be born of hatred”*

gave us a glimpse of the terrible pain and sadness that she has carried like a cross ever since that horrible day.

Within a year of the bomb another 70,000 people died of radiation or problems associated with the blast. 40% of the city's population had been lost. The blast and ensuing fires and deaths created some 6,000



Figure 6 ***“I appeal to you, abolish nuclear weapons, children are the jewels of the world”***

orphans. A few went to live in the temples of Kyoto but most stayed on the streets of Hiroshima and robbed and killed to survive.

By 1950 Emiko realised **“Nothing will be born of hatred”** and yet the bomb blast survivors were facing another tragedy because no one wanted to hire or marry a Hibakusha thinking they carried radiation that would cause them to die on the job, have deformed babies or not be able to have children at all. Emiko suffers from plastic anaemia but has so far been lucky to avoid the cataracts, leukaemia and organ damage that has afflicted other Hibakusha. Each year the names of the Hibakusha who died during the preceding year are added to the cenotaph. By 2008 there were some 4,000 names on the Cenotaph and Emiko wonders when her name will be added to the others. In the meantime she tells her story but her brother prefers to remain silent.

Emiko's wish is that Nuclear War ended with her experience. Sadly there are more nuclear warheads today than ever before, some 30,000 at last count in the US, Russia, France, China, India, Pakistan. Emiko pleads **“I appeal to you, abolish nuclear weapons, children are the jewels of the world.”** She travels now

as a peace ambassador, telling her story and showing her drawings. On a recent trip to India she was rattled by seeing \$10 million nuclear warheads paraded in the national day parade down streets lined with homeless children who are beaten by their parents if they return at night without having begged for food.

When Emiko travels she asks children in poor countries **“What is hope for you”** and they reply **“I want to go to school”**. She believes the key to the future is in how we treat children in poor countries. She wants every country to share their military budgets with children instead of preparing for war.

At this point Emiko thanked us for coming and gave us each a paper crane, **“No Bombs”** she says smiling. She thanked us for visiting Hiroshima at which point the two American teachers asked for a photo and then departed. Sachiko, realising I wasn't finished asking questions, reminded Emiko of my professional interest in her story.

I explained that I train leading executives around the world on how to overcome conflict and achieve optimal outcomes. I take a moment to show her the dialogue puzzle that I created suggesting the way to achieve economically optimally outcomes is to get the right people talking about the right issues in the right way and at the right time and place. Emiko smiles and for the first time speaking in (very good)



Figure 7 ***“Endurance, kindness and tolerance, I appeal to these three virtues”***

English, with Sachiko the translator looking on in amazement, tells me **“Without doubt trust each other”**.

“Without doubt trust each other?” I’m thinking of all the trusting people I have worked with who have been taken by untrustworthy dealers and she is espousing blind trust? Emiko continues, “My father was a teacher at a middle school. It was behind the hill so he survived the war. Before the war the tuition was militaristic but after the war the curriculum changed to dealing with life’s pressures of which there were many”. **“Textbooks don’t teach the preciousness of life”** Emiko pointed out.



Figure 8 **“Smile and shake hands with strangers, it is very important”**

Emiko’s parents died soon after the war. When they cremated Emiko’s mother they found her body was full of broken glass embedded since the blast. Her mother was very unhealthy after the war. Emiko has been relatively lucky in comparison. In one area 8400 students had assembled 15 minutes before the blast and 6300 were killed on the spot. **“Textbooks don’t teach the preciousness of life”**. I realise she is right, it isn’t textbooks that teach the preciousness of life but rather witnesses, like Emiko, who teach others the preciousness of life, one dialogue at a time.

**“Smile and shake hands with strangers, it is very important”** says Emiko as we bring our dialogue to a close. Speaking now in Japanese, “the old Japanese think the A-Bomb was revenge for Pearl Harbour”. Is she stuck on revenge? “Endurance, kindness and *patience*”, Sachiko checks her translation of patience with Emiko and then corrects herself, **“Endurance, kindness and tolerance, I appeal to these three virtues”**, says Sachiko on behalf of Emiko.

**“Everyone asks someone else to be the solution”** Emiko states bluntly. I realise our time together is coming to a close. She is busy this week influencing the G8 leaders who are presently meeting in Hokkaido. Demonstrating she is the change she wants to see in the world, Emiko tells me she has sent each of the G8 leaders a love letter. Now with tears in my eyes and wondering how anyone could refuse the love of this beautiful woman I ask if she has had any replies. “Yes from half of the leaders, the USA, Germany, England and France”. What about Canada I wonder to myself and as I say goodbye I offer Emiko my love on behalf of my country.



Figure 9 Emiko with granddaughter Yuki, speaking at the United Nations, May 2009

Two months after meeting Emiko a close neighbour of mine called Jim was killed instantly when his cottage was levelled by a gas explosion. The blast shook the entire community. I gave Jim’s widow and two lovely daughters Emiko’s paper crane. “Textbooks don’t teach the preciousness of life”. The new cottage opened this summer and like the green shoots that Emiko witnessed as a little girl, rebirth gives us another chance to trust each other.

[Peter.Nixon@PotentialDialogue.com](mailto:Peter.Nixon@PotentialDialogue.com)  
Hong Kong, 17 September 2009

## My favourite messages of love from Emiko Okada-san

1. ***“Everyone asks someone else to be the solution”***  
***Gandhi reminds us to be the change you  
want to see in the world***
2. ***“Nothing will be born of hatred”***  
***The Sutras remind us to be compassionate  
and the Scriptures reminds us to love thy  
neighbour***
3. ***“Without doubt, trust each other”***  
***Dialogue leads to understanding and  
understanding leads to trust.***

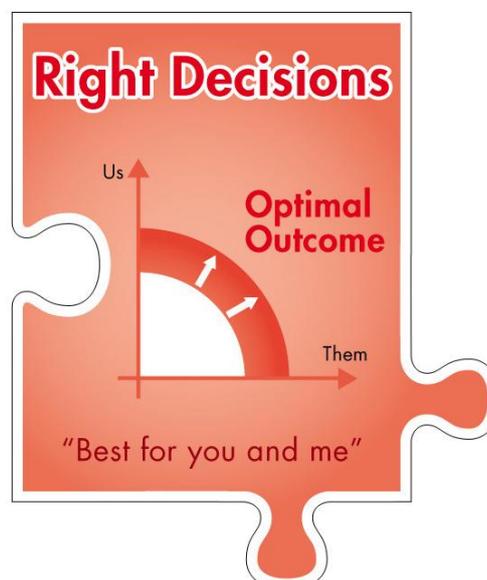


Figure 10 [www.PotentialDialogue.com](http://www.PotentialDialogue.com)