EXPLORING One Thousand Cranes

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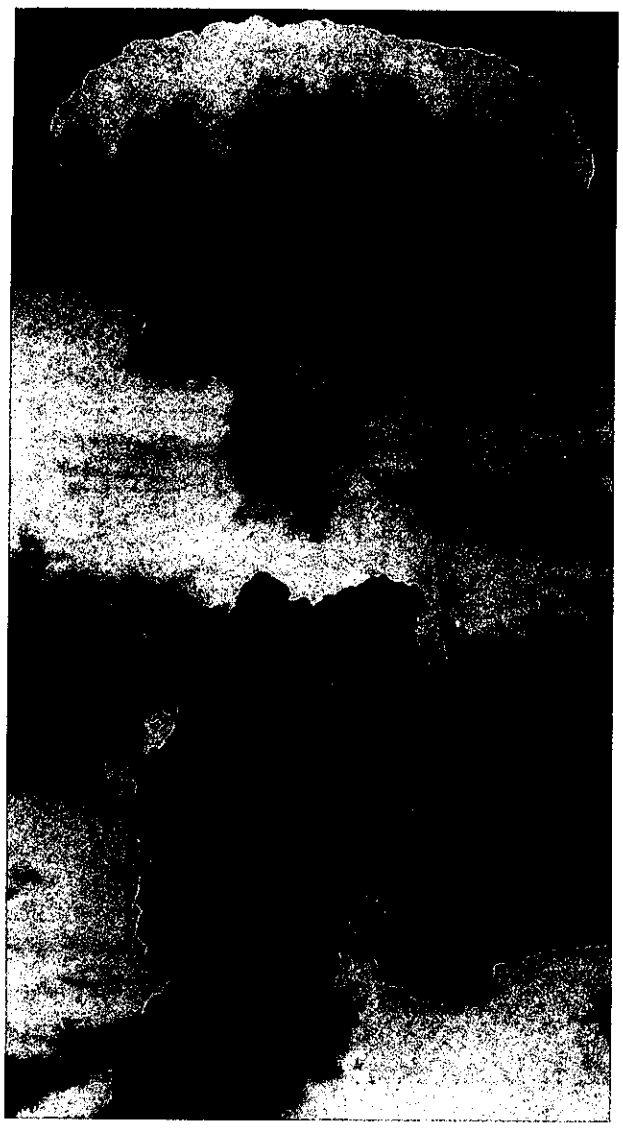
Two Stories



A mushroom cloud of radioactive matter rises over Hiroshima after the explosion of the atom bomb.

One Thousand Cranes tells the stories of two children whose lives are forever altered by war. Although the stories are separated by both geography and time, they are tied together by a legendary symbol of hope and peace.

The first story is true. It concerns Sasaki Sadako, a Japanese girl who was only two years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on her home town of Hiroshima in 1945. Sadako and her parents survived the explosion seemingly unharmed, and as Hiroshima was slowly rebuilt, Sadako grew to be a busy, active child, a star of her school's relay race team.

The second story is fiction, but there are thousands of similar stories which are true. It concerns a boy named Radmillo who escapes war in Eastern Europe and emigrates to America with his mother. While Rad's mother is nostalgic for her old life in Europe, Rad tries to forget the past and make a new life in America. Yet Rad is haunted by nightmares of his best friend Sascha who was killed in the fighting. It is through learning the story of Sadako that Rad begins to deals with his dark memories.

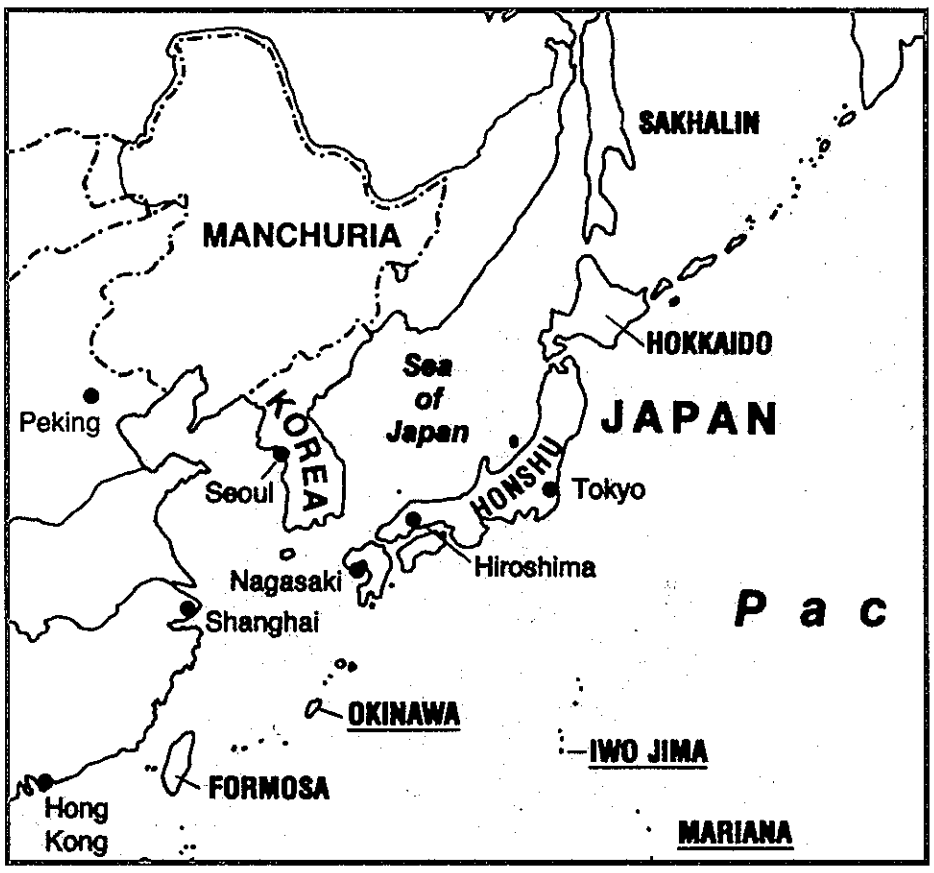
At the age of eleven, Sadako was struck with leukemia, known as radiation sickness because it was caused by the radioactive effects of the bomb. The only thing that cheered her was the ancient legend of one thousand paper cranes. According to the legend, cranes lived for a thousand years, and if a person folded one thousand Origami paper cranes, the gods would grant him or her a long life.

Sadako began the project of folding one thousand cranes. As she folded each one, she made a wish for peace. Sadly, her condition worsened, and a year later she died. Her classmates and friends raised money to build a monument—a children's statue for peace. Today children from all over the world still send Origami cranes to be displayed at the monument, reminding the world of their hope for peace. ★

One Wish

Refugees escape from Bosnia over a narrow, improvised bridge.

Hiroshima and the Bomb



In 1939, Europe exploded into war. Germany and Italy were allies against France and Britain. Japan later joined them when the United States condemned the Japanese for invading China. However, the United States remained neutral until 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

Two years previously, on October 11, 1939, President Roosevelt had received a letter from the world's most famous scientist, Albert Einstein. Einstein wanted to inform Roosevelt about a recent discovery in physics, one that might lead to the development of an extremely powerful bomb. Einstein noted that the Nazis were also aware of this discovery.

Although in 1941 the American government had not yet made a decision concerning the bomb experiment, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, America's war plan included research and possible development of the bomb. As the war continued to expand into other countries, the United States, Great Britain, and France were strengthening their forces in an attempt to bring a quick end to the war.

On June 6, 1944, the Allied invasion of Europe began. On the eastern front, the Russians continued to drive the Germans back. In the Pacific, the U.S. Navy and Marine forces were closing a circle around Japan. These invasions were costly for the United States, both in terms of casualties abroad and hardships at home. By 1945 the Japanese had perfected their defensive tactics. They also began *kamikaze* attacks: planes were loaded with dynamite and crashed into American ships by pilots willing to die for their country.

In Europe the Allies squeezed Germany, bringing the war closer to an end. Meanwhile in Los Alamos, New Mexico, scientists were nearing completion of the bomb.

On April 12, 1945, U.S. President Roosevelt died. Vice President Harry S. Truman assumed the presidency. On May 9, Truman was able to declare victory in Europe, but Japan was not willing to surrender.

By early July 1945 the team at Los Alamos was making final preparations to test the bomb. The site for the test was Alamogordo Air Base, an isolated location in the desert, two hundred miles south of Los Alamos. The test revealed that the bomb was ready.

On July 16 the U.S.S. Indianapolis was ordered to sail from San Francisco to Tinian, a tiny Mariana Island in the Pacific, to deliver a "package." Although the package contained the core for the Hiroshima bomb, the contents were not revealed to the captain of the ship; he only knew that he was to transport the package and that others would unload the cargo when the ship reached its destination. On July 26 when the Indianapolis arrived at the Tinian Harbor, the ship was surrounded by numerous small crafts and the package was taken ashore. (Four days later, on its return to San Francisco, the Indianapolis was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine. It sank in twelve minutes; of a total of 1196 crew members only 315 were rescued. A war memorial commemorating these men has recently been erected in Indianapolis.)

During this time Truman was in Potsdam, Germany, with leaders from the Soviet Union and Great Britain, trying to decide the political and economic future of Europe. Truman, wanting to end the war with Japan, issued the Potsdam Declaration, which demanded Japan's immediate surrender. The terms for the Potsdam Declaration included: removing Japanese leaders from office, dismantling Japan's military forces (allowing them to return to their homes peacefully) and limiting the Japanese homeland to Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku, and minor islands determined by the United States and its allies. If Japan refused the declaration, the atomic bomb would be dropped. On July 28 the decision was final; Japan rejected the Potsdam Declaration.

Hiroshima, Kokura, and Nagasaki were chosen as targets, with Hiroshima being the primary target. On August 6 the Enola Gay, a B-29 bomber flown by pilot Paul Tibbets, was ready to begin its mission—to carry and drop the atomic bomb.

At 7:25 the Enola Gay's radio operator received a message that the sky over Hiroshima was clear. At 8:15 A.M. the bomb called "Little Boy" was dropped.

The bomb exploded about two thousand feet above the city, giving off a blinding light. The people of Hiroshima called the blast *pikadon* (flash boom). Seventy thousand people died instantly. The intense heat generated by the bomb disintegrated both people and objects, sometimes leaving an imprint burned into sides of buildings and sidewalks. Those who were not killed wandered the city in misery, their flesh hanging from their bodies, seeking water to cool the pain.

Fires began to break out. Soon a black cloud covered the city, and within moments rain began to fall. Many believed gasoline was being poured on them by the Americans, although this was not true. The rain was followed by strong winds which uprooted trees, buildings (those that were still standing), and anything else that wasn't tied down. Survivors searched to find family members or to help those buried underneath the rubble.

Thousands flocked to hospitals, but only three out of forty-five hospitals in the city survived the bomb, and damage to them was so severe that they were only able to serve as first aid stations. The day after the *pikadon* the Japanese army began sending troops throughout the city to collect and cremate the dead.

The Japanese government was still unwilling to surrender, so on August 9 an atomic bomb called "Fat Man" was dropped on Nagasaki. The destruction was equal to that in Hiroshima.

By this point the Japanese government feared that if they did not surrender the whole Japanese race would be wiped out. They decided for the sake of their nation and their people that the war must come to an end; and on August 15 Emperor Hirohito's voice was heard on the radio announcing Japan's surrender. ★

—Annélisa Blake-Wasden

War in the Balkans

In recent years the news from the Balkan region of Eastern Europe has been full of horrific images of war. With these images have come words and phrases—ethnic cleansing, Serbian atrocities, Albanian refugees, NATO bombings—which have become part of our language almost before we know what they mean. When we hear news of conflict—whether it is between neighbors across the street or between nations around the world—it is often our human nature to want to take sides, to figure out who is right and who is wrong. The Balkan conflict defies such simplistic thinking. It is a conflict—actually it is many conflicts—which go back more than a thousand years, involving constantly changing alliances and breaks between constantly evolving nations, provinces, and ethnic groups. While watching the character of Radmillo in *One Thousand Cranes*, we never learn exactly where he is from or who his people are. This information is unimportant. What we do know is that he is one of thousands of victims of a war which began long before they were born. ★

(opposite page, center)
"Little Boy," the atom bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima.

(opposite page, below)
Hiroshima after the bomb.

(this page, below)
The town of Vukovar, now in ruins.

Ethnic Conflicts

The region known as the Balkans is the home of many peoples, including Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins, Albanians, and Macedonians. Despite their different names, most of them were descended from one group of tribes, the South Slavs, who moved into the Balkans from the fifth century C.E. The main exception, the Albanians, were non-Slavs who had established themselves in the region even earlier.

Over the next few hundred years, the South Slavs broke up into separate peoples. Those in the west, the Slovenes and Croats, were converted to the Roman Catholic form of Christianity that dominated western Europe. Their culture was based on Latin, they used the Roman alphabet, and they were "western" in many other respects. The Serbs, Montenegrins, and Macedonians also became Christians, but they followed the Orthodox Church, used a Greek-based alphabet, and developed their own distinct culture. The West-East separation was remarkably complete; for example, even though the Croatian and Serbian languages remained almost identical, Croats and Serbs came to feel that they were utterly different from each other.

The Turkish Ottoman Empire controlled most of the Balkans from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Among the Turks' victims were the Serbs, who went down fighting at Kosovo in 1389. The Turks were Muslims, ruling mainly Christian peoples. But in some places a substantial number of their subjects became converts to Islam, the religion of Muslims.

In the late 1800s the Slovenes, and later the Croats, became subjects of the Hapsburg Austrian empire to the north. This empire became a Christian outpost in the long struggle against the Turks. When the Turks were finally driven out of the region in 1912, those who had converted remained faithful to Islam. Most of them were Albanians, Croats, or Serbs, like their neighbors, but because of their religion they came to be seen as a separate people. Their enemies often labeled them "Turks," to make them seem more foreign.

So by the early 20th century the main ethnic groups had formed in what later became Yugoslavia. "Ethnic" is a useful term, used to describe peoples or national communities, whether their identity is based on skin color, language, religion, or less clear-cut ideas such as a shared way of life. Ethnic conflicts involve groups or peoples who think of one another as deeply and hatefully different. Beliefs of this kind, based on prejudice, often lead to savage persecutions and wars. ★

***—adapted from* The War in Former Yugoslavia**
by Nathaniel Harris

Opposing Viewpoints

In general, **the Serbian view** of Kosovo could be summarized as follows: It is the nation's holy land, first settled by their ancestors in the seventh century. Medieval Serbian kings were crowned there. Important shrines of the Serbian Orthodox church still dot the landscape.

Most important, it was the site of the battle of Kosovo Polje, where in 1389 the Turks defeated the Serbs and set the nation on its course of 500 years of resistance to Ottoman rule. This event is at the heart of the Serbian national myth, and as the writer Noel Malcolm observed in his recent book, *Kosovo, a Short History*, Serbian writers have often compared the loss at Kosovo to the crucifixion of Christ, and its reconquest in 1912 to resurrection.

To the extent that a Serbian view takes account of Albanians at all, the Albanians are portrayed as having sided with or served the Ottoman Turks, and they are said to have taken over properties left behind when Serbs fled northward, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Serbs claim that in the years of Ottoman rule, the Turks favored the Albanians, most of whom are fellow Muslims, installing them as landlords and allowing them to exploit and humiliate Serbs.

Albanians see things differently. They claim that their ancestors, the ancient Illyrian tribes, who provided fighting legions for the Greek and Roman empires, were in Kosovo for centuries when the Serbs first arrived from what is now southern Poland. Moreover, they claim that Albanians had a long record of fighting the Turks, and that in fact Albanians had fought as allies of the Serbs at Kosovo Polje. They point out that their national hero, Scanderbeg, spent 20 years in the 15th century warring against the Ottoman Sultan.

The Albanians, who did not have their own state until 1913, stress that they are an overwhelming majority in the area and that they have attained such numerical supremacy despite longstanding efforts of governments in Belgrade to displace them, among these an attempt in 1926 to sponsor Serb settlements. The Albanians recall how in the period between the two world wars mosques were seized, land was confiscated, old deeds invalidated and some Albanians were forcibly put on trains and deported to Turkey. ★

—*The New York Times*, April 4, 1999

Peace Park

Peace Memorial Park is a beautiful park in Hiroshima which in some ways might be a park anywhere. But this park is special; it was laid out in the early 1950s to mark the center of the explosion. Every year people from all over the world visit Peace Park on August 6, the anniversary of the day the bombing took place in Hiroshima, to remember those who died as a result of the atom bomb.

Many gather in the early morning hours to pray quietly at the Memorial Mound for the Unknown Dead. By 8:15 thousands of people arrive for the official ceremony. With the ringing of bells, all bow their heads in prayer for one minute. Next, the Mayor makes a plea for peace, dignitaries offer a few words to the living, white doves are released into the sky, and fresh flowers are offered in memory of the dead.

August 6 is a day of protest as well as commemoration. Groups of people can be seen marching through Peace Park with banners that read: No More A and H Bombs! No More Hiroshimas!

Many stop at the Children's Monument erected in 1958 in memory of Sadako Sasaki. There are usually members of the Folding Crane Club gathered around, placing cranes at the base of the statue.

Many pause at the Cenotaph. This is a large granite arch which is a replica of an ancient clay house. Beneath the arch, where the souls of the dead are believed to reside, lies the registry of these who perished from the bomb. As *hibakusha* (survivors of the bomb) die over the years their names are added to the sacred list. The plaque where the names are engraved reads: "Rest in Peace. The mistake will not be repeated."

Many join in the Die-In at the Atomic Bomb Dome—a building destroyed when the bomb was dropped, leaving only the steel frame. They lie for moments in complete silence where the victims fell.

At night many go with the people of Hiroshima to float paper lanterns down the Ota River to console the spirits of the dead. Each lantern has the name of someone who encountered the bomb. They sing the words of poet Sankichi Toge, who died from delayed radiation effects:

Give back my father, give back my mother,
give grandpa back, grandma back,
give our sons and daughters back.
Give me back myself, give mankind back.
Give each back to each other.
So long as this life lasts,
Give peace that will never end.

★

(above) Only the concrete shell of this building and the ironwork frame of its dome survived the atomic blast in Hiroshima. This ruined building still stands today in the midst of the Peace Memorial Park as a reminder of the devastation caused by the bomb.

These two photographs were among the inspirations for Madeleine Sabota's scenic design of *One Thousand Cranes.* When you see the play, try to find the connections between these images and the scenic environment.

(below) Hope continues amid the destruction: Cellist Vedrand Smailovic and composer Nigel Osborne perform in the ruins of the concert hall of the Skenderija Stadium in Bosnia.

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