

# My Experiences with the WFC

Kaelee Parker

July 6<sup>th</sup> - August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018

## **Arriving in the Rain**

I landed in the Hiroshima airport on July 6<sup>th</sup>, when the city was in the midst of the torrential rain. The highways were closed, buses and trains weren't running, and the airport hotel was completely full. Luckily, Mikiko-san and Yoshi-san helped me through this stressful venture. They were able to reserve a cottage for me, located close to the airport hotel, so that I wouldn't have to spend the night in the airport. The cottage was meant for a family of four so it was a little big for just me, but I chose to make the best of it and relax after the long flight into Japan.

The next morning, I moved over to the airport hotel lobby. The buses were still not running and now the WiFi and phone service was down too. Even the food trucks couldn't make it to the hotel so there wasn't any food available. They ended up shuttling me to the airport so that I could get food and WiFi. There, I was able to contact Mikiko-san more. It looked like I'd need to stay at the airport hotel overnight. Luckily, this time, there was a room available for me. Being jetlagged, I fell asleep around 5pm that night.

Waking up around 4am the next morning, I had a lot of time without much to do (since there was no WiFi and it was raining too hard to explore). I ended up reading a book until about 11am, at which point I took the shuttle over to the airport to get some food and to contact Mikiko-san again. While there, I discovered that the airport had created an alternate route to the city! They had a free bus to transport people to Higashi Hiroshima Station where they could then take the Shinkansen to Hiroshima Station. Mikiko-san told me that this route would work (through a series of emails where I'd send her pictures of Japanese signs and she'd respond with whether or not the route would get me to the right place), so I quickly got my luggage and set off on the bus

to Higashi Hiroshima Station. It was a very beautiful bus ride going through rural areas of Japan, past traditional houses and lush rice fields.



Mikiko-san and Yoshi-san met me at the Hiroshima Station and drove me over to the World Friendship Center. It was so wonderful to see them again and to finally arrive at the WFC.

### **Familiar Faces and New Friends**

Upon arriving at the WFC, I met the directors, Barb and Dannie, along with their daughter Sophie. They were very welcoming and I immediately felt like I was at home. Even though I landed in Hiroshima on July 6<sup>th</sup>, it wasn't until July 8<sup>th</sup> that I managed to get to the center (with lots of help!). July 8<sup>th</sup> was a Sunday, which turned out to be an important day for the directors. Every Sunday, they eat popcorn and apples for dinner while “binge” watching a television show called “Doc Martin.” They quickly welcomed me into their tradition, which resulted in a much-needed relaxing evening. From then on, we would watch an episode every night after dinner.

On July 9<sup>th</sup>, the day after I arrived at the WFC, a peace choir event was canceled so they came to the WFC for lunch instead. This was a great chance for me to see many of the amazing people I had meet three years ago, and for me to meet a few others for the first time. I learned about

Michiko-san's adorable dog named Luke and Mikiko-san helped correct people on the pronunciation of my name. Asaka-san led us in some songs while Youko-san played the piano.

One of Dannie's English classes was focused on reading John Hersey's book "Hiroshima." I was reading this book at the same time so I joined the class for a few weeks. It was really nice to get to know those in the class a little better.

Occasionally I would also attend some of the other English classes. Once, while Dannie and Barb were in Osaka, Sophie and I led an English class. It was with the Thursday class (self-named "The Tangential Class") and we had a lot of fun going off on tangents. I would test out my Japanese "speeches" for them, along with practicing my astronomy quiz that I was preparing for Mutsumien, the nursing home.

### **Bakeries and Cafes**

Sophie was working on her Master's dissertation so we'd often go out to study at cafés. This gave me a chance to work on some of my Japanese speaking and listening skills. We also loved to frequent bakeries. Japanese bakeries are so much more exciting than American ones—where else can someone get bread filled with curry?!

### **Astronomy at Mutsumien**

On the day that Barb and Dannie went to Osaka, Mikiko-san, Michiko-san, and Youko-san took me to Mutsumien to visit the people there. I brought along an astronomy themed quiz that consisted of the following questions:

1. What planet is closest to the sun?  
A) Mercury, B) Venus, C) Jupiter
2. Which is bigger:  
Earth or Neptune?  
Earth or the moon?

Earth or the sun?

3. Who was the first person to walk on the moon?  
A) Buzz Aldrin, B) Neil Armstrong, C) Thomas Edison
4. True or False: The moon causes the tides on Earth.
5. The Big Dipper constellation points to which star that is used for navigation?  
A) The sun, B) Aldeberan, C) The North Star

The people there seemed to especially like the questions about the moon. Since the rivers of Hiroshima change so dramatically with the tides, it seems that many of the people here are very interested in the moon and know quite a bit about it.

As always, Shin-chan was a huge hit at Mutsumien. Asaka-san led us through some more songs, and then I helped present flowers to everyone who had birthdays that month.

### **Nagasaki Nekos and Other Nagasaki Adventures**

On July 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, I traveled with Mikiko-san and Michiko-san to Nagasaki. There, we met up with one of Michiko-san's friends, Yamakawa-sensei, who helped guide us around Nagasaki. We went to a Nagasaki Champon restaurant where we ordered "what the locals get," and then headed for the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum and the Nagasaki National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb. It was very interesting to compare the Nagasaki museum to the Hiroshima one, and of course, it was a very sad and moving experience. Our English guide was named Sachiko Maruyama-san and she was very kind as well.



Left to right: Yamakawa-sensei, Mikiko-san, me, Maruyama-san, Michiko-san

After the museum, Yamakawa-sensei's wife visited the Catholic Center where we were staying. She is a hibakusha from Nagasaki's bombing so she told us her story and that of her family. Thankfully, most of her family made it out alive even though they lived only 1.4 km away from the hypocenter. The room had collapsed on her (a young child at the time), her older sister, and her mother, but luckily one of her brothers and her nanny were able to dig them out from the ruins. That brother died a month or so later from radiation, but their family was still considered lucky because so many of them had survived.

While staying in Nagasaki, I learned about the Nagasaki Nekos—stray cats in Nagasaki that have somewhat bent tails. We saw many of these cats during the two days we spent in the city. The Catholic Center left food out for them so some would congregate nearby.

On our second day there, we spent the morning at the Nagasaki peace park. There, I learned about the prison that used to exist where the peace park now is, the evacuation tunnels under the big hill, and the memorials that now scatter the park. Many of them were donated from other countries, in memory of those who were killed or suffered from the effects of radiation. Some were water structures, to provide water to those who once were crying out for it.



After the peace park tour, we visited the Nagasaki City Nagai Takashi Memorial Museum. Dr. Nagai is a famous figure in Nagasaki, the first honorary citizen of Nagasaki even. He was a radiologist who allowed himself to be exposed to the radiation from his X-rays because he refused to stop his practice even though X-ray film had become extremely scarce. From this, he developed cancer, estimating that he had about three years left to live. When the atomic bomb was dropped, he was exposed to even more radiation. The community built him a two tatami mat house where he stayed when he became too sick to walk, and it was there that he wrote his novels. His novels were calls for peace, spreading awareness of the horrors of the bombing. We were able to visit Dr. Nagai's small house, named Nyokodo, or "Love Thy Neighbors," while we were in Nagasaki. The Nagasaki City Nagai Takashi Memorial Museum was originally a library that Dr. Nagai set up for the children of Nagasaki after the bombing. It is still a library today, but it has a museum component as well.



Nyokodo

After going to the Nagasaki City Nagai Takashi Memorial Museum, we walked over to the Oka Masaharu Memorial Nagasaki Peace Museum. This museum was a little like the peace museum in Kyoto, where they show some of the realities of Japanese aggression during WW2. It was yet another sad museum but it was also eye-opening for me because it was the first time I was learning about much of it.

On the way back to Hiroshima, the train stopped on its way to Hakata due to rain. We were stuck there for a couple hours. Michiko-san and Mikiko-san were very cheerful despite the hassle though, and eventually we got back to the WFC.

### **Oleander Project (and Other WFC Guests)**

One role the World Friendship Center plays is to accommodate guests. Oftentimes these guests were from countries from all over the world. Every morning, we would provide breakfast for our guests, which was a wonderful time to listen to their stories and learn more about their countries and cultures. While I was at the WFC, we had had guests from places including France, Germany, Australia, La Reunion Island, Italy, the US, and Belgium.



The Oleander Project was a group of teachers from the Middle East and the US who came to Hiroshima to learn about peace and how they could introduce it into their curriculums. Eight of them stayed at the WFC while the others were at a hotel. It was very busy while they were here, but it was also extremely interesting. Breakfasts, especially, were amazing since everyone was sharing about their countries and Samia (from Morocco) had often prepared some Middle Eastern dishes for everyone to try.



I got to know Samia better than the others because she asked me and the WFC intern, Ryo, to take her to the grocery store. We struggled to find everything she needed—she'd tell me what she needed to find in English and then I'd try to convey it to Ryo who could then read the Japanese labels and find what she asked for—but in the end, we found enough for her to make the dishes she had in mind.

Because the Oleander Project was using all of the rooms at the World Friendship Center, I moved into Mikiko-san and Yoshi-san's house for about a week. I stayed with them three years ago, with my family, when we visited for the World Friendship Center's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, so it was wonderful to be invited back. It was so nice to catch up with them and to get to see them in the evenings. Yoshi-san would make me a cup of coffee in the mornings before I'd head to the WFC to help set up breakfast and Mikiko-san taught me how to make rice correctly, along with



other cooking advice. They helped me practice my speech for August 6<sup>th</sup>, specifically the Japanese portions, and overall it was just so wonderful to spend more time with them.



### **August 6<sup>th</sup>: A busy day and a sinking lantern**

August 6<sup>th</sup> was a very long day with the World Friendship Center but I am so glad I was there for it. It started off early at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony held in the peace park. I've heard that over 50,000 people were in attendance that day. We were given flowers to present at the Cenotaph and then we found seats near other members of the WFC. Unfortunately, the sun rose above the tree line during the ceremony and shined directly on us for the majority of it, so it was very very hot. We couldn't see very well from our seats, but some of the speeches were still quite moving and I am glad I could go in person.



Once we returned to the World Friendship Center, we watched the short film “Claw Marks” and then listened to Komiyoshi-san’s hibakusha story.



A group picture with Fujii-san (front left) and Komiyoshi-san (front middle)

In the afternoon, we met at the Memorial Mound in peace park. There we listened to a number of speeches and then songs by the Peace Choir. Other than giving my speech, it was relaxing and actually rather cool since we were in the shade.

After the ceremony there, we moved over to Barbara’s Memorial where we held another shorter ceremony. Once again, I gave my short speech, and we sang some more songs. After this, we built our lanterns for the river, writing on them our wishes for peace.





By the time we had gotten to the river, it was starting to get dark out. The lanterns on the river were absolutely beautiful and the pictures don't really do them justice. When I put my lantern in the water though, it tipped and capsized. It was still close enough that I was able to pull it back in and set it upright, but now the candle had gone out. The second time it was released, it made it a little farther before it flipped over again and was swept away under the water. Yoshi-san had a nice way of looking at this though—maybe my lantern actually made it to the ocean because it wasn't picked up like the others.





## **Performances**

Following August 6<sup>th</sup>, life became much calmer. On August 7<sup>th</sup>, Tatsushi Amano-san came to the World Friendship Center to perform his one-person performance of “Living with Father.” It was so touching and Amano-san was able to switch between the two characters with such ease and distinction that you always knew whether he was playing the daughter or her father. The play itself was about the daughter who was having to deal with things such as survivor’s guilt after many of those she was close to were killed by the bomb.

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, we watched another performance, this one called “The Grandchildren of Hiroshima.” Mirei-san and her children were performing in it and they did such a wonderful job. The play itself told the stories of multiple hibakusha and the performers spanned a few generations.

## **Miyajima**

On August 9<sup>th</sup>, Mikiko-san, Barbara, and I finally made it out to Miyajima. We had been meaning to go for a while, but since it was so hot out for my entire visit, we kept postponing it. It



was still hot that day but thankfully it was occasionally cloudy. We took cable cars up to near the top of Mt. Misen, then we climbed the rest of the way and ate onigiri at the observatory. The view from there was spectacular, overlooking many of the surrounding islands.



The thought of ice cream kept us going on the long walk back to the cable car. By then, the sun had fully come out from the clouds so it was very hot out. After the cable car, we found our way to the Daisho-in Temple where we saw hundreds of unique jizos with hats. We “went on a pilgrimage” by walking over tiles from 88 different temple sites and even saw a monkey near the stairs up to the temple.



Other pictures from Miyajima:



The monkey is in the middle of the picture







## **Saying Goodbye (For Now)**

I had such a wonderful experience in Hiroshima with the World Friendship Center this summer. It was amazing to see everyone again and to meet so many new people. I am excited to bring my stories back to my family and friends at home, spreading what I've learned about peace and about the effects of the bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I really hope to visit again and to continue working with the World Friendship Center. I have made so many friends during my stay and I really hope to stay in touch with all of you. Thank you for this opportunity.

### August 6<sup>th</sup> Speech

Kaelee Parker

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Three years ago, I came to Hiroshima with my family for the first time to attend the World Friendship Center's 50th anniversary. My great-grandmother, Barbara, had founded the World Friendship Center, but until visiting this city, I knew very little about her and her peace efforts.

We were only here for two weeks, but those two weeks were life-changing for me. Listening to the Hibakusha stories of devastation and death imparted upon me the horrors of nuclear weapons and why we should never use them again.

After I went back to America, I always had a longing to return to Hiroshima and to help spread the desire for peace and nuclear disarmament. This summer, I had the opportunity to come back to the World Friendship Center as a volunteer for six weeks.

This opportunity has been allowing me to learn more about my great-grandmother and peace education. For 53 years, the World Friendship Center has been continuing her vision, advocating for peace and spreading awareness of Hibakusha and their stories.

My great-grandmother, and others who spread the ideals of peace, inspires me with hope every day. I believe that so much violence is caused by people who do not know or see the effects of what they do.

My great-grandmother helped people understand the tragedies of nuclear weapons and radiation through the stories and drawings of Hibakusha—not with the intent to provoke guilt, but so as to show the realities of war.

The more people who see the effects of war and nuclear weapons, through a lens of equality and empathy, the more peaceful the world will become. Barbara Reynolds's legacy continues and with it, lives like mine, continue to be changed.

