

Lafayette Author Pursues Peace One Heart at a Time

By Jennifer Wake



Lafayette resident and Hiroshima survivor Takashi Tanemori stands with guide dog Yuki outside of Serika Japanese Restaurant in Orinda's Theater Square Photo Jennifer Wake

On Aug. 6, 1945, Lafayette resident Takashi Thomas Tanemori was only 8 years old when he left his home and began to play hide and seek with his friends outside of his elementary school in Hiroshima, Japan. Minutes before school began, sirens sounded. The blast left Tanemori buried in the school's burning rubble.

After a gruesome exodus with his father, eldest sister and younger brother to Kotachi Village, 63 miles outside

of Hiroshima, the remaining family members found themselves ostracized from relatives. Living in a one-room shack, Tanemori's two other sisters, who had been living in a nearby village, soon joined them.

His father, who was against the violence of the war, died from radiation exposure nearly one month later, after making several return trips to Hiroshima to search for Tanemori's mother and baby sister. They were never found. The day after his father died, Tanemori's eldest sister lost her battle as well.

Following a ten-year struggle to survive, Tanemori – orphaned and hell-bent on revenge – immigrated to the United States in 1955, landing in a migrant labor camp outside of Fresno. Not long after, he found himself fighting for his life in a mental institution, subjected to frequent spinal taps and other painful procedures as doctors researched the effects of his radiation exposure. Through the tenderness of one of the nurses, Mary Furr, he was released and found peace.

Throughout his life, Tanemori has strived to live by his father's guiding principles: "Be strong and never be defeated by your own weaknesses; Be true to yourself; Do not be satisfied with yesterday's accomplishments; and Rise to new height each day."

He went on to earn two master's degrees in theology and spent many years working as a minister in the Baptist church, and later served as an official emissary of California to the Pacific Rim promoting commerce with Japan, sponsored by California's State Export Program.

Now age 69, Tanemori has published his first book, "Hiroshima: Bridge to Forgiveness," (Multicultural Books, 2007), which offers readers a glimpse into Japanese culture, the complexities of post-war life in a small Japanese village, and the hurdles Japanese immigrants faced when coming to the United States.

"The purpose of the book was to fulfill a promise I made to my father the night before he died," Tanemori said. "He told me to live my life for the benefit of others; my book shows how I saw hope in the path of Hiroshima."

The book not only tells a tale of survival of this young Japanese boy, but weaves a shining thread throughout its pages – of strength, discovery, isolation, and forgiveness. Not forgiveness for the bombing of Hiroshima, but forgiveness of a more intimate nature: The forgiveness between brother and sister, between heart and soul.

"The human soul is stronger than any nuclear bomb," Tanemori writes in his book. "The dramatic and emotionally charged nature of the story is inspirational testimony. It is my hope that this historical presentation may bring urgently required understanding that may lead us, as citizens of the world, to become more honest with ourselves and with our own history."

Tanemori will be at the Lafayette Book Store on Nov. 18 at 3 p.m. for a book signing. "Hiroshima: Bridge to Forgiveness" can also be purchased online at Amazon.com.

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