

# The Hibakusha Tour: Reflections of a Day on This Blue

By Emily Morrison

The first thing that came to mind, as peace walkers traced the symbolic perimeters of possible nuclear annihilation represented by the fence that encircles Seneca Army Depot, was water.

Five of us went the distance with them, nearly ten miles in the relentless heat, hoping to record in words and visual images the spirit of the rally, march, Mass, and series of speeches and ecumenical religious services that marked the fortieth anniversary of the bombing of two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Mounted state police officers, a few cars, and several shuttle vans accompanied the two divergent groups of walkers, who split off in opposite directions in order to completely circumnavigate the depot, reputed storage site for a large number of nuclear warheads. Ahead of us, the double imprints of horses' hooves in fresh tar marked off our path, alongside patchwork fields of corn, clover, and Queen Anne's lace. At the front of the parade, someone was beating a drum. The hollow, monotonous cadence suggested a funeral cortege.

Water could be had, provided by support drivers at intervals along the route. But we somehow managed to find thirst uppermost in our minds: the unalleviated thirst of hundreds of thousands of hibakusha, or survivors, for

whatever period of time, of the atomic blasts.

In Peace Park at Hiroshima, a fountain has been dedicated to the tens of thousands of initial survivors of the bombing, most of whom died days later begging for water. The shrine was described during a reading given by Paul Wenderlich of Seneca Falls, as part of the Interfaith Prayer Service celebrated the morning of the commemorative rally. Wenderlich read from a brief article by William J. Grimm, M.M., that appeared in a recent issue of Maryknoll Magazine.

In a small museum in Peace Park, relics of the devastation stand as moving testaments to the horrors of the nuclear age. "Twisted steel, things chemically altered by radiation," Grimm enumerates. "A lump of molten glass — was it a bottle, a window? Someone was touching it or holding it because the remains of the hand are still there. A boy's lunch box still filled with a rock-like lump of blackened rice charcoal. What of the boy? So many quiet screams."

When Grimm was in Peace Park, he saw a little girl skipping around the base of the fountain, laughing joyously. "I think," he concludes, "the thousands of children who stopped laughing that day would be glad to hear her."

At Sampson State Park, site of last weekend's rally, a shrine with a somewhat different focus was stationed near the

speakers' platform. Called "St. Francis' Instrument of Peace" by its creator, sculptor John Lyon Paul of Burdett, the shrine is a large purple pushcart with an assemblage of strikingly juxtaposed objects encased behind its glassed-in facade.

"I started it about a year ago as a collage," says Paul, "when I saw a human target in a store — a hunting and fishing tackle place. The piece is really about something like resurrection, or, better still, the transformation of each of us."

The shrine's central figure is a target with the face of an eight-year-old black child wearing a superimposed Franciscan beard and tonsure, its heart marked off as a bull's-eye by a series of converging circles. Around it is a bizarre shooting gallery comprised of the apparently moving targets of human figures wearing halos, a reference to an image from Ingmar Bergman's classic film, "The Seventh Seal."

"In Europe, people move shrines around in crowds," Paul points out. The wagon, which Paul built himself, refers to both a circus wagon and a funeral hearse. "The inside of the carriage is meant to look architectural, vaulted, like a church," he adds. "The outside is meant to look like a vehicle. We're all vehicles; we, too, can be pushed or pulled."

The staves, he points out, would be too small for a pony, and thus the wagon would

have to be pulled or moved around by a person — in atonement, perhaps, for some unimaginable sin? "Everything is a target," Paul concludes. "And you can't think about target without thinking about aiming somebody."

At Hiroshima, where the unimaginable took the form of hundreds of thousands of innocent human targets, the Peace Park shrine inscribed with the following memorial, etched into a large stone standing near Ground Zero: "To those who died, rest in peace. We will not repeat the sin."

The place where, in the words of Father Grimm, "hell once opened its gates" was on the home of Fumimaro Maruoka, in 1945 student in the first year of Hiroshima Prefectural First Middle School. Now 50, Maruoka appeared at the August 10 rally with a delegation of Japanese visitors making the Mid-Atlantic leg of the Hibakusha Peace Tour, part of a nationwide campaign by peace organizers and Japanese A-bomb survivors to put an end to the international nuclear arms race.

Maruoka was accompanied by Teruo Morimoto, a hibakusha from Nagasaki; Misoko Ishiguro of the New Japan Women's Association; interpreter Rieko Asato; and Leslie Cagan, program coordinator of Mobilization for Survival, a national coalition of 170 local peace and justice organizations.

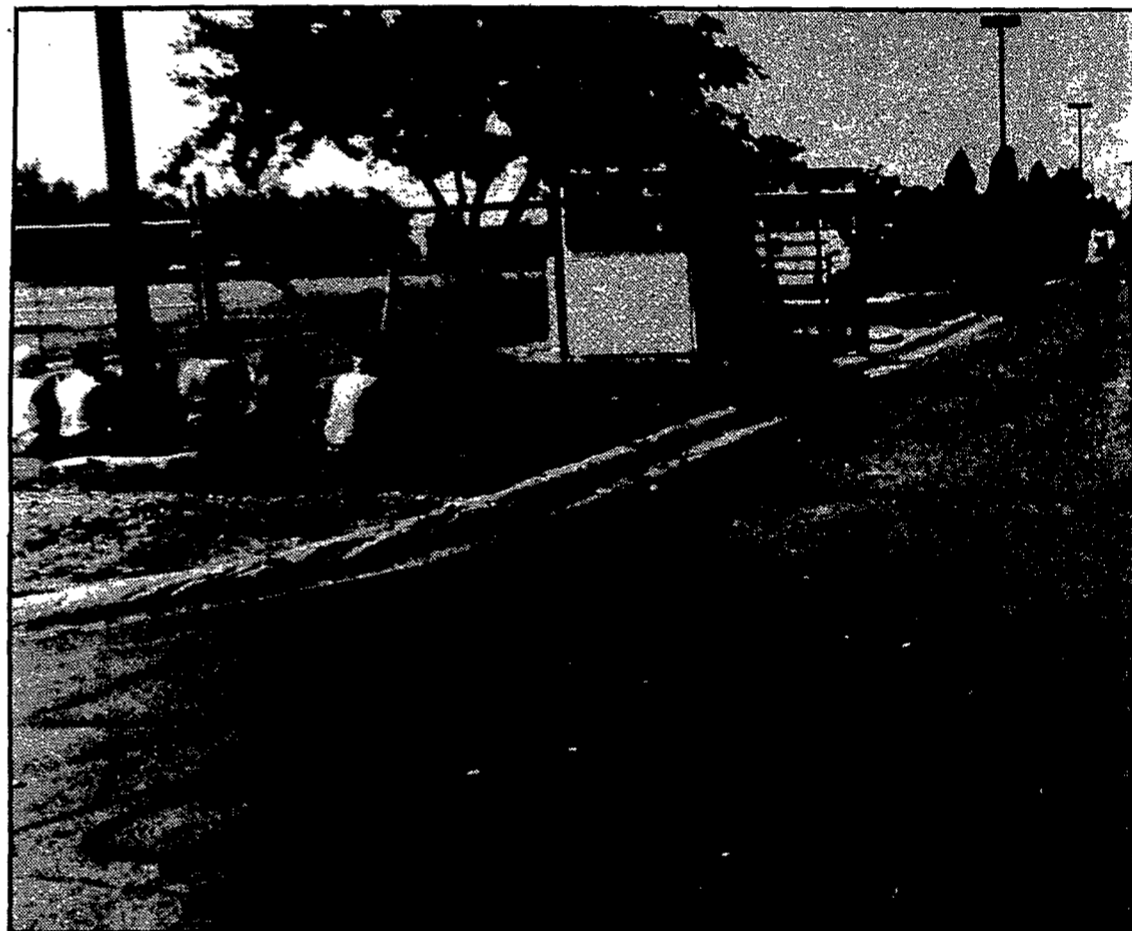


The southern group of marchers, numbering 175, head down the home stretch along Route 96A to end at Sampson State Park.

Bruce Wang

### Editor's Note:

The references to Vishnu in Emily Morrison's poem, "Lifelines, Deathflowers" (printed on page 1) are intended to suggest the creators of the atomic bomb — in particular, American nuclear physicist Robert J. Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer was allegedly heard to quote, after witnessing the effects of a test of one of his early efforts, the words of the Hindu god Vishnu from the *Bhagavad Gita*, "Now I have become death, the destroyer of worlds."



The focal point of the peace rally on Saturday, August 12, was the Seneca Army Depot main gate, which allegedly houses the largest store of nuclear warheads in the nation. From the gate and the



Kevin Mogg, from Rochester, dramatically interprets for the hearing impaired the strong words of Elizabeth Holtzman during the rally after the march.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal



Framed by the peace sign, an enthusiastic crowd