

There is a spring season, even in Hiroshima

CHIBA-SHI, Japan — Kazuko sat with her eyes squeezed shut as hipless faces, dripping skin, and other horrors of the Hiroshima A-bomb tragedy flickered across the screen. I, however, felt strangely numb. All the faces looked so much alike, and so different from me.

Before we entered Hiroshima's Peace Park A-bomb Museum, I was already depressed. It was a cold, wet, dreary day, and Kazuko had joined Renee and me just to escape from the rain.

"I don't want to go in there," she's told us earlier. "I'm not ready yet."

My Japanese teacher had told me about her experience at the museum as a young girl, and I was also apprehensive before entering.

"My friend and I held each other and cried as we left," Mrs. Hasegawa had said. She wondered if I really knew what I was getting into.

The aftermath of the bomb had been filmed, the movie narrator explained, but the U.S. government had confiscated most of the film of human suffering. The blurry photographs and film still remaining were repeated over and over again throughout both movies and the museum exhibit.

I agreed the horror of the A-bomb should never be repeated; but as I watched the movie, I resented the portrayal of my country as the villain. I remembered what I'd read about the Japanese occupation of China and the southern Asian countries. It appalled me that although most Japanese students know everything about the A-bomb tragedy, most schools teach very little about the brutality of the Japanese army while in occupied territory.

View from Japan

KAREN CUBIE



In the museum, I studied the diorama of the city after the explosion, and saw how the destruction stretched for miles. I located the site of the Inn we'd slept in the previous night. Every part of Hiroshima we'd seen so far had been utterly destroyed.

A display of keloids — huge, lumpy tumors removed from the bodies of victims, was arrayed in glass jars near the tumor-scarred carcass of a horse. Items melted down and sealed together by the incinerating heat of the explosion or the radioactive fires which later raged across the city were laid out in a glass case in the middle of the room.

A particularly chilling exhibit of human bone fused with china plate sent shivers down my spine, but I still couldn't identify with the victims. I felt like I was walking through Madame Tussaud's London Chamber of Horrors or a bizarre science fiction museum instead of through an exhibit of an actual historic event.

The previous Sunday had been Easter, and as I sat through the special Easter sermon, I experienced a similar sense of detachment. I realized as much as I believed in the reality of Christ's death and resurrection, I couldn't identify with his agony

and suffering on the cross. I couldn't completely comprehend why such a death was necessary.

As I rounded the corner to the end of the exhibit where a marble bank stoop displayed the indelible shadow of a sitting man liquidated by the blast, a shaft of bright light filtered in through the exit.

I stepped out into the glass enclosed foyer and was overwhelmed by the bright, sunny scene before me. An arched cenotaph I hadn't really looked at before rose like Noah's rainbow over the rose-tinted ruins of the Gennako Dome, a city building left standing after the bomb. Children crossed pigeons across the park, and cherry blossom worshippers celebrated spring, flowers and the renewal of life.

As I walked toward the ruined building, I finally began to relate to the victims. I thought of the city employees surprised by the blast, and I remembered employees of the Taunton city office building I'd frequently visited while working as a reporter in another town. I remembered the bustle of activity and hum of typewriters, and the young clerk who was trying to get a day off to shop for maternity clothes. I realized the dome had housed the same busyness, and I suddenly felt sorrow for the lives destroyed so unexpectedly with a bomb dropped by my country.

Near a bridge in the park, I found a plaque commemorating the junior high girls and other volunteer workers caught near the center of the blast and burned to an unrecognizable point. I imagined them racing to the cooling river where they drowned, and the bloated bodies floating along the charred surroundings.

"These people lived long enough to



The Gennako Dome, above a city building left as it stood the atomic blast at Hiroshima

know they were dead, without understanding how or why it had happened." I thought, and I felt frightened for my own life as I remembered all the newer, more powerful weapons developed since.

I studied the plaque and the empty husk of a building, and again I thought of Christ and his agony on the cross. But then the new city risen from the ashes of the old, and the cluster of people celebrat-

ing spring among the ruins reminding me of the hope and forgiveness I loved Good Friday with Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday.

And as I walked beneath the blossoms hanging across the street, I thanked God for the renewal of hope which spring brings even to