

## **Emily Mitchell's Journey of Discovery to Hiroshima, Part 7 *Returning home from Japan; another generation responds*** (As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on March 25, 2008)

This is the last in the series of Emily Mitchell's journal entries as she completes her journey of discovery to Hiroshima, Japan. She has gone there to learn how she, an Oak Ridge native, feels about being from the city where the uranium 235 was separated for the atomic bomb that was dropped on that city.

She wanted to experience Hiroshima personally and decide for herself how to process the facts but also the feelings generated by a personal journey of discovery. As she has said, she did not do it to change anyone's mind. She did it for herself. We have been able to virtually go with her on this unique journey through her candid and well-written journal entries.

We have read about her feelings as she experienced the various aspects of Hiroshima and two other Japanese cities that might have been bombed, but for the weather or the mere choice of a single man. We have seen her react to the memorials and to the people. We have even had the opportunity to see her react to comments from readers.

Now let's finish the journey with her.

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January 8, 2008

Maybe Yesterday - somewhere over the Pacific Ocean

If you travel far enough in the same direction, you'll end up back where you started.

Ten days ago I was on my way to Japan, prolonging the sunset. Now I'm going East, chasing the sunrise, hastening the night.

I left Oak Ridge looking for answers, for reconciliation. Somewhere in me a seed of curiosity had been growing, sown by the whims of history and destiny. I went to reap. Guilt, pride, confusion, perhaps all unwarranted, hijacked feelings from others' actions, rooted me into inherited responsibility.

I left Hiroshima before the sun came up. A drowsy haze of city lights reflected blue-gray off the clouds. I left a piece of myself in Hiroshima, maybe the fruits of that initial realization.

I left with a peace of Hiroshima in me. I felt, as I rode in a taxi for the last time by the Peace Park, and the monuments that hold true to their names, instilling calm in a place that has every right to harbor resentment. I feel, even as I write, my right hand going numb.

Usually, when I try to suppress sadness, my hand starts to tingle, as if my tears, being refused release from my eyes, have welled up instead in my fingers. When that feeling comes, the physical compensation for emotional impotence, I know that something has to change.

This time, though, I can't do anything. It can't be helped. Shogunai. At least not right now.

I wish I could explain how it felt to be there. I wish I could tell you what it was like to walk for hours exploring the city that I had so many times explored in my imagination. I wish I could describe how it feels to leave.

On August 6, 1945, 140,000 people died, and Hiroshima was reborn. I will always remember her as she was at the turn of 2008: A phoenix city thriving from the ashes of its unique and tragic history.

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But there's something invaluable about going home to the lakes and trees that infused my childhood memories. Back to the scientific undertones of another unique past, one that helped the world through an irreparable rebirth into the Atomic Age.

Whether this change was good or evil, is for us (each new generation) to decide. Or maybe, it is the prerogative of human reason to decide not to decide, provided that as we step into the future, we keep one foot in Hiroshima, remembering "that which must never be forgotten."

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Whew! Now don't you agree that this series of journal entries was certainly something real, something tangible, something not many get to experience. See what I mean about Emily Mitchell? See why I have come to appreciate her so much? One of these days, we just might say, "I knew that author when she was writing in *The Oak Ridger* about her trip to Hiroshima," as she accepts some award for her writing ability.

I have faithfully published Emily's every word without editorializing any more than absolutely necessary. Now I feel compelled to make a few personal comments.

First, I am not sure of the 140,000 number of deaths, I have seen several numbers, most of them lower. However, I am positive about the number of deaths from the Tokyo fire-bombings.

There were far more deaths there than both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This is a most important point to remember when questioning the advisability of using atomic bombs to end World War II.

That decision actually saved many more lives than it took and also enabled many American men to return home who were otherwise headed for an invasion of Japan. Such an invasion would have undoubtedly resulted in many, many more deaths of both American boys and Japanese.

To help put it in perspective I will cite Bill Wilcox's, *An Overview of the History of Y-12 1942-1992*, page 16, "March 9 [1945] – To try to force an end to the war in Japan, Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay works out a new strategy in that theater of firebombing. On March 9, 425 B-29 bombers, each the size of half a football field, are loaded with 10,000 pounds of jelled gasoline and sent over the urban area of Tokyo this night staggered in altitude from 4,000 to 9,000 feet. The fires destroy 16.7 sq. mi. and kill 100,000 people, injure hundreds of thousands. More citizens are killed the night of March 9 than in the great fire of London in 1666, in Chicago's fire of 1871, in San Francisco's 1906, or at Hiroshima or Nagasaki. The firebombing of Japan then continues night after night into the summer; 63 Japanese cities are destroyed totally or partially, 485 B-29's are lost with 3,000 U.S. combat personnel" Wilcox references Rhodes, *Dark Sun*, p.21 and *American Heritage Magazine*, May-June 1995, p.82, where it is said that 120,000 were killed and wounded."

So, it might well be said that the atomic bomb stopped something that was destined to continue killing huge numbers of Japanese through massive bombing raids and huge numbers of American soldiers through a brutal and inevitable planned invasion of the Japanese mainland. Such was that horrible war! Literally thousands were dying routinely...it had to stop!

I truly believe that President Truman chose the most effective means to end that cruel war. I am proud to be a part of the city where the uranium 235 was separated that created Little Boy. I am equally proud to have been a part of winning the Cold War and maintaining America's freedom over the past years and even now.

Being a Vietnam veteran, I take pride in our heritage of fighting when our government deems it necessary even in the occasions where I personally see situations that are less than ideal and

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may even be hard to understand, still I support our government. Part of being a U.S. citizen is the trust we place in our leaders to make decisions with regard to the nation's wellbeing and the world's safety. That is why it is so important to exercise our voting rights and to work diligently to promote and encourage responsible leadership in our elected offices. We each must take personal responsibility for electing our government leaders. We the people ARE the determining factor.

It has been a pleasure to bring you the challenge of a new generation's impressions. I have enjoyed the feedback, both positive and expressions of concern. I hope you have sincerely read Emily's journals with an open mind. I believe we can all learn from her journey.

Next week we will hear from Emily one last time as she summarizes her feelings after a bit of time has passed. She will also reflect on this series and its attending feedback. Join us then as Emily reflects again on the whole experience of traveling to Hiroshima as an Oak Ridge native.



Emily's friends in Japan

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Peace clock in Hiroshima - one monument among many

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Hiroshima – city reborn, but with intense memories set in monuments in the center of the city

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One of many bridges under which victims sought shelter and now where tourist view river