

*Presented at annual Hiroshima Nagasaki vigil in Ashland, OR on 8.6.26,  
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Christ*

When I was ten years old, the elementary school I attended in Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada had a Remembrance Day Assembly where among those who were invited were veterans of the First World War. By my reckoning, it was 67 years since the war ended—an eternity for a ten-year-old. These men wore their uniforms, their heads held beneath formal visored or garrison caps. Medals and regalia hung from their breasts. They were among the last witnesses whose eyes had seen, and whose bodies bore the score of the cruelty of that war. We marked the silence and remembered, their memory more vivid and more accurate than my own.

Here we are, gathered on the morning of August 6, 81 years after a B-29 bomber named *Enola Gay* dropped what they called “Little Boy” on Hiroshima, engulfing the city in fire and light. *Enola Gay* was the name of pilot Col. Paul Tibbets’s mother. In my own folk etymology, her name means “happy alone.” This Enola flew off into the sky, chasing the sun, leaving her “Little Boy” to wreak havoc below.

It was the first weapon of its kind, but not the last. Three days later, another bomb fell to the earth, leveling Nagasaki. Since that time, these weapons have proliferated, first among the world’s two great superpowers, and then among other nations who fell under the sway of a mutually assured seduction—the power to smite thine enemies from the face of the earth.

There are still witnesses to Hiroshima. Among *us* is our own Hideko Tamura Snider, who saw with her eyes the terror of an atomic bomb when she was only 10 years old. Her witness reminds us both of the

horror of a nuclear holocaust and the resilience of those who survived—a hope that would not die and seeds of peace that would plume to peace hereafter. If you have read her memoir, you know that though she tasted tragedy that day, losing her mother to the bomb, Hideko was not destroyed at Hiroshima. Like her beloved peace trees, she blossomed into a resilient advocate for peace. But when those who saw, heard, smelt, and touched are gone, who will tell this story? Will we remember what happened when we have no one who was there to tell us?

One of the most sacred things humans do is remember. In my own religious tradition, we eat bread and drink wine to remember a state-sponsored execution of an innocent man. My Jewish friends gather around a table to remember God's liberation from bondage and tyranny and the ways they survived. Yet Christians and Jews are not alone in remembering. Every tradition's holy days—their feasts and celebrations, their fasts and pilgrimages, every visit to an ancestral shrine, every floating lantern—are tied to the act of remembering. Without memory, none of us know who we are.

My non-religious friends remember too. Whether it is in marking the days that live in infamy, or the freedom, gratitude, and joy in our civic celebrations, we remember. We write our histories and compose our odes to people and places and events that formed us. Even on our happiest days, we carry a sense of loss for those who went before us.

Memory is not nostalgia for a bygone age. Nor is it mere despair over who we are and what we have done. We remember the past so that we can live in light of it, embracing new futures and new possibilities. We live in a world that carries the trauma of what we have done to one another. The Doctrine of Discovery. Slavery. Kristallnacht. The Shoah. The Nakba. The Bomb. How wonderful it would be to turn the clock

back and inhabit a world where none of this happened. But that is a different world.

This morning we hold silence together and remember. And as we remember, the silence holds us. We wrestle with the cold calculus that called this tragedy into being, where the lives of our US combatants were valued above the innocent in Hiroshima prefecture. We join our hearts with those who have died. We also join the survivor's song, singing out, "Never. Never again."

We remember. And through our memory, we know who we are: the ones who take swords and beat them into plowshares; the ones who refashion spears into pruning hooks. How much better is it to nourish life instead of wielding the weapons that would end it. The annals of history tell of destruction and death, suffering and violence. And because we remember, we can dare to dream and dare to live out our dreams. Another world is possible.