

2017 Mayors for Peace Youth Exchange for Peace: Support Program for "HIROSHIMA and PEACE"

Alice Parent (Montréal, Canada)

“What does Hiroshima mean?”

More than once, our teachers asked us this question. “What does Hiroshima mean?”

After 10 days spent together, we, the Hiroshima & Peace participants, stood together in a circle, holding hands. One by one, we were told to summarize our experience in one word. Memory. Peace. Friendship. History. Conflict. Forgiveness. Nuclear weapons. Hibakusha. Identity. Disaster. Reconstruction. Death. Hope. Metropolis. Okonomiyaki. Each one of these words is heavy with meaning (except maybe for “okonomiyaki”, but Hiroshima would not be the same without them). Each word is, in itself, an answer, one of the numerous meanings of Hiroshima.

When most people outside Japan hear the word *Hiroshima* they immediately think about the nuclear bomb that was launched on the city on August 6th 1945. When I told my grandmother that I was going to Hiroshima, she said “Oh, I remember Hiroshima.” As she was recalling the bombing, she was imagining the burned-down city, its inhabitants running in despair, dying in the unimaginable heat. To many people in the world, *Hiroshima* is still burned stones, dangling skin, charred pieces of children’s clothing, falling hair, melted glass. To them *Hiroshima* has but one meaning, it is *Hiroshima the disaster*.

In my Hiroshima & Peace classes, I learned about *Hiroshima*.

However, to other people, the word Hiroshima has an entirely different meaning. Hiroshima is the vibrant Hondori street, the green Peace Park, a tramway ride, the best okonomiyaki of Japan, the joyful and welcoming Hiroshima citizens. To many, the City of Hiroshima is home.

By living with a host family and by hanging out with students from Hiroshima, I learned about Hiroshima.

In this unique metropolis, *Hiroshima* and Hiroshima cohabit. One can’t exist without the other. Their past, their present and their future are intertwined. After the bombing of the city, the complete reconstruction of *Hiroshima* made it what it is today. And, similarly, Hiroshima is still home to the disaster: it is witnessed, for example, each time one passes by the A-Bomb dome. There is really only one Hiroshima, the International City of Peace and Culture.

By going to the Peace Memorial museum and by attending the Peace Memorial Ceremony, I learned about a city fighting for a nuclear-free tomorrow and about Hiroshima.

By listening to the Hibakusha testimonies, I learned about the importance of memory and remembrance, about the importance of passing down of these memories and about Hiroshima.

One class particularly marked me. It was a testimony of the A-Bomb given by Mrs. Ogura Keiko. She told the class something very powerful: “I told you my story. From now on, it is also your story. By hearing it, you became a witness. It is now your turn to share it with others.” And share it I will. Since I came back, I have been thinking of project ideas, with the ultimate goal of promoting a nuclear-free world. For now, the biggest project that is brewing in my mind is the “A-Bombed trees in Montreal” project. There are NGOs in Hiroshima providing seeds from A-Bombed trees (trees that survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima). I would like to order such seeds and, with the approval of the Mayor, plant them in a park or in

the botanical garden. They would be a symbol of both *Hiroshima* and Hiroshima: descendants of the disaster, but living proof of the city's reconstruction. The trees are bearers of Hiroshima memories and are part of Hiroshima's legacy: they have the power to educate the park or the garden's visitors on the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima. My other project is to give a conference about what I learned in Hiroshima and about Mayors for Peace in my home university. I would like to use this opportunity to share the numerous pictures I took in Hiroshima.

It is also important to mention that Hiroshima & Peace isn't only about nuclear weapons, it is not only about the Hibakusha and their testimonies, it is not only about Hiroshima's legacy. According to me, Hiroshima & Peace is first and foremost about its participants. It is about understanding oneself, understanding one's country. It is about understanding others and their countries. It is about building bridges and reuniting people from different parts of the globe towards one common goal: understanding the mistakes of the past, passing down the memories, promoting a nuclear-free world and a peaceful future.

Once more, I want to thank Mayors for Peace and Hiroshima City University for letting me participate in the Hiroshima & Peace program. It was an absolutely amazing, enlightening, unique and unparalleled experience.

平和を考える場所、広島。 *A place to think about peace – Hiroshima.*

平和を誓う場所、広島。 *A place to commit to peace - Hiroshima*

未来を考えるスタートの場所、広島。 *A place to start thinking about the future – Hiroshima.*

Excerpt for the Peace Memorial Ceremony

Sincerely,
Alice Parent