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A Prayer for Peace — Sadako's Paper Cranes —

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Even today, 72 years after the war, the Children's Peace Monument looks out over Hiroshima. Every time I fold a paper crane, I remember a girl. She is Sadako Sasaki, the model for the Children's Peace Monument. Sadako was exposed to atomic bomb radiation and died of leukemia 10 years after the atomic bomb was dropped. I learned of her when I was a 6th grader in elementary school. Her life was introduced to us in an English textbook. I clearly remember experiencing an unbearable sorrow when I learned about her life.

Why did I feel so much pain? It was because Sadako died when she was 12 years old exactly the same age as I was at the time. She was unable to see her friends, go to school, nor would not live long against her wish. When she was diagnosed with leukemia, everything she had taken for granted in her life was taken away. I could not help but think "If I were Sadako..." However, her painful life in the hospital was not her whole life. There was one thing that gave her hope for living and motivated her to overcome the disease. It is the paper crane that the girl on the Children's Peace Monument is holding up in her hands. The paper cranes that Sadako folded to the last moment outnumbered 1,000. I don't think that Sadako kept folding paper cranes for just killing time in the hospital room. I feel that she put her strong wish to cure her disease and live at any cost into each and every paper crane. Those paper cranes have become a manifestation of a prayer for peace, having been sent out to the world.

On August 6th of this year, something unexpected occurred. It broke a barrier again standing between America and Japan, and surprised all of Japan. On that day, one of Sadako's paper cranes was donated to a museum established at the site of the historic Wendover Army Airfield in the state of Utah, U.S. where a hangar for the Enola Gay, Boeing B-29 bomber that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima has been kept. That means the day finally came: that a paper crane was gifted to the very site where the bomber which carried the bomb dropped on Hiroshima took off from. At the ceremony,

Sadako's nephew, Yuji, said, "It is really meaningful to donate a paper crane in the name of peace to the site where the Enola Gay actually took off from." There are pros and cons to the donation of the paper crane, but consider the situation immediately after the war. Could you have donated it then? In the post war times, people's wish to seek peace must have been intensified. Even so, we, those who have no experience of war cannot understand how scary it is though we know the fact something terrible happened in the past. In the opinion poll for young people aged 18 to 19 taken by NHK in June this year, 14% responded that they did not know about the day when the war ended. Perhaps, the most awful thing for us living in contemporary time is to forget about the incident of war in the past because the time we live in now is so peaceful.

On May 27, last year, the then U.S. President Barack Obama addressed a speech at the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima. It was the first time in history that a sitting president commemorated war-victims in Hiroshima. It was an event which drew attention from all over Japan, and the world. Despite being the head of a nuclear power, the then President Obama strongly advocated for a denuclearized world. His attendance turned to be a strong message for the prevention of recurrence of any war. I will never forget the scene where he and a *Hibakusha* (A-bomb victim) hugged each other and shed tears. The tears were not out of hatred nor of a grudge held 72 years ago. They were pure tears of relief. When enemies that once killed and injured each other hold hands, we should start thinking about what war really is like.

Just in Hiroshima alone, around 140,000 people lost their lives to the atomic bomb. The accurate number is still unknown. Many people like Sadako passed away from diseases caused by radiation exposure 10 or 20 years on. I had only ever heard the word, *Hibaku* (exposed to radiation) used in regards to the atomic bombing. I was convinced it was its only use. Nevertheless, on March 11, 2011, Fukushima Prefecture where I live became a nuclear-affected site due to the accident at the nuclear power station triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Radioactive substances were more damaging than expected, and there are many people who cannot return home even now. Apart from returning, there may be some people who will be suffering from symptoms of radiation-induced diseases over the years like Sadako. Such concern drifted through my mind. This is not at all another's problem.

We have to think whatever can be beneficial for reconstruction and start whatever we can. It is the first step for reconstruction. After Sadako passed away, her classmates and family members devotedly collected donations, and eventually, three years later, The

Children's Peace Monument was built with a prayer for the reconstruction of Hiroshima, commemoration for victims and a wish for peace. Why does Sadako as a symbol of peace have the power to advocate peace to so many people? I think it is because she was an ordinary girl. She played with her friends at school, learned things and laughed with the people around her.

Dreams and the future that she was holding on to were all taken away by the war. Not only Sadako but many girls were victimized by the war. Sadako's paper cranes will continue to say that nobody is allowed to deprive ordinary girls of any dream, future or wish for living that they naturally have, by war which is man-made.

The average age of the survivors of the war is now over 80 years old. Even though it must be painful just to remember the war, those who have experienced it often speak out about what happened. One day, I had an opportunity to talk to a *Hibakusha*. When I asked her why she was able to tell us about her experience, she said, "It is my mission as someone who survived the war because my war will never end until my last moment". This is the survivor's destiny (karma). Her war was yet to end. — At this moment, many things overlapped in my mind. I found myself trying to turn away from the disaster and unconsciously tried to forget about it. Yet, it is out of question to avoid looking at the past. It is our mission to keep remembering the past war, talk about memories of the disaster and link it to the future.

It's because of that, that I want to become a person like Sadako, who wholeheartedly hoped for peace, and valued dignity of life and cherished the lives we take for granted.

One by one, Sadako's small paper cranes have been sent out around the world. They have become a ray of light directing the world to a nuclear-free and peaceful future. May the whole world be a land of peace someday.