

Hiroshima Mon Amour Amidst Rays of Hope: 2023

This year has brought us a seemingly endless stream and dark and bloody news, but a few bright spots offer some relief. In the face of futility, the peace movement still stands, wary but unafraid of the odds. After all, there's nothing to lose. As Gandhi once said, "You never know. Sometimes you win."

As readers of this newsletter know, this year's G-7 summit met in Hiroshima and featured a ceremonial tribute to the victims of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. President Biden laid a wreath while laying an egg by failing to apologize for the bombings. There was a ritual pledge to "strengthen disarmament and non-proliferation efforts, towards the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons," laughable on its face considering the ongoing development of nuclear weapons planned to be operable into the 2090s and Japan's doubling of its military spending, a move in the works ever since the Shinzo Abe days. For over half a century, none of the Non-Proliferation Treaty's signatories have bothered to honor their disarmament obligations under article 6 of that Treaty. So much for G-7 members Britain, France, and the United States. To top it off, the G-7 also issued a statement in support of continued nuclear deterrence. And so the long-running talk of ultimate goals—a dose of the tranquilizing drug of gradualism if there ever was one—is nothing more than cant.

Hiroshima bombing survivors put the hypocrisy involved in its proper place. Setsuko Thurlow, age 91, said, "I felt no pulse, no warmth, from the voices of the G-7 leaders," calling the summit "a huge failure," and blasting it as "blasphemy against atomic bomb survivors." Jiro Hamasumi asked, "What was the point of hosting it in Hiroshima?" he went on to say, "As a survivor of an atomic bombing, I am outraged," and added, "Nuclear weapons are an absolute evil that cannot coexist with humans."

Will any such statements have any effect? Consider this well-known example of what one person can do. In 1982, ten year old Samantha Smith was worried about nuclear weapons and afraid that the Soviet Union would start a nuclear war to conquer the world. At the time, US-Soviet relations were especially tense. With her parents' encouragement, she wrote Soviet leader Yuri Andropov. No reply came, so she wrote a letter to Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. That was enough to get a reply from Andropov, who invited her to visit Russia. And so she and her parents went.

In his letter, Andropov assured Samantha that people in Russia were equally worried about nuclear war and wanted peace between the two nations. In spite of difficulties which still lay ahead, that contact, which led to Samantha and her parents' two week visit to the Soviet Union with Samantha as Andropov's special guest, was the beginning of the end of the Cold War. In turn, that led to a sharp reduction in the two nations' nuclear stockpiles.

Think about it. This is what a ten year old girl was able to accomplish. Did anyone else do more? On June 5 this year, there was a ceremony in South Portland to honor Samantha Smith. Thanks to the work of Veterans for Peace and the help of South Portland's present and former mayors and state senator Anne Carney, Maine's department of transportation got the authority to name

one of South Portland's streets Samantha Smith Way. It's just off Route 1, on the way to Route 295, where plenty of drivers can see it.

Though we've let more than enough out of our Pandora's box, hope's still there. In June, the US Conference of Mayors called for an end to the nuclear arms race, as it has for the past several years. Tired of great power stalling and empty talk, more and more nations worldwide are doing the same. And by way of lifting our spirits, the Golden Rule sailed to various ports in the northeast, visiting Portland and Bath early this summer. So keep hope alive, and help it grow. After all, what we have for a harvest is not far off.

If you'd like some happy and inspiring summer reading, pick up Lena Nelson's *America's Youngest Ambassador: the Cold War Story of Samantha Smith's Lasting Message for Peace*. And while you're at it, read John Hersey's *Hiroshima*. If you've read it already, read it again. It will put everything into perspective.

John Raby, August 2023