



# **A Dimly Burning Wick, Memoir from the Ruins of Hiroshima**

*Sadako Okuda*

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In an agonizing diary, a survivor of the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima relates the horror of searching through smoldering rubble for signs of her family and documents for the world the selfless compassion of the youngest victims. Sadako Okuda tenderly describes and gives voice to the wounded children who even in their final hours gently cared for their siblings, parents, grandparents, and friends.

The children she tried to save stunned her with their dignity and enduring will to help others, to hold their families together, and to avoid bitterness and blame. An introduction and supporting essays provide a context in history and social psychology.

*A Dimly Burning Wick* is searing in its emotional impact. Focusing on the stories of children and their distinctive perspective of this horrific event, the book was taken from the diary of a young Japanese woman written as the events were unfolding, rather than the recollections of witnesses recorded months or years in a more detached or clinical style. Okuda's memoir is one of kindness amid horror. While struggling with her anger at the horrific events to which she bears witness, Okuda ultimately realizes that the answer lies in working for peace.

As children left for school on the morning of August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb exploded some 2,000 feet above the city of Hiroshima, causing unspeakable devastation to hundreds of thousands of civilians. In *A Dimly Burning Wick*, Okuda shares her personal testimony as she searched for her young niece and nephew in the smoking ruins, in a place that can only be described as 'a scar that must have been made by the fingernail of the devil himself.'

During the eight days of her agonizing search, Okuda witnessed first-hand the cruelty and ugliness of war. Mothers and grandparents desperately searched for lost children, wounded children cared for one another, and human beings were reduced to shells of their former selves. Okuda could do little more than offer the innocent children whom she encountered her compassion, tenderness, and love.

Essays exploring the official story explaining why the bomb was dropped, and the ways in which the event is remembered, are contributed by Nobel Peace Prize Nominee Sok-Hon Ham and preeminent scholars such as historian Ronald Takaki of the University of California at Berkeley (winner of the American Book Award) and sociologist Paul Joseph, Director of the Peace and Justice Studies Program at Tufts University.

Several books about Hiroshima appeared on the 50th anniversary, about ten years ago. However, those books are gradually going out of print. Even at a time of heightened international concern regarding nuclear proliferation, we are losing access to the memories of the survivors of nuclear attacks. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused unspeakable devastation, yet our collective memory of this catastrophic event has faded over time. Okuda shakes us out of our apathy with her personal testimony of the senseless suffering that tore families apart and ruined the lives of the children of Hiroshima.

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