

Hiroshima bomb survivor finds peace through forgiveness

By Kawehi Haug
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Takashi Tanemori has a lot he could be bitter about.

His father, mother, grandparents and two sisters were killed in the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima. He survived a suicide attempt, two heart attacks and stomach cancer, and now is blind as a result of nuclear radiation from the attack.

But Tanemori isn't bitter. He isn't even angry.

"Everything I've experienced, each instant, has brought me to where I am now," said the 65-year-old man. "I realized my life was spared for a reason."

Tanemori is in Hawai'i to take part in the International Forgiveness Day Festival. The festival will be held today at the University of Hawai'i. Drama troupe Eth-Noh-Tec will perform "Takashi's Dream," a 35-minute drama based on Tanemori's life.

Tanemori, of Lafayette, Calif., said despite it all, he's happy with

Forgiveness Festival

► The Forgiveness Day Festival with Eth-Noh-Tec, Frank DeLima and Takashi Tanemori will be held 1-4:30 p.m. today at the East-West Center, Hawai'i Imin International Conference Center, Kenoi Room. Free. Call 587-5712.

his life.

Tanemori was 8 years old and less than a mile from ground zero when his parents and much of his family were killed the day his hometown of Hiroshima was bombed.

When he was 18, Tanemori emigrated to America as an embittered teenager, hating the nation that had destroyed his family.

"I hated Americans," Tanemori said.

He wanted people to suffer as he

had suffered.

But he says on Aug. 5, 1985 — 40 years after the bombing of Hiroshima — Tanemori stopped hating.

He was on his way to an antinuclear rally when the clouds over San Francisco Bay triggered his memory of the atom bomb.

"I pulled over and started crying. The memories were so vivid. I saw the whole thing again in my mind and I wanted so badly to hurt the people who killed my family," said Tanemori.

But the memory of the atomic bombing and its mushroom cloud wasn't the only one that came to mind while Tanemori sat in his car on the San Francisco Bay Bridge.

"Then I remembered the words of my father — 'Respect all who are living' — and at that very moment I knew revenge was the wrong way," Tanemori said. "I felt like I had welcomed the dawn of a new day."

He said he has since learned that "the best revenge is love and forgiveness."

Tanemori has worked as a minister, a chef and an international business consultant.

He now spends his time promoting peace and fostering forgiveness through his Silkworm Peace Institute in Lafayette. Since the events of Sept. 11 and the conflict in Iraq, Tanemori said his message has taken on renewed meaning.

Though Tanemori spends his time promoting peace, he said he won't participate in antiwar activities. He said he's not interested in the kind of peace that "raises its fist in protest."

Peace, he said, is not transforming the masses, but transforming the heart.

"We know by now that the world will never know the absence of war. But we can be at peace even in the turmoil," Tanemori said. "I have learned to enter the eye of the storm — and from there I get a different perspective."



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Takashi Tanemori says anger consumed him for 40 years after many in his family died in the 1945 bombing of Hiroshima. He learned to forgive after recalling his father's words: "Respect all who are living."