

John D. Elder and Anne Elder Kendal at Oberlin Ohio

John and Anne elder both attended Oberlin College where they met during their first year. They later married in 1954, a year after their graduation. John Elder served as pastor of the First Church in Oberlin from 1973 to 1991 and was Chaplain at Oberlin's Allen Memorial Hospital from 1974 to 1985. He is an honorary trustee of Oberlin College and is a founding member of the Oberlin Retirement community board of Kendal at Oberlin. Anne Elder served as a Supervisor in the Lorain City Schools from 1973 to 1991. She was also a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), advocating for children in the court system. John Elder was chair of the admissions committee of Kendal at Oberlin, and the elders moved to the retirement home in 2007. They have been deeply engaged in the community at Kendal at Oberlin contributing to the cultural and environmental initiatives.



1. How did you learn about GLH and what are your thoughts on its mission to spread the message of peace through plants?

We learned about Green Legacy Hiroshima through Oberlin Shansi when the first Fellow was appointed to work with peace organizations in Hiroshima, and through Ann Sherif, the Oberlin College Professor who has advocated for GLH on campus and at Kendal, the retirement community where we live. Now that Sophie Qano, who regularly participated in our weekly Oberlin peace vigils, is the Shansi Hiroshima Fellow, we are learning even more. We think there is much value in developing global networks of people concerned with finding nonviolent ways to resolve conflict. We especially appreciate the emphasis of GLH on resilience, as symbolized by the trees that survived the atomic bombing.

2. Please share with us your experience being Oberlin Shansi Fellows and the impact/lessons learnt during your time in Japan.

I was appointed in 1953 as the first of the Shansi Fellows (then called Representatives, or "Reps") to Japan. After my first year I returned briefly to the U.S. to marry Anne, and we both served as teachers at Obirin Gakuen (now J. F. Oberlin University) for the next two

Partners in Profile



years. At that time, although the Occupation had officially ended, the American military presence was still significant. Anne volunteered with a social service agency in placing "mixed-blood" children of service-men with adoptive families. The Japanese economy was making its remarkable recovery from the devastation of the war, which of course included, in addition to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the fire-bombing of Tokyo, which probably killed more people. We were surprised – and relieved – that although Americans had inflicted this destruction, we were still welcomed wherever we went. So, in addition to learning from our Japanese hosts the power of resilience, we also learned from them the power of forgiveness.

3. What makes Kendal at Oberlin unique in terms of a care center and how has being in a city like Oberlin that is striving for climate positivity influenced your daily lives?

Kendal at Oberlin is unlike most continuing care retirement communities in that there is no "Program Director." All of our lectures, recitals, art shows, dramatic performances, discussion groups, celebratory events and service projects are organized by our multitude of committees and interest groups. Also, our center for assisted living and nursing care is integrated into (rather than separated from) the rest of the community. Together with the City of Oberlin and Oberlin College, the residents and the administration work together in encouraging environmentally sustainable practices, including the John Bartram Arboretum (<https://www.johnbartramarboretum.org/>).

4. What advice can you give to the youth on peace and sustainability — especially in these times when remaining optimistic is so difficult?

Our generation experienced America's "Great Depression," followed by World War II and then the "Cold War." We learned to live with possibility of nuclear catastrophe. Now we, our children, our grand-children, and our great-grand-children face the mutually compounding threats of authoritarianism and climate change, as well as increasing racism. And nuclear catastrophe remains a real possibility. Some of us are by nature optimistic and are able to see positive signs in the darkest situations, and even those of us who are more pessimistic can affirm our personal integrity by finding ways to work for peace and sustainability even when we fear they maybe futile. History teaches us that change for the better often comes in unexpected ways, so we should remain humble, knowing that our most well-intentioned efforts may accomplish less than we dream, yet actions we hardly think matter may change the world for the better.

Feature edited by Saeeda Razick of GLH