What does the presence of the GLH saplings in Australia mean here? What is your vision for these saplings in the future?

The survivor-tree gingko sapling I planted at the Australian National University Crawford School of Public Policy in 2016 will be a constant reminder to passers-by – and in our case, very appropriately, many successive generations of students of public policy at this great national university of ours – of the horror of what occurred in August 1945. But not only that, it will be a demonstration of the positive - of what can be regenerated, what can grow out of that horror. President Obama talked in Hiroshima of us choosing “a future in which Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known not as the dawn of atomic warfare, but as the start of our own moral awakening.” And what is true of our little sapling is true of all those planted elsewhere. Properly tended, as they must be, and with their story clearly labelled for all to read and understand, they will long into the future carry a message that we must never forget.

What does the connection with Hiroshima mean for you personally and professionally?

I first came to Hiroshima in 1964, nearly six decades ago, as a twenty-year old student, and it was one of the most formative experiences of my life. Through-out my early years I had been vaguely conscious, like everyone else, of the shadow of nuclear war hanging over us all. But nothing had quite prepared me for the experience of standing at the epicentre of that first nuclear bomb strike, and being overwhelmed by the almost indescribable horror of what had occurred here just two decades earlier.

There is one particular exhibit in the Hiroshima peace park museum I saw then that I have never been able to get out of my memory: a granite block, part of the front steps of a bank building, against which someone had been sitting when the bomb exploded early that bright sunny August meeting. Starkly visible on that stone was – and still is, though perhaps rather more faded now – the shadow of that man or woman, or maybe teenager, indelibly etched there by the crystallisation of the granite around his or her body as it was, in an instant, incinerated by that terrible blast.

Besides GLH’s current activities, what is something else you think that can be done for the hibaku jumoku for a nuclear-free world and reverence of nature around the world?

Given the green, nature-focused dimension of its mission, GLH may be uniquely placed to spread the message that we must never forget. Particularly, on nuclear disarmament and just about everything else, is about as desolate as we can all remember, and my greatest fear for the future is that this lesson will not be learned – with a critical test looming in the coming United States presidential election.

But it is important to keep things in perspective, and to stay optimistic. Pendulums do swing, wheels do turn, lessons are learned, and Presidents and Prime Ministers do change. Optimism is self-reinforcing in the same way that pessimism is self-defeating. Achieving anything of lasting value in public life is difficult enough, but it is almost impossible to do so without believing that what seems to be out of reach really is achievable. The crucial thing is to keep the flame of hope alight, not just in big diplomatic ways, but in a myriad of small ways. With nuclear weapons it is crucial to keep the memory of Hiroshima alive, and to keep alive the idea that out of the ashes of Hiroshi-ma a better and more humane world can indeed grow. That is the mission of GLH, and – like our gingko survivor tree in Canberra – long may it flourish.

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