Tell us a bit about yourself and how you got involved with horticulture and nature.

I have worked at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) in Northern Ireland since 2012 and am now the Course Director responsible for Higher Education Horticulture. My professional journey in horticulture started when I completed a Degree in Horticulture at the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin, Ireland and then progressed to a Masters in Sustainable Development at the Dublin Institute of Technology. I worked in historic gardens before taking up a lecturing role at CAFRE. My current job is an interesting mixture of managing horticultural projects on the campus estate and also for you personally?

What is your vision for these saplings at CAFRE in the future? And how does the unfolding of COVID-19 influence horticulture and nature in general, and the hibakujumoku in particular?

We plan to plant a number of the trees and shrubs on our campus grounds where they will have a special place in our plant collection. Students often learn something of the history of a plant species when learning to identify them. The hibakujumoku are different because our students will be in contact with a living piece of history. It is wonderful to know that future generations of young horticulturists will be inspired by the hibakujumoku.

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that people are spending more time at home and there has been an increase in interest in horticulture and nature. I think the hibakujumoku can also be interpreted as symbols of the need to protect the environment. These trees have much to teach us about the regenerative power of nature, the importance of working for peace and the need for hope even in the most difficult times such as we are experiencing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

How will the message of peace of the survivor trees be shared with your community?

We have had some radio media coverage and have an active website that follows the seedlings development. The plants will have a commemorative plaque to explain their significance and will be shown to the campus’s many visitors. We also plan to reach out to new partners in our community and eventually share trees with them. Already we have been contacted by organisations interested in receiving young trees so we can look forward to planting ceremonies in the coming years.