

David Hedberg
Historian and Filmmaker
Outdoor History Consulting
Oregon, USA



David Hedberg is a historian and filmmaker based in Portland, Oregon. He received his bachelor's degree in History with a minor in Native American studies and his master's in Environmental History and Native American History from Portland State University. He is founder of Outdoor History Consulting, an independent firm specializing in historical research, environmental history, land-use histories, and public history programming. David Hedberg has produced several documentary films, most recently for North Shore Productions and Black Bald Films. He also produced the Canopy Stories with NW Documentary.

1. Please share with us your life trajectory and how you came to be a historian and filmmaker.

I grew up in Oregon and had lots of time with my grandparents and great-grandparents listening to their stories about Oregon history. As a kid I was always attracted to the history section of my local library. In college I found history to be quite enjoyable and majored in it then worked as a field archaeologist recording sites across the western U.S. for four years after college. I gained much experience traveling and contributing historical research in places and topics I was less familiar with. I also learned to collaborate with people from the communities I was working in as they were a different type of expert than me. I found oral histories to be a great way to

highlight local knowledge and record it as a source for future researchers.

I returned to graduate school and was fortunate to work as an editorial assistant for Pacific Historical Review, helping review and edit scholarly articles about the history of the Pacific region—including communities on the eastern side of that ocean. Growing up in the U.S. we are often taught one-sided history. The Trans-Pacific studies I helped review showed me that every story has multiple sides. I grew tremendously as a researcher and historian in graduate school but struggled to find teaching jobs with only a master's degree. I also learned that many people were not aware of current historical scholarship and were unlikely to take the time to read scholarly journals or books. So I started working with NW Documentary

on projects that helped distill scholars' work into more accessible documentary films. I picked up skills in camera work and production by collaborating with others who knew more than me. I learned to find, record, and edit a good story.

My filmmaking follows my ethos as a historian: first to honor and respect local knowledge, and to collaborate with others in telling a story.

2. What are your thoughts on GLH and its message and aim to spread peace through plants?

GLH's mission to spread a message of peace and remembrance of the bombing of Hiroshima through the seeds of survivor trees is important in so many ways. In a universal way, trees offer us

a living connection to the past and the actions of our forebears. These trees also offer us a symbol of hope and resilience as their parents pushed out buds in the aftermath of the atom bomb and gave the survivors hope. The trees are also reminders of the fragility of life and dangers of nuclear weapons. Lastly, they offer these messages in the form of beauty, shade, and hopefully, longevity. Many generations to come will see these trees and have the opportunity to reflect on the horrors of nuclear war and the hope embodied in survival and remembrance.

3. GLH has spread to different corners of the world and connected people through plants. In your opinion, why do you think this movement has resonated with so many people, and what can we do, to make the message reso-



nate more strongly with people to spur action?

In the communities I have visited in Oregon, I am so impressed by how many make the connection between their tree and its parent in Hiroshima. I almost never hear people debate or justify the bombing now, instead the trees work as a reminder that regardless of reason, the atom bomb was devastating and killed tens of thousands of innocent people. It, and the subsequent nuclear arms race, changed the composition of our atmosphere for the entire planet. The effects of Hiroshima are global, and the trees are a reminder that we are all living on the same planet and must prevent the use of atomic weapons at all costs.

4. You have been working on your documentary 'Seeds of Peace', about Hideko Tamura's efforts to bring survivor tree seeds to Oregon. What motivated you to create this documentary and how has the process impacted you?

I was inspired to follow the planting of peace trees in Oregon and explore how Hideko's message of peace has taken root in the many individuals and communities across the state. I read Hideko's book early on when I first learned of her effort and was so moved by her ability to confront her trauma and her life in helping others, it also made me think about other children like her who suffered--they clearly were innocent victims of the bombing. My grandfather had served in WWII in the US Navy and had seen combat and later occupied Japan. He had a complicated feeling about the war and the atom bomb, but had kept an



David Hedberg interviewing Mike Oxendine, president of Oregon Community Trees.

open mind and discussed it with me as I grew up. After reading Hideko's book, I felt inspired to take this project on and highlight her effort and the many people who it resonates with across Oregon.

The process of making the film has been its own journey. Many planned dedications were delayed because of COVID-19. I above all wanted to keep everyone safe during the pandemic. I found ways to interview people safely and have logged many miles on the road.

What strikes me after visiting over 20 Oregon communities is how this message of peace and resilience has taken on many forms. From communities that survived wildfire to adults incarcerated in prison, from tiny rural towns to metropolitan communities, from second and third-generation Japanese immigrants to elementary school students, each peace tree is growing in a diverse

Oregon community and spreading a message of peace and resilience. It's a message and story we desperately need.

5. How important are initiatives like GLH for the youth and how do you see it expanding beyond just GLH?

I've been impressed with the many youth groups that have been involved with the peace tree dedications in Oregon. I have seen elementary school children who express peace and remembrance through writing Haiku. I have interviewed middle and high-school students who have created signs, displays, and constructed features to ensure future generations visit and understand the importance of these trees. Lastly, I have spent time with college students at Oregon State University. They hold a special event every year to offer thoughts and prayers for peace to their tree and to

acknowledge and remember the hibakusha.

Having been born long after the bombing, I and the many younger people I visit with, look at this history with a different perspective than older generations. In Hideko we see the survivors' humanity. The peace trees are a constant reminder of the power of life and the importance of peace. We also see the impacts of war, displacement, and a changing planet that we did not create but affect us and we must take on nonetheless. Finally, I see the power in relating to one another as individuals, beyond nationalistic narratives. Hideko has had incredible courage to both survive and share her story so freely with people of the nation that bombed her. Americans need more stories like hers that expose and challenge our deeply held assumptions about the world.

Feature edited by Saeeda Razick of GLH



David Hedberg and Jimmy Kashi, president of the Asian Pacific Family Club at Oregon State Penitentiary.