"Everything is connected," exclaimed Takeshi Miyata as he walked along the railway at the Auschwitz death camps, almost 70 years after Jews were carted off to slaughter in the same location. "Jewish scientists escaped the Nazis, helped America build an atomic bomb, and it was dropped on me."

Anyone who entered Hiroshima and Nagasaki within two weeks of the release of the only two atom bombs ever detonated over people were called Hibakusha: "Exposed to the atomic bomb/radiation." Miyata, and eight other members of the Peace Boat Hibakusha Project, had travelled halfway around the world from Japan. They shared their cautionary tales of nuclear power in each port of call along the way. Some spoke publicly for the first time in their lives. I was their web reporter.

'Peace Boat', part cruise ship, part political lobby, was on its 80th voyage in 30 years. The Hibakusha Project was participating in a Peace Boat voyage for the sixth time. Our journey in 2013 started in Da Nang, Vietnam, where we spent the day with victims of Agent Orange who had experienced generational effects of the chemical’s wartime use. We confronted Japan’s own violent past in Singapore at the National History Museum. We shared a testimony with a Hungarian-Polish Auschwitz survivor at the Centre for Dialogue in Poland, and befriended El Salvadorian revolutionaries in Central America.

Over 85 days we spoke at city halls, foreign ministries, schools, and temples in more than 19 countries. Thousands of people will now forever be able to say they met someone who survived the bombings of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, and heard their testimony.

SADAKO’S SAD FATE

Passengers on the ship called us the Orizuru Project. In Japanese "Orizuru" means "Paper Crane." They say in Japan, that if you fold one thousand paper cranes, a wish will be granted. In 1955 Sadako Sasaki tried everything, including the "Paper Crane" legend, to cure her leukemia 10 years after she was exposed to the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. She wasn’t the only one. Every family that survived Hiroshima had a Sadako, an unknown victim who was not made famous for their grace under pressure. A monument to memorialize all of the child victims was erected by Sadako’s classmates and years later her story was told around the world. This is how I learned about it in school when I was her age.

Miyata-san wasn’t the only one who could see connections. I wasn’t just a web reporter documenting Peace Boat’s Hibakusha Project. My grandfather was Jacob Beser, the only man in the world to fly as a serviceman on both planes...
that dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He was the radar countermeasures officer. In essence he helped build and monitor the radar-detonated fuse for the so-called "gimmick."

Many people know that my grandfather was on the airplanes but few know that my family also has a connection to someone who was underneath the mushroom cloud.

**BOTH SIDES OF THE BOMB**

I wrote about this coincidental connection in 2010 and mentioned Maiden J. publicly (and I will not use her name again). Her surviving family is very protective of her legacy, having been "burned" by Japanese media in the past who wanted to dramatize her love story. Her family was upset that I started to write about her, until they realized they knew me.

She left Hiroshima in the late 1960s to marry an American who courted her while she lived in New York where she received reconstructive surgery with the famous Hiroshima Maidens. She eventually settled in Baltimore where she worked alongside my future grandfather Aaron Cohen. I met her when I was a child and was awestruck at knowing people from both sides of the bomb.

On 10 March 2011, I won a research grant to write a book about my family connections. It was already 11 March in Japan, a night when disaster struck. As the news unfolded of what would become known as the Great East Japan Earthquake, Tsunami and Nuclear Disaster, I decided not to give up my trip to Japan.

**THE NUCLEAR FAMILY**

Five months later, I began the research for a book that took me five years to complete. *The Nuclear Family* has just been published. When I met Maiden J.'s family, they said, "We can be your friends but if you want to understand what happened, you must meet Hibakusha who will tell you first hand."

In Japan, I was introduced to Yuji Sasaki, the nephew of Sadako. A one-time Ramen (noodle soup) shop owner, he now dedicates his energy to "Sadako Legacy," his family's non-profit organization. When I met him for the first time, he was serving up delicious bowls of hot Hakata Ramen.

"The Genbaku Dome, Hiroshima's former Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall, was the only building left standing near the bomb’s hypocentre. It is today a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Photo courtesy of Ari Beser."
Within minutes of our group’s arrival, Yuji leapt to the back of his shop to look for a small plastic box. He returned momentarily and opened it to reveal a pin-size paper crane and a small folded triangle of paper. He placed the tiny crane in the palm of my hand and said, “This is the last crane she ever folded, and this triangle is the crane she didn’t finish.”

Yuji is changing the world with his aunt’s paper cranes. He and his father Masahiro have donated Sadako’s cranes to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, the 9/11 memorial, and the Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor. There, Masahiro met a Pearl Harbor survivor who proclaimed, “They said you can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” before the Japanese and American survivors embraced in a hug.

Throughout the Fulbright‒National Geographic Digital Storytelling Fellowship, I will explore the connections I have discovered over the last few years, and introduce these members of “The Nuclear Family” from the span of the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki through the 5th anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, Tsunami, and Nuclear Disaster in Fukushima. I will periodically update Hibakusha: The Nuclear Family with video installments, photo essays, and articles.

This article has been adapted from the original post that appeared on the Fulbright National Geographic digital stories blog and appears with kind permission: voices.nationalgeographic.com/2015/07/20/the-story-about-hiroshima-and-nagasaki-youve-never-heard/

**Biographical Note**

ARI M. BESER is a Fulbright‒National Geographic Fellow. He is the grandson of Lt. Jacob Beser, the only U.S. Serviceman aboard both B-29s that dropped atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He has spent the past four years researching and authoring the book The Nuclear Family about both the American and Japanese perspectives of the atomic bombings. He has worked with Japanese and Americans to forward a message of reconciliation and nuclear disarmament. Follow Ari on Instagram and Twitter @HibakushaTNF and @aribeser.