

Hiroshima Day Rally, 2020 World Conference against A and H Bombs

August 6, 2020

George Friday, Peace Action

The US--the country--does not value or care about its people and has no real interest in our safety and well-being. But the people in my country are remarkable both in how easily so many can be fooled, bullied and fear-mongered into profound ignorance and how amazing we can be when we join together in powerful ways.

We've had way too much of the first and not enough of the latter, but perhaps we are FINALLY seeing something shift.

August 6 happens to be my birthday – a coincidence that has profoundly shaped the direction of my life. I had the honor to be in Japan and speak in 2005 at the World Conference Against A&H Bombs. I admire the foresight and strength that your Article 9 demonstrates to the world and it is so good to know that it still has strong support from the people of Japan.

One of my most cherished life memories is having over 10,000 people sing me happy birthday as I was onstage on August 6th. I'm sure there was a cake, but I don't remember that.

I wish I could share that the US has made real improvements in the last 15 years. But we absolutely have not, and while it takes WAY too long, our folk *do* learn. It takes SO much to wake them up and get them to act.

There are some, too few still – but over the past months a growing number-- who are ready to demand and work for deep systemic change, but we are still too few with far too little time to act.

I don't want to speak badly of the people in my country, but it has been easier for most people in the US to maintain an ignorance about the country-- founded in genocide, rooted in oppression-- that exists to benefit very few at the cost of many and the very earth itself.

What people would **tolerate** the killing of people by police, the destruction of the environment by the military (the number one cause of environmental degradation) and from businesses, and exposing its residents without a real plan or protection from the deadliest virus the world has seen in over a 100 years? Who tolerates that? Idiots!!

Until recently it was easier for white people to ignore systemic racism, just as they have ignored the rest of the atrocities our country thrives on, because facing the truth was too difficult, too inconvenient, too uncomfortable.

You wouldn't believe how attached white people are to *comfort*! The phrase "talking about that makes me uncomfortable" is used to *absolutely* shut down discussion about any "controversial" subject. Like protecting the environment, and protecting people from a deadly virus or being killed in the streets was controversial?!

Please!

When horrible things happened; mass shootings, anti-black racism, police shootings– and they are regular-- there would be "statements of condemnation" or even the occasional apology for racism.

But there was no fundamental change, no systemic shift. The US might change the furniture and decorations occasionally, but the house stays the same.

Recently the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists reset the Doomsday Clock to 100 seconds to midnight, and the US administration threatening to resume nuclear testing after almost 28 years, pushes us close to the brink. Why?

Now in the 21st century we all know there are surely better ways to conduct war if one must conduct war at all, but in the 21st century we must also recognize that it's got to be about something else, and we must no longer accept the lies that any form of violence over another is justifiable.

So, what are the opportunities and possibilities this time offers us? What opportunities can we create, if any?

One of the best things, maybe the only good thing about the global pandemic, is that here in the US the flaws in the system have been laid bare ... so only those who will themselves to maintain the lies, can ignore the obscenity of this system. The truth is in their faces and cannot be denied, except for those who inhabit denial town.

After George Floyd was murdered, millions protested, here and worldwide, and for many that event ignited work to address systemic change.

Now most of them felt that taking down monuments to White Supremacy might do it, and that's not a bad start. And when folk say "defund the police" so that there will be money set aside for counselors, social workers, and mental health professionals that's a good step too. It's better than simply changing the decorations in the house. It's remodeling-- taking out the attic to add a rooftop deck and turning the garage into a rec room-- but it's still only change in appearance. What we need is a complete and total rebuild, starting with the foundation.

What we need is a foundation rooted in value and love; value of all living beings and love of the planet, her beings, and each other. When we build relationships of equity and integrity we build foundations of trust, shared values, and commitment to each other. When we have those kind of relationships, loving thy neighbor is easy and war can become obsolete.

That, my dear ones, is a birthday wish worth fighting for. It will take time! It's now my 60th year on the planet, and I'm here for it!

So let's do it. Let's keep pushing for deep, systemic changes and make war and nuclear weapons obsolete!

In the meantime, for us in the US things will get stormy, shaky, and hard, but we must continue to stand, hopefully hand-in-hand to face the storm and get through to another day!

Legendary Civil Rights leader John Lewis died last month. There's a story he tells in his book. *Walking With the Wind*, that I want to share with you as I close.

Now I'll warn you, I may be in tears at the end of reading this but please know that I am well, strong and determined to work to make sure NO one anywhere will ever have to suffer another Hiroshima!

"About fifteen of us children were outside my aunt Seneva's house, playing in her dirt yard. The sky began clouding over, the wind started picking up, lightning flashed far off in the distance, and suddenly I wasn't thinking about playing anymore; I was terrified..."

Aunt Seneva was the only adult around, and as the sky blackened and the wind grew stronger, she herded us all inside.

Her house was not the biggest place around, and it seemed even smaller with so many children squeezed inside. Small and surprisingly quiet. All of the shouting and laughter that had been going on earlier, outside, had stopped. The wind was howling now, and the house was starting to shake. We were scared. Even Aunt Seneva was scared.

And then it got worse. Now the house was beginning to sway. The wood plank flooring beneath us began to bend. And then, a corner of the room started lifting up.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. None of us could. This storm was actually pulling the house toward the sky. With us inside it.

That was when Aunt Seneva told us to clasp hands. Line up and hold hands, she said, and we did as we were told. Then she had us walk as a group toward the corner of the room that was rising. From the kitchen to the front of the house we walked, the wind screaming outside, sheets of rain beating on the tin roof. Then we walked back in the other direction, as another end of the house began to lift.

And so it went, back and forth, fifteen children walking with the wind, holding that trembling house down with the weight of our small bodies.

More than half a century has passed since that day, and it has struck me more than once over those many years that our society is not unlike the children in that house, rocked again and again by the winds of one storm or another, the walls around us seeming at times as if they might fly apart.

It seemed that way in the 1960s, at the height of the civil rights movement, when America itself felt as if it might burst at the seams—so much tension, so many storms. But the people of conscience never left the house. They never ran away. They stayed, they came together and they did the best they could, clasping hands and moving toward the corner of the house that was the weakest.

And then another corner would lift, and we would go there.

And eventually, inevitably, the storm would settle, and the house would still stand.

But we knew another storm would come, and we would have to do it all over again.

And we did.

And we still do, all of us. You and I.

Children holding hands, walking with the wind. . . ."

Thank you or all you do. Accept my love and generate that love through your work.

Let us make and see a better world for us all.

Be well -