

Long Synopsis

This film is inspired by Sadako Sasaki, a child in 1940's Hiroshima who developed leukemia after radiation exposure from the atomic bomb. In Japanese legend, if you fold one thousand paper cranes, you're granted a wish. Sadako began to fold paper cranes in an effort to overcome her illness.

Ten years ago, my husband and I visited the Peace Museum in Hiroshima, Japan. My husband who was studying to be a radiation oncologist, took in the museum from a highly scientific perspective. How could radiation, the tool he was using to fight his patient's cancer, also be so evil and do so much harm? As an aspiring filmmaker, I was extremely taken by all the stories and personal belongings of those affected. The brightness of the blast left human photographic shadows on the concrete, a watch was frozen on the time of the bomb and the possessions left behind showed that people were unaware of what was to come. The epicenter of the bomb, left a domed, lattice structure behind resembling a birdcage. And then I saw the image that I wouldn't be able to get out of my mind for the next few years....the exhibit of Sadako's paper cranes. They were so small, only a child's hands could have folded them. As a child myself who was fascinated by origami, there is a meditative feeling I understood well. It is a satisfying feeling to hold a finished crane in your hands and awe inspiring that it could come from something as simple as a square piece of paper. To me, the innocence and childlike fantasy of a wish from folding cranes, was such a beautiful representation of the human spirit. There is a dichotomy I noticed through our experience at the museum. Fighting evil with peaceful means and transforming shadows with cranes, was a story I felt compelled to tell.

In almost every journey of a filmmaker's process, however, there seems to be interwoven element of doubt. I began to ask myself, "How I could relate to girl a third of my age, who lived decades before me in a completely different part of the world? What did I bring to this story that warranted its existence?" That answer came on Mother's Day 2015.

My husband's mother, someone I had loved dearly and who had become as close to me as my own, died unexpectedly in a car crash. My 2-year old nephew who was in the vehicle, survived the crash. He happened to be the same age as Sadako during the Atomic bomb and everything he began to say in the months after the tragedy forced me to think of the film's story in a new light. His memories of the tragedy were fragmented and repetitive, often in fantastical description. He found ways he could articulate his sadness and with his own methods, he found the coping mechanisms he needed to process a very adult experience. It opened up a whole new world of how to tell this story, made the film feel personal and became a cathartic way to process my own loss of a mother figure.

My story is about a girl, who has a special bond and loving relationship with her mother. This comfortable, secure world she knows is turned upside down when a bomb explodes outside of their home. The girl recounts her life's memories in what is now a horrific and desolate cityscape. The girl wakes up to find herself alone in a dream-like, caged world. The traumatic images she had experienced from the bomb are now in a different form, surreal and fantastical, like a child's imagination. When faced with darkness, in the form of forest shadows and a smoke eagle, she must remember her mother's lessons...she is strong and can overcome her fears. The girl realizes she has the power to make cranes from the shadows. With her army of cranes she defeats the smoke eagle and breaks free from the cage she is in.

Some accounts say Sadako succeeded in folding one thousand cranes and others say her classmates had to finish them after her death. Whether she reached the amount or not, is irrelevant to me. The beauty is in the attempt and has motivated my own journey to see the film through.