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Among the wounded on the day they dropped the bomb on Nagasaki was a young doctor who, though sick himself cared for the sick and dying. Written when he too lay dying of leukemia, *The Bells of Nagasaki* is the extraordinary account of his experience. It is deeply moving and human story.

The Bells of Nagasaki Details

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From Reader Review The Bells of Nagasaki for online ebook

Julie Davis says

After reading A Song For Nagasaki about Takashi Nagai, I thought it would be good to at least try Nagai's first and most famous book.

It begins on the morning that the bomb is dropped on Nagasaki. I was interested to see it told not only from his point of view but also from that of various other people in the countryside and from different vantage points at the teaching hospital where Nagai was dean. After helping all those they can from the immediate university area, the small band of survivors heads to the countryside to help the many people who are being sheltered by farmers and villages.

I was surprised to find myself laughing at one point. After American planes drop leaflets informing the Japanese that they dropped an atom bomb (so surrender already), Nagai instantly whirls into thought about the implications, both scientifically and to the victims. He comes out to hear the few remaining hospital staff, doctors, and students in a fevered discussion about which scientists were involved ("Einstein?"), how it would have worked ("they couldn't have had a cyclotron on a plane" "fission! it must have been fission!" "Ahhh"), and so forth. Despite the circumstances, as Nagai himself comments after reporting this exchange, they are all scientists first and deeply interested in the development.

We were members of a research group with a great interest in nuclear physics and totally devoted to this branch of science--and ironically we ourselves had become victims of the atom bomb which was the very core of the theory we were studying. Here we lay, helpless in a dugout!

And yet it was a precious experience for us. Placed on the experimentation table, we could watch the whole process in a most intimate way. We could observe the changes that were taking place and that would take place in the future. Crushed with grief because of the defeat of Japan, filled with anger and resentment, we nevertheless felt rising within us a new drive and a new motivation in our search for truth. In this devastated atomic desert, fresh and vigorous scientific life began to flourish.

I'm really glad that I read A Song For Nagasaki first so I have the context of Nagai's life in which to put this story. I think without that it could be desperately depressing. However, there are always very human moments to which we all can relate, such as when the little team is on the road back to a farmer's house and a fart starts a series of jokes, with each person capping the next.

I'd think this would be the mandatory companion to A Song For Nagasaki because I was surprised to find how much Paul Glynn soft-pedaled Nagai's reaction to Japan's unconditional surrender. Nagai in this book tells us how stunned everyone was when the news came, how he cried for 20 minutes, and how devastated everyone felt. I completely understand Glynn's overview of Nagai's overall feeling about war in general, but it did ring very true to me that one would feel a gut-punch to learn one's country had to completely surrender. For a Japanese person it would have been such a part of their very identity that it would be very hard to take. And, the way that Nagai rallied everyone would have less impact if he hadn't honestly told of his own reactions. The conclusions he drew later would be much less powerful, such as what happens after Nagai's sense of overwhelming defeat leads him to reject a man seeking medical help.

In a flash I had a change of heart. Even one precious life was worth saving. Japan was defeated;

but the wounded were still alive. The war was over; but the work of our relief team remained. Our country was destroyed; but medical science still existed. Wasn't our work only beginning? Irrespective of the rise and fall of our country, wasn't our main duty to attend to the life and death of each single person? The very basis of the Red Cross was to attend to the wounded, be they friend or foe. Precisely because we Japanese had treated human life so simply and so carelessly--precisely for this reason we were reduced to our present miserable plight. Respect for the life of every person--this must be the foundation stone on which we would built a new society.

Our people had been told that they must suffer these terrible wounds to win the war; but in fact they had suffered in order to lose. Now they were thrown into the most pitiable and desperate situation. And there was no one to console them, no one to help them except us. We must stand and come to their aid. I stood there unsteadily on my tottering legs. And then the whole group stood up beside me. Our courage came back. The determination to continue our work gave us strength and joy.

There is precious little moralizing of the sort that many might expect. In fact, I saw a review somewhere where a person refused to read the book because they found out that Nagai was Roman Catholic. Nagai rarely mentions his faith other than in passing so that person's innate prejudices stopped them from experiencing a very inspirational and thought provoking book about the innate heights to which the human spirit can soar. Highly recommended.

Leroy Seat says

I planned to finish reading this book on August 9, for the book starts on August 9, 1945--but I finished reading it today, the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Dr. Nagai gives a first-hand account of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, where he was a doctor on duty at the nearby Nagasaki University Medical School.

Dr. Nagai (1908-51) was a Christian and a member of the Urakami Catholic church--the largest church in East Asia--that was destroyed by the bomb. One of the most striking parts of the book is his "Funeral Address for the Victims of the Atomic Bomb." In one amazing paragraph in that paragraph Dr. Nagai asks, rhetorically,

"Is there not a profound relationship between the destruction of Nagasaki and the end of the war? Nagasaki, the only holy place in all Japan--was it not chosen as a victim, a pure lamb, to be slaughtered and burned on the altar of sacrifice to expiate the sins committed by humanity in the Second World War?" (p. 107).

Dr. Nagai completed his book in August 1946, just a year after the bombing, but it was not published until 1949. The book was translated by William Johnston, an Irish Catholic missionary to Japan, and published in English in 1984. Father Johnston (b. 1936) also wrote a very insightful introduction to the book. Several years earlier he translated Shusaku Endo's powerful book "Silence," and he has also written several books on mysticism.

katie says

Another classic of nuclear issues that I've been wanting to read forever. It was incredibly moving and definitely should be read by everyone who wants to understand the reality of nuclear weapons. It's very intense and difficult to read, so proceed with caution. But only a physician who had been studying the effects of radiation would have been able to write such a specific and accurate account of the immediate hours/days after the bombing of Nagasaki.

It's a little frustrating to read the parts where he still believed that the dangers of radiation were being overestimated and was encouraging people to move back into the city of Nagasaki immediately, when we know now that there are dangerous effects that linger after the initial exposure. But that's also the reality of the time after the very first uses of nuclear explosions ever, and it's part of what we as the US should feel ashamed and guilty about. Because the US is the only country that has ever used these bombs on people.

So in that way, it was important to read, to get the context and perspective of the victims of the bomb, not just with the added benefits of hindsight that most writing has. This is an extremely important piece of nuclear history.

Brian says

"Go to the mountains and meditate! If you stay in the hurly-burly of this world, you'll run around in circles without ever finding your way. You'll become the kind of person who just stamps and screams. But the blue mountains are immovable and the white clouds come and go."

This was Takashi Nagai's advice a few weeks after the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. This book was non-fiction... unfortunately.

Takashi Nagai was a doctor, a nuclear physicist, and dean of the radiology department in the medical school of the University of Nagasaki and a devout Christian. On Thursday, August 9, 1945 at two minutes past eleven in the morning he was in his office about 700 meters from the epicenter of the blast. From first hand accounts he tells the story of life immediately before the blast, during the blast, and after the blast. That he survived is nothing short of miraculous.

The description of seeing up-close the results of colliding atoms is nightmarish. It starts with the sound of a plane and then... the blinding white light, darkness blacker than night caused by a cloud of debris covering the sun, the coming of a red tinted light, a drop in temperature, the invisible wind, the instant disappearance of a world known... and ends with the appearance of hell on earth.

"No. The sun must have exploded," said Choro.

"Maybe so... the temperature has suddenly dropped." Shiro's voice was thoughtful.

"If the sun explodes, what happens to the earth?" Now it was the anxious voice of Nurse Tsubakiyama.

"It's the end of the world," said Choro with resignation.

They remained silent and waited. No light returned. A minute passed. Someone's watch kept ticking in the darkness. Tick, tick, tick...

Takashi was a scholarly writer before the dropping of the bomb. Afterward, before his death in 1951, he

became a poet, artist, humanist, and mystic and wrote over 20 books.

Patrick Costello says

Takashi Nagai is a messenger of forgiveness, peace, Providence, authentic religion, and the redemptive value of suffering. His view of the atomic attack on Nagasaki (which claimed his wife's life and almost his own) is revolutionary, unforgettable, and a view most of us have never considered before. In the late 1940s this work introduced the virtues of faith, hope, and love to a bitter and demoralized Japan in the years following WW2 and should be required reading for all of us living in the modern nuclear age. Want to see Christianity applied? Read this book!

Diane says

Bells of Nagasaki, a memoir of the days after the dropping of Nagasaki bomb, was completed in August 1946 - a year after the disaster. Dr. Nagasaki was a radiologist who had done a lot of work in the area of radiation effects. He was on the faculty of the Nagasaki Medical University, very close to ground zero of the bombing. He had also been recently diagnosed with leukemia and given a life expectancy of 3 years. He and his wife were converts to Catholicism and ardent Christians.

This little book is an unusual mix of memoir of the events of the day of the bombing and for subsequent days, scientific discussion of the bomb and the effects of radiation, and Christian reflection on the meaning of the bomb and the need to strive towards world peace. Nagai lost his wife in the bombing but he built a small hut on the site of his former home and lived there until 1951, meditating and writing many essays and other works on medicine, war, peace and religion. He includes a chapter in which former students come to visit and they sit around and talk about the war and the bomb - it reminded me somehow of Job and his friends. This is the only time I remember reading of the anger people felt about losing the war.

It is worth reading the Wikipedia entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takashi_.... This m

Stephen Douglas Rowland says

Strange book. Written by a deeply religious doctor who witnessed the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki, it freely switches from first person to third, from a literary style to a memoir style to clinical, scientific examinations. At times it's poetic and profound, at times it's bizarre and embarrassing. Indeed, it seems as if it was written by 3 or 4 different people. And while it's immensely entertaining, the condescending Christian arrogance that stealthily creeps in toward the end ruins it. Bummer.

Joanna says

An extremely moving first person account of Nagasaki immediately before and after the atomic bomb was dropped. Perhaps because the author was a doctor and a scientist, the tone is rather objective and detached and written at least in part in an effort to reflect on the observed effects of atomic radiation on the people

who lived nearby. Definitely worth reading, but rather depressing.

Erin says

I think this book can be summed up from the post-it my coworker left on this book when I left it on my desk on my way somewhere: "Excellent Text". I'm not sure if he was serious or if he has read the book but it was an excellent treatment of the mindset of those living in Nagasaki as well as their experiences right after the bomb. It helped explain a lot in the book I am currently reading about Chernobyl.

Eva Inzu says

Meski terjemahan yang kurang bagus tapi saya dapat menangkap keseluruhan kisah ini dan memberi inspirasi. Tidak ada melankolis berlebihan yang Anda harapkan dari buku true story, namun kembangkan imajinasi lebih tinggi lagi, kita akan dapat melihat akibat bom atom tsb. Buku ini bukan mengisahkan mengenai saat itu saja, tapi penulis menyampaikan sesuatu untuk masa depan^^b

Paige Kilian says

3.5

K De says

Dr. Nagai's moving personal account of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki's Urakami prefecture should be read by all those who profess that atomic warfare is viable. He was one of the survivors and worked as a research doctor. His retelling of his experience with atomic wasteland shows the human cost of the explosion of a low yield nuclear weapon.

The people's of the world must state in the strongest terms possible of the dangers of a new nuclear weapons race as well as the risk of nuclear energy proliferation in the Middle East by the USA, Russia and other countries by the building of nuclear power generation stations. As Dr. Nagai's plea that Nagasaki be the last atomic wasteland in the history of the human race.

Chrissie says

I am not religious. I don't have faith in anything except simple kindness. Neither do I understand nationalism/patriotism. I had trouble with large portions of this teeny book.

AGamble says

Perfect. Disturbing, but only because it is honest. A book everyone should read for the message all should heed. Not a light read, but an engaging one, and a necessary one as well. I join with the citizens of Nagasaki in their prayer for peace.

booklady says

'Yes, we were a defeated army in retreat, but even so we were still the faculty of a university. We were dedicated to the truth. We were determined to come to the assistance of the needy, using all our resources. In the heat and the din, searching for the wounded, it was still the pursuit of truth that gave our lives meaning. While this remained vibrant in our hearts, even if our exterior circumstances were wretched, we had no problems.' --Dr. Takashi Nagai

Dr. Nagai, nuclear physicist, dean of radiology department in the University of Nagasaki medical school and head of Eleventh Medical Corps (since the war began) although himself wounded August 9, 1945 when his beloved city was hit, still managed to gather together a group of doctors, nurses and students who selflessly tended the sick and dying in the days following the bombing. His book describes their initial reactions of profound shock and horror. What was this strange new weapon which had been used on them? Working under constant threat of another such bomb being dropped and the slow weakening of their own strength as the radiation began to take effect, the little band evacuated to a valley over the mountain. Here they found clear streams, green grass, good food, but the sick and dying had also evacuated, so there was almost no rest for days. Nagai almost died. His beloved wife did die in the bombing. His two children, 11 y/o son, Makoto and 5 y/o Kayano, survived.

Dr. Nagai's descriptions of the horrors he observed especially in those early days were technical but not impersonal. He explained things as the professional he was, yet with profound compassion. He also included the insightful comments and actions of his colleagues, friends and compatriots revealing the deep character of the Japanese people. A critical juncture occurred when they learned Japan had surrendered, but it was then Nagai gave them a new reason to carry on:

'The war was over; but the work of our relief team remained. Our country was destroyed; but medical science still existed. Wasn't our work only beginning? Irrespective of the rise and fall of our country, wasn't our main duty to attend to the life and death of each single person? Precisely because we Japanese had treated human life so simply and so carelessly—precisely for this reason we were reduced to our present miserable plight. Respect for the life of every person—this must be the foundation stone on which we would build a new society.'

Nagai went on to describe the rebuilding of Nagasaki which actually happened light years faster than ever thought possible. The 75-year dead-zone theory was quickly dispelled. There was atomic sickness and after effects to be sure, but there was far more resilience than anyone anticipated. Ants returned within 3 weeks, worms, other insects and critters were not long in following. Crops grown that winter had abnormalities but by the next year were indistinguishable from those grown elsewhere.

For such a tragic situation, this is the most amazingly optimistic book you can ever imagine.

Here are a few more of his quotes which I just love:

'Living with deep faith and enduring courageously, this tiny group of people, who know the happiness of weeping, is suffering to make amends for the sins of the world. People without faith have not returned. Faith alone is the motivating force behind the reconstruction of Urikami.'

'The human race, with this discovery of atomic power, has now grasped the key to its future destiny—a key to survival or destruction. This is a truly awful thought. I myself believe that the only way to the proper use of this key is authentic religion.'

If anyone had reason for resentment, hatred and bitterness it would be Dr. Nagai and the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but I could find no trace of any of these things in this book. Instead it is a book of faith, hope and love. He accepted four years of deprivation and a war which was ultimately lost, the death of his spouse, the destruction of his university, home city, and everything in it, occupation by his enemy while facing his own premature death, still caring for his children and maintaining his professional integrity—all this with the grace impossible to praise enough.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki martyrs, pray for us! May what you suffered be a constant reminder to us to **never** let such a thing happen again!

Can I give 10 stars?!

February 3, 2007: I can't remember when I first heard about this book or its author—possibly it was when I was reading about the events that happened at Akita, Japan, in a small community of religious, called the Institute of the Handmaids of the Eucharist. In any event, ever since then, I'd been trying to track down this book which was out-of-print. Finally in 2007 I got a used copy—the cover depicted here from the 1984 edition. I'm revising the review to reflect that fact. When I first wrote this, they only had covers for later editions.

The Bells Of Nagasaki is a heartrending story about a young doctor, Takashi Nagai, who cared for the sick and dying on the day they dropped the bomb on Nagasaki. Even more poignant because he wrote as he lay on his bed dying from leukemia, just one of the millions forever scarred by the devastation of that war and those two horrible bombs. If you've ever struggled with the moral issues associated with war, atomic warfare in particular and man's inhumanity to man, this book is a must-read. It doesn't offer any easy answers. It is NOT an anti-war book, but it is a cry for peace, for compassion and for true Christianity.

Since then A Song for Nagasaki: The Story of Takashi Nagai: Scientist, Convert, and Survivor of the Atomic Bomb has been written by an Australian Marist priest which tells the rest of the fascinating story of this extraordinary man, beginning with his boyhood, continuing on through his life right up to his heroic death.

Libby says

I read this book in one sitting. I couldn't put it down. I just happened to be visiting a Buddhist temple for a meditation weekend and I thought it would be a good book to take. It certainly gave me a lot to meditate on. It was fascinating to read a first hand account of the events from a scientist with an analytical mind. I admit to not knowing much about the event. I did Ancient History in school as I have a total abhorrence of war and couldn't stomach learning about recent battles. This was the first account of war that I could bring myself to read and I admit to it being quite an emotional experience. The bravery and compassion of the doctor and his

surviving team served as stark contrast to the incredibly inhumane minds behind the decision to drop the bombs.

Otabechan says

Moving, insightful and heart-wrenching read of a dedicated doctor who risks his life to aid others after the dropping of the bomb, and the overwhelming love of humanity that allows him to share his strongest desire for love and peace in the world. Should be a must-read for everyone in school.

Aida says

Dropping those two atomic bombs on Aug 6 and 9 came at a terrible price, anyone reading this book can agree. Anything to do with the atomic bomb, or Nagasaki, or anything like that has always held a morbid interest for me: I was born exactly 50 years later.

Ashraf Ali says

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Valarie says

This courageous memoir, penned in one of the last few years of the author's life, is an excellent perspective on the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. Especially since Nagasaki is the lesser-known of the two Japanese cities that were victimized by the atomic bomb, I'd recommend this book to anyone who wants to be educated about the events. Nagai was a doctor, scientist, and avid researcher, so he is able to explain the thinking of WWII citizens of Japan very well. His dispassioned analysis allows the reader's emotions to swell up and fill the void, while still reading between the lines to see Nagai's own grief and eventual acceptance. Four stars instead of five because the last third of the book gets a little too abstract and religious, which doesn't seem to

mesh with the main section.
