



An Imperial War Museums Commission

I SAW THE WORLD END

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Content warning: the following text contains graphic language and first-hand accounts so discretion is advised.

a source of power so potent that a man might carry in his hand
the energy to light a city for a year

— H. G. Wells, *The World Set Free*, 1913

*my surroundings turned blindingly white,
like a million camera flashes going off at once.
Then, pitch darkness.*

— Yasujiro Tanaka - Nagasaki survivor

Every scrap of solid matter in the world would become an available reservoir of concentrated force...

— H. G. Wells, *The World Set Free*, 1913

*Everything turned white. We were too stunned to move,
...there was glass everywhere, and tiny bits of dust and debris floating in the air.*

— Takato Michishita - Nagasaki survivor

It would mean a change in human conditions
that I can only compare to the discovery of fire,
that first discovery that lifted man above the brute.

— H. G. Wells, *The World Set Free*, 1913

When I went outside I saw that everything had totally changed. Although it had been a beautiful morning - it looked like twilight now.

— Sueko Hada - Hiroshima survivor

Early on a dismal, grey London morning in September 1933, as I waited at a traffic light on Southampton Row, the answer came to me in a flash.

— Leo Szilard – Physicist

*at 11:02am, the sky turned bright white.
My siblings and I were knocked off our feet
and violently slammed back into the bomb shelter.
We had no idea what had happened.*

— Shigeko Matsumoto - Nagasaki survivor

If a neutron, fired at an atom,
produces the release of two neutrons,
each of which hits another atom,
which both in turn release two more neutrons,
which each go on to collide with two further atoms,
a nuclear chain reaction would take place,
releasing unimaginable amounts of energy.

— Leo Szilard - Physicist

*I saw a young mother running
with a headless baby on her back.
I saw someone else with his belly ripped open
and intestines spilling out.*

— Sueko Hada - Hiroshima survivor

Knowing what it would mean
- and I knew because I had read HG Wells –
I did not want this patent to become public.

— Leo Szilard - patented the nuclear fission reactor in 1934

*All I could do was follow the others.
I saw terrible things.
There were people with eyeballs hanging out of their sockets.
There were others whose cheeks had been ripped open
from the corners of their mouths to their ears.*

— Sueko Hada - Hiroshima survivor

It may become possible to set up a nuclear chain reaction
...by which vast amounts of power ...would be generated.

— Albert Einstein and Leo Szilard in a Letter to President F D Roosevelt, 1939

As we sat there shell-shocked and confused, heavily injured burn victims came stumbling in en masse. Their skin had peeled off their bodies and faces and hung limply down on the ground, in ribbons.

— Shigeko Matsumoto - Nagasaki survivor

There was a feeling of great urgency, at the outset... we felt as if the fate of the world was in our hands.

— Peter Lax - Manhattan Project mathematician

*Still, to this day, my sister's voices haunt me...
I'll feel guilty as long as I live. I will never be happy.*

— Sueko Hada - Hiroshima survivor

We do not regard it as a new weapon merely,
but as a revolutionary change in the relations of man to the universe.

— Henry L. Stimson - US Secretary of State, May 31 1945

*Blood was pouring out of my flesh.
I know it sounds strange, but I felt absolutely no pain.
I even forgot to cry*

— Katsuji Yoshida - Nagasaki survivor

Uncle Wills does hate Chinese and Japs. So do I.

— President Harry S. Truman - in a letter to his future wife, 1911

As a firsthand witness to this atrocity, my only desire is to live a full life,

— Yasujiro Tanaka - Nagasaki survivor

It is race prejudice I guess.

— President Harry S. Truman - in a letter to his future wife, 1911

...hopefully in a world where people are kind to each other, and to themselves.

— Yasujiro Tanaka - Nagasaki survivor

I was greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese
on Pearl Harbour

— President Harry S. Truman, August 11 1945

I pray that every human being finds peace.

— Shigeko Matsumoto - Nagasaki survivor

When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast.

It is most regrettable but nevertheless true.

— President Harry S. Truman, August 11 1945

I pray that this message resonates with young people all over the globe.

Please excuse my handwriting.

— Inosuke Hayasaki - Nagasaki survivor

Silence reigned on the desert

— Robert Leckie - Military historian

I saw a black dot in the sky.

— Fujio Torikoshi - Hiroshima survivor

And then out of the bowels of the earth there shot into the sky
the herald of another dawn,

— Robert Leckie - Military historian

*Suddenly it burst into a ball of blinding light
that filled my surroundings.*

— Fujio Torikoshi - Hiroshima survivor

the light not of this world but of many suns in one

— Robert Leckie - Military historian

*The light was indescribable –
an unbelievably massive light lit up the whole city.*

— Koichi Wada - Nagasaki survivor

Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.

— J. Robert Oppenheimer, July 16 1945

Most of these people looked like ghosts. It truly was a vision of Hell.

— Sueko Hada - Hiroshima survivor

If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky,
that would be like the splendour of the mighty one

— J. Robert Oppenheimer, July 16 1945

*Suddenly, I was surrounded by a blinding light.
I immediately dropped on my stomach...
'I'm going to die,' I thought.*

— Masakatsu Obata - Nagasaki survivor

The problem which is posed by the release of atomic energy
is a problem of the ability of the human race to govern itself without war.

— J. Robert Oppenheimer, 1952

*Dear young people who have never experienced war,
Wars begin covertly. If you sense it coming, it may be too late.*

— Takato Michishita - Nagasaki survivor

There is no permanent method of excising atomic energy from our affairs ...now that men
know how it can be released.

— J. Robert Oppenheimer, 1952

All I want to do is forget... All I can do is pray... earnestly, relentlessly – for world peace.

— Fujio Torikoshi - Hiroshima survivor

The history of mankind is the history of the attainment of external power.
Man is the tool-using, fire-making animal.

— H. G. Wells - *The World Set Free*, 1913

*The state may collapse,
but the mountains and rivers remain.*

— *Du Fu*, 755

What if a dinosaur sleeping in the Southern Hemisphere had been awakened
and transformed into a giant by the Bomb?

— Tanaka Tomoyuki - producer of *Godjira*, 1954

*We may not have created this monster, but we summoned it.
We brought this on ourselves.”*

— *Dr Serizawa*, in *Godzilla 2014*

We knew the world would not be the same,
A few people laughed, a few people cried,
most people were silent.

— J. Robert Oppenheimer

*Everything turned yellow.
It was like I'd looked right at the sun.
Then there was a big sound a second or two later
and everything went dark*

— *Kimura Yoshihiro* - *Hiroshima survivor*

The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything except our modes of thinking.
Thus, we are drifting toward catastrophe beyond conception.
We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive.

— *Albert Einstein*, May 1946

Even after the appearance of cherry blossoms in Hiroshima, survivors retained
the feelings that they had come close to experiencing the end of the world.

I call them apocalyptic twins because these two threats, Climate change and nuclear
arms, can destroy the human species.

the rest of us can take in as perspective survivors the climate damage that threatens our
whole civilisation.

— Robert Jay Lifton - Psychiatrist

In a dark time, the eye begins to see.

— Theodore Roethke

From the first they had to see the round globe as one problem;
it was impossible any longer to deal with it piece by piece.

— H. G. Wells, *The World Set Free*, 1913

Survivors have a special form of witness..
what they know, what they've learned,
is the capacity of our technology, our weaponry,
to destroy our entire species and much of the planet.
They know that in a visceral way,
in a way that we don't know...
as a kind of perspective survivor,
somebody who imagines this happening.

— Robert Jay Lifton –Psychiatrist

*And after seeing the flash,
I had a sensation of floating in the air.
All the buildings were flattened by the blast and falling.
And, obviously, the building I was in was falling,
and my body was falling together with it.
That's the end of my recollection.*

— Setsuko Thurlow - Hiroshima survivor