

"At Valley, success was about filling my heart"

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Documentary explores life after the atomic bombings

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VERONA-CEDAR GROVE TIMES
STAFF WRITERS

David Rothauer is using film to make sure people don't forget the atomic bombings that led to the end of World War II.

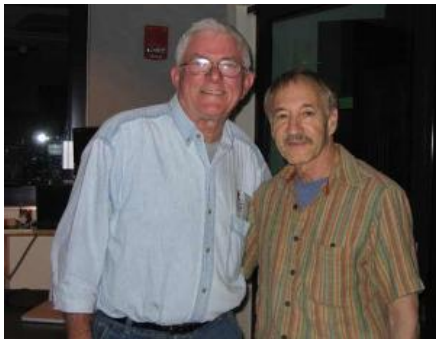


PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID ROTHAUER

Filmmaker David Rothauer poses with Phil Donahue, the narrator of 'Hibakusha, Our Life to Live,' a documentary about the atomic bombings of Japan.

historic estimates.

Rothauer is writer, producer and director.

The film tells the stories of Japanese, Korean and American hibakusha (survivors) of the atomic bombings.

Survivors' stories are interwoven with the relationship between Eiji Nakanishi, the youngest survivor of Hiroshima, and his friend, Yoko, an 8-year-old girl he teaches to play guitar.

Rothauer uses the relationship between Nakanishi and Yoko to illustrate the link between the older and younger generations.

He's gaining worldwide recognition in the process.

"I've felt like I've lived under a nuclear cloud after all these years and it's my story as much as it is others," said Rothauer, who graduated from Verona High School in 1952.

His documentary, "Hibakusha, Our Life to Live," is about the lasting effects of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombings, which occurred three days apart in August 1945, resulted in a combined death toll of more than 185,000, according to

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"The younger generation knows next to nothing about the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki," he said. "This type of film I was hoping would generate an interest in them because it was part of their story as well as the older generation's."

While books and other materials on the subject are plentiful at Verona Public Library, the library's director, James Thomas, says younger readers' interest appears to be waning.

"People interested in World War II and older wars are probably adults," said Thomas, who has been with the library for 28 years. "I cannot recall a class coming in to research Hiroshima and Nagasaki in quite some time."

The inspiration for the film began more than five years ago, after Rothauser read "Hiroshima" by John Hersey.

The book contained interviews with A-bomb survivors.

"It had a powerful effect on me emotionally," he said.

At the time, Rothauser wasn't a filmmaker and didn't have the means to make a film.

Rothauser received his undergraduate degree in theater. He started a career in acting before moving to Boston in 1971 and pursuing a graduate degree in filmmaking.

He began making films right after graduation, forming his own production company in 1996.

He is the producer of the award-winning film "The Diary of Sacco and Vanzetti."

In 2003 he met two survivors – one from Hiroshima and one from Nagasaki – through a mutual friend. They were speaking in Princeton, and Rothauser decided he didn't just want to meet them – he wanted to interview them.

"I didn't know why. I just did," he said.

Over the next two years, he met and interviewed more survivors. In 2005 he decided to use their stories to tell a much larger story.

In the summer of 2005, he went to Japan to begin filming. He went back the following two summers for brief periods to shoot more footage.

The film was completed on Dec. 7, 2009.

Rothauser flew to Japan a total of four times to do research and film interviews with more than 25 survivors.

"They all told their stories of the bombing, where they were and what happened that moment. Some of them reflected on what happened after the bombings, from 1945 until now," he said.

One survivor talked about how he was a young boy when the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and when he was older, he wanted to get married. However, when he was ready to be married, the girl's parents forbade him to marry their daughter because he was a survivor.

Many parents felt that way about survivors, Rothauser said, because they believed their children would be subjected to the radiation and perhaps even pass it along to their own children.

"They were just totally discriminated against and they had a hard time getting medical treatment from the government," he said. "Their lives were completely changed. So they were always considered survivors, not normal people in the way you would think."

Rothauser said the people he spoke to volunteered to tell their stories. "They kept their stories inside for more than 50 years and they felt they had to release that as part of a healing process, and also to educate the younger generation, so that this would never happen again."

His budget for the film totaled between \$400,000 and \$500,000.



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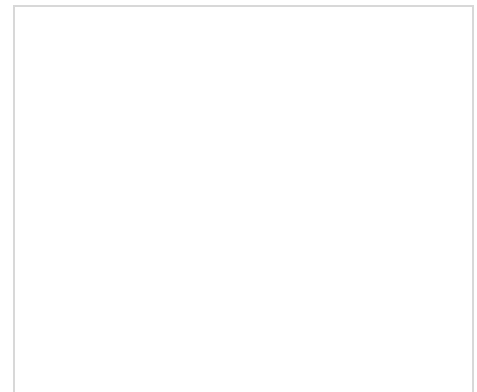


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However, residents in Japan helped make the filming go smoother by offering their homes and vehicles for use. Even translators donated their time, he said. He worked with a crew of three other people, including two filmmakers and a translator.

There are two versions of the film – one that contains Japanese subtitles and another with English subtitles. A trailer of the film can be viewed on YouTube. More information about the film is on Rothauser's Web site, www.memoryproductions.org

The film is narrated by former TV personality Phil Donahue. Rothauser said Donahue's voice was perfect for the film.

The American premiere of the documentary was last month at the United Nations Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, which meets once every five years to discuss the international issue of the safe use of nuclear energy.

"The response was amazing," he said. "I observed the audience at the end of the film. They sat there in silence and they appeared to be mesmerized by the end of the film. People said this film should be shown everywhere."

The Japanese premiere of the film is in August, and Rothauser plans to attend.

He said he hopes people will see the film as a history lesson, and learn how the bombings impacted so many people.

"If people can come out of the theater thinking that this story isn't just about these people...that this happened 65 years ago, that this story happened and it's become a part of all of us," he said. "As a kid, I felt that war ... it wasn't something that was happening here immediately. It was somewhere else and it had an end. Once it was over, there was no continuation. But the bombings, the radiation effects ... it's ongoing, it's never-ending and psychologically, that changed for me."

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