I read "Hiroshima" by John Hersey when I was twelve. Last Christmas, I travelled with my family to Japan, we toured central Japan and we stopped in Hiroshima. I bought Hersey's book and "One Thousand Paper Cranes: The Story of Sadako and the Children's Peace Statue" by Takayuki Ishi for my twelve year daughter. I read both.

Hersey recounts the horrible symptoms of radiation sickness experienced by the survivors of the atomic bomb dropped in 1945. One symptom is keloid tumours. The term conjures images of gross disfiguration and a more painful psychological punch to the victim when they realize that keloid tumours mean protracted, painful illness followed by premature death.

Hersey recalls the black rain that followed the explosion and the total annihilation radiating from the epicentre. Scientists scrambled across the cadaverous city and performed an urban autopsy. They tested residual radiation and estimated the temperature at varying distances from the epicentre. The technical details are powerful. Imagine a wave of energy 6000ºC. Hot enough to fuse mica in granite and to dissolve clay roofing tiles. However, what makes the book come alive is Hersey's meticulous retracing of the activities of six survivors following the explosion. You feel that nothing but luck transforms our lives.

Approximately 100,000 died instantly when the bomb exploded, tens of thousands of hibakusha - those close to the explosion or whose parents or grandparents were close to the explosion - have died since of chronic illnesses and radiation-induced birth defects. Suffering doesn't stop with death and illness. The Japanese government refused to compensate the hibakusha and only relented in 1957 under harsh public rebuke which began in 1954. In that year, radiation sickness made Japanese headlines again. Japanese fishers aboard the Lucky Dragon No. 5 were caught in the blast of an atomic bomb test detonated on a remote Pacific Island. The rationale for not providing compensation was that the bomb had been dropped during the war. Compensating the hibakusha would set a precedent for compensating all Japanese victims of the war and for accepting responsibility for the acts of the previous war government.

In the latest edition of "Hiroshima", an additional, not final, chapter was added that revisits the six survivors and completes the stories of their lives. Toshiko Sasaki's story affected me most. Her legs were crippled, she lost her parents, she cared for younger siblings, she worked as a seamstress, found a job with an orphanage, studied at university, qualified as a nursery school teacher, endured orthopaedic surgery and cared for the illegitimate children of American soldiers and Japanese prostitutes. She realized that the parents of her charges, like her, were innocent victims of somebody else's war. She became an outspoken critic not of atomic weaponry but of war.

"One Thousand Paper Cranes: The Story of Sadako and the Children's Peace Statue" by Takayuki Ishi traces the short life of Sadako Sasaki. Sadako was two when the bomb exploded. She was sufficiently distant from the epicentre that she didn't develop immediate symptoms. She was growing up normally, attending school, excelling in sports, making friends. However, like many, her exposure to radiation precipitated leukaemia and Sadako died when she was twelve. Sadako's life and death summoned her classmates and community to recognize the timeless horror of war especially for children and to raise a statue to convey that message.

"One Thousand Paper Cranes: The Story of Sadako and the Children's Peace Statue" like Hersey's book is a wonderful book for twelve year old children. The language and the message are clear - it's time to rethink how we live and how we resolve differences.