

I was born on February 16th 1960 on the Japanese island of Shikoku. I planned to become a primary school teacher but felt that I wasn't ready to teach when I finished university. Instead, I decided to do graduate work at Tokyo University. I was interested in the history of education in modern Japan, particularly in relation to poverty.

During my studies, I realized that a number of western ideas had been introduced so I wanted to know how these ideas had developed in the west. I was lucky enough to have a chance to do research at Edinburgh University so I decided to quit my college teaching job and go to Scotland. I was 37 years old.

I enrolled in a PhD program in 1997 just after Labour had won a landslide election. I remember clearly that Tony Blair's slogan was 'Education, education, education'.

After completing my degree, I began teaching a course on Japanese history but soon realised that I could not earn enough to support myself. I ended up doing various jobs including working as a housekeeper and cashier in a supermarket.

2011 - it's nearly 14 years since I arrived in Edinburgh and I still have mixed feelings about life here. It seems that the interest in Japan among British people peaked during the Fukushima earthquake in March. I had started a Japanese Language Choir in 2009 so began working on fundraising to support the earthquake victims. More than 200 people came to the concert.

By the following March, I began planning a renewable energy symposium. Since I didn't know anything about renewable energy, I began teaching myself. I had learned that the Fukushima Prefecture planned to become a 100 per cent renewable energy hub by 2040. It occurred to me that we could connect Fukushima with Scotland, which was aiming to supply 100 per cent renewable energy by 2020.

I reached out to Fukushima University and was able to secure support from the Institute for Energy Systems to host a Seminar: 'Energy Evolution from Fukushima'. The event was a great success, attracting a wide range of people from all over Scotland.

But despite these successes, I was frustrated and wanted to find a project that would give meaning to my life. Then in November 2015, I came across an article about the

little-known history of secrecy and censorship in wake of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and was reminded that 140,000 people had died by the end of December 1945.

At last I had found something that could involve members of the community - a grassroots activity. What if we could fold 140,000 origami cranes in memory of the children killed by the atomic bombs? I also thought of Sadako Sasaki, the atomic bomb victim who helped turn the origami crane into a symbol of peace and hope.

I remember posting on my Facebook page that December; 'I have made some paper cranes - no more *Hibakusha*' [a word generally designating the people affected by the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki].

On January 9th 2016, the first workshop 'Let's make origami cranes' was held at the Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre. We began running workshops in a number of community centres, libraries and churches around Edinburgh.

Then suddenly on February 2nd 2017, I passed away due to a diabetic coma. What will become of my project of 140,000 cranes? At the time of my death we had only managed to fold 50,000. However, by 2021, with paper cranes folded by people from across the UK, France, Canada, New Zealand and Japan, we not only hit my target, but 'Peace Cranes', a monumental installation of 140, 000 origami paper cranes held in St John's Episcopal Church was the cornerstone of this summer's Just Festival [Edinburgh's festival of social justice and human rights*]. My vision didn't die with me!

Atsuko Betchaku

Heather Kiernan (writer), Iliyana Nedkova (arts curator) and You-Ri Yamanaka (presenter)

*Follow this link to see the glory of Atsuko's work: <https://www.just-festival.org/>

