

SAN FRANCISCO PSYCHOLOGIST

A PEACE-MAKING FILM

by Ilene Sarlin, Ph.D.

After the recently missed opportunity for Japan and the United States to apologize to each other during the ceremonies marking the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, the theme of the role of *apology* in the efforts to heal from wars and possibly prevent new ones is fresh. What would happen if countries actually took responsibility and apologized to each other for causing harm?

Akira Kurosawa's film, *Rhapsody in August*, now playing in San Francisco and around the Bay Area, provides a chance to see this theme played out. In an unforgettable tribute to the role of memory and forgetting, and to the importance of story-telling and forgiveness in post-traumatic stress, Kurosawa shows us the *psychic* reality underlying the facts of the story. The film has been criticized for being slow, but perhaps this standard should only apply to overt action. Kurosawa shows us the landscape and pace with which psychological action is registered. He is interested in the inner, not the outer, landscape. He does this by emphasizing image and the imagination to create a dream-like text.

For example, the bombing of Nagasaki is remembered as a blinding flash and a huge eye breaking through the clouds. One of the characters in the film, a "weak-minded" younger brother, reacts by holing himself up in his room and painting nothing but eyes for the rest of his life.

Memory returns through image and its connection to the senses. Just as Proust's little cake, le madeleine, reminded the narrator of times past, so a glimpse of a cloudy sky on a full moon night reminds the grandmother, a central character, of the night of the bombing.

The new generation is represented in the film by four lively grandchildren, who are staying with their grandmother while their parents are visiting relatives in Hawaii. These children wear Western clothes, are not accustomed to their grandmother's "old-fashioned" customs, and do not know about the bombing. Slowly, the grandchildren's curiosity helps the grandmother to remember and she shares her memories with them. The grandmother begins to remember the names of her brothers and sisters, the last of whom is dying in Hawaii.

The plot of the film revolves around the grandchildren's desire to convince the grandmother to accept an invitation by her brother to visit, and to take them to Hawaii. Although they begin by going for superficial reasons—to indulge in the rich lifestyle of their relatives—they soon begin to learn the true story of their grandmother and understand a

deeper reason for going.

The grandmother tells the children that her husband was killed in Nagasaki, and the children find the site. They begin to feel the power of the event, feel enormous sadness for their grandmother, and understand their family's legacy and ties to the bombing at Nagasaki.

The children's growing awareness is paralleled by their initiation into the magical world of their grandmother. She is portrayed as a beautiful and frail old woman who still observes traditional ways. She has an open and child-like face, used to be a school teacher and still functions as the moral educator of this family. Her hair loss is a manifest symbol of having survived the bombing. When the family is gloating over the imagined opportunities that rich relatives in Hawaii would bring them, the grandmother forcefully reminds them that the real reason to go is to pay honor to a dying brother. She speaks of the dead, and holds a Buddhist ceremony in memory of the day.

Grandmother speaks in image and symbol, directly from her soul. In one moving scene, another old woman comes to visit her. They sit together in silence for over one hour. When the children, alarmed over such strange behavior, ask her what they were doing, she replies "We understand each other. Her husband died in the bombing too, and sometimes she just comes to be with me. Some people talk even when they are silent." I was reminded by this of a

Hands on Help with Managed Care II: Risk, Liability, and Treatment Issues

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- * Contracting issues
- * Professional liability
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- * Treatment reporting

Bill Gaito, J.D., M.S., CEAP, Teamsters Assistance Program, will speak from the legal perspective. Jacqueline B. Persons, Ph.D., Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry, UCSF, and author of the book Cognitive Therapy in Practice: A case formulation approach, will address clinical issues.

Friday, MAY 15, 1992

8:00 am-12:30 pm

Merritt Peralta Medical Center

Fontaine Auditorium

400 Hawthorne Street, Oakland, CA

Fee: \$45

To register or for more information, please call Carol Gagner (510) 798-1412 or Jo Benwell (415) 771-6631.

...ory from my Tibetan teacher, who used to tell us that a visit for tea in Tibet would often involve one person trekking over the mountain to another, sitting in silence and drinking tea for some time, then leaving.

The grandmother also represents the blending of ordinary and psychic reality. The children sometimes could not tell if she was speaking the truth or making up the "spooky" stories she told them. On one occasion, she told them with full seriousness about the water imp who lived under the waterfall, and then she brought them outside to appreciate the full moon. Her consciousness was contrasted with the cruder consciousness of her children. They were not only dazzled by the wealth of their Hawaiian relatives, but in trying to secure their place with these relatives, hid the fact that their uncle was killed in the bombing. Their relatives were Japanese-American who were trying to assimilate into American Culture. They were ashamed of their past, and were in a state of denial about it.

This state of denial was broken in two ways. First, the American cousin arrives in Nagasaki ostensibly to convince the grandmother to visit. But by then, the children had sent a telegram to Hawaii which revealed that the uncle had been killed in the war. The parents are fearful and expect that the cousin will be angry and rescind the family's invitation for the grandmother's visit. Instead, the cousin is a statuesque Richard Gere, whom the children call a "John Wayne," and who turns out to be enlightened and sympathetic. He asks to visit the site where the uncle died, wants to know and to remember, and asks forgiveness from the grandmother.

At this point, the children fall in love with him, and he joins them in their innocence and simplicity. Together, in a new alliance with the grandmother, they raise the awareness of the parents of their mistaken assumption. The parents are then ashamed of themselves, realize their debt to the grandmother, and understand loyalty and the importance of telling the truth.

At this point, it may be too late. News arrives that the grandmother's brother has died in Hawaii, just before she had a chance to renew the family tie. Her mind, which had been opening to memory and alertness, seems to snap. She confuses her son (or son-in-law) with her brother, and then begins to re-live the bombing. On a cloudy, rainy night which reminds her of the bombing, she strides out into the night, parasol held erect, followed literally and figuratively by her children and her grandchildren.

With this electrifying scene, the film ends. As such, it is a spell-binding depiction of the way the mind works, the way the psyche registers trauma, of the importance of telling the truth, and of telling the story, and of the role of forgiveness

in creating true peace.

I have just returned from a visit to the town in the Western Ukraine where my own relatives escaped the pogroms and from a visit with my great-aunt, the last survivor of the immigrant generation. As she told the story of what happened in that town, I was moved again by the power of narrative. And as I work with earthquake victims and on a team for victims of disaster and post-traumatic stress, I am reminded again of the power of telling one's story for the reconstruction and healing of torn lives.

ONLY 364 DAYS UNTIL APRIL 15TH
by Don Weinstock, C.P.A.

Now that the April 15th tax filing deadline has passed, it is time to direct your attention to ways you can reduce your 1992 tax liability. For example, if you're self-employed, zealously track your business expenses. By capturing just an additional \$25 of expenses per week for the rest of this year, you can save \$300 to \$500 in income and self-employment taxes. Consider the following tips on ways you can improve your tax and financial situation this year.

- * Contribute now to your self-employed retirement plan or IRA. You do not have to wait until the end of the year to make your contribution and this way your investment grows tax-deferred for a whole additional year.
- * Contribute the maximum (\$8,728) to your company's 401(k) plan. If your employer matches a portion of your contribution, this strategy will produce an instant gain on your investment for retirement in addition to reducing your taxes.
- * The 1992 standard mileage rate for business auto use is 28 cents per mile. However, by keeping track of your actual expenses, your deduction will generally be greater. Use a log book to record your expenses.
- * Personal interest is no longer tax deductible. Pay back your credit card debt and essentially earn 19% on your money. Also consider swapping your current high-rate interest debt with a lower interest rate. Wells Fargo Bank currently offers a unsecured line of credit with an interest rate of approximately 9%: well below most credit card rates. Call them to see if you qualify.
- * You might consider yourself lucky to be getting a tax refund, however you just gave the government a one-year interest free loan. Review your 1992 withholding and/or estimated tax payments so you don't pay in too much this year. Use the extra take home pay to reduce any credit card debt.