

# Films with a mission

by Ken Burke

There is a definite spark in Martin Duckworth's eyes as he laughs, runs a large hand through his greying curly hair and talks about the movie he'd make if he could.

"I'd like to make a film about mockingbirds," he grins. "I'd show scenes of the birds, then cut away to pictures of politicians trying to keep breast of all courses and issues. I'd just keep cutting back and forth and not say a word."

Through his working as Director, co-director, or camera operation in over 50- films, Martin Duckworth has become known as one of the leading voices for social change in the Canadian Arts. His films with the National Film Board (NFB) and as an independant have sought to influence and affect people since he gave up teaching in 1965. *No More Hibakusha!*, his latest film for the NFB, is also firmly rooted in that tradition.

Working as both director and camera on the \$200,000 film, Duckworth follows three generations of Hibakusha as they visit New York for the second United Nations Special Session on Disarmament (UNSSOD II) and attend the huge peace march held there June 12, 1982. Hibakusha is the Japanese word for victims of the 1945 nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Duckworth was inspired to make the film after visiting Hiroshima. After meeting several hibakusha through their Hidankyo society, he was drawn to the story by their courage and directness. "They were ordinary people like myself - like the people I hang around with back home," he says. "In a way, they talked the same language as me."

Looking at his family background, perhaps it's not surprising Martin Duckworth speaks of directing films "out of a sense of duty." Duckworth attributes his concern with social justice equally between his parents. "They in turn took their inspiration from Paul Robeson, Mahatma Gandhi and Tommy Douglas," he says in a clear, proud voice, pausing to give each name the weight of great respect.

Muriel Duckworth, Martin's mother, was awarded the Order of Canada this year for her lifetime of activism and work with the Voice of Women and the Peace Movement.

After attending high school in Halifax and obtaining degrees in history from Yale and U of T, Duckworth taught history in

London, England for two years. In 1958 he returned to Canada to become director of extension services at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick. It was at Mount Allison that an interest in photography led to his decision to switch careers at age thirty.

In the NFB, Duckworth soon earned his reputation as one of the best documentary cinematographer/camera operators in the country through work with noted directors, including Don Shebib and Derek May.

Unions in Canada have been a special interest of Duckworth's as witnessed by the films *12,000 Men* and *A Wife's Tale*. *12,000 Men* tells the story of turn-of-the-century struggle to unionize Cape Breton Coal Miners and the bloody retaliations which ensued. *A Wife's Tale* focuses on the role wives of striking Sudbury nickel miners played during the long, bitter strike at the INCO mines.

"I would hope the films I made for the labour movement had some effect," he says, considering the effectiveness of movies in bringing about change in society. Duckworth considers films made in Quebec in the 50's and 60's as examples of film having just such an effect. "People generally agree they (the films) had a lot to do with making Quebecers feel proud of themselves, and think of themselves as a nation," he says.

In any case, Duckworth is not willing to be pessimistic about his

does is document what the Hiroshima explosion has done to their lives.

The answer is different for all three people. Mrs. Tominaga has clearly been affected physically as well as mentally. She walks through Hiroshima with her back twisted in an unnatural half-moon, a bitter parody of the cardboard stand-up American Beach beauties she passes by on a downtown Hiroshima street. She is nearing blindness from damage the blast caused to her eyes and has been in and out of hospitals for years with abdominal trouble, an abnormally low white blood cell count and numerous other radiation-related diseases.

Mr. Murata is a different case, however. Although he was within two kilometers of the hypocentre of the blast, he escaped with fairly minor burns on his back and had hidden the fact he was hibakusha from society until just before the New York trip. Also hidden was Murata's trauma from the event, such as seeing his younger sister "her left side of her body severely burned - the skin hanging -not recognizeable as a human body anymore," as he painfully recalls. He also lives knowing every day of good health he has may be his last, due to radiation's aftereffects.

Both the social and genetic aftereffects worry young Hiroko. Even though she was born long after the bomb fell, Hiroko is



thing dramatic would happen."

The strongest and most effective scenes in the film take place when hibakusha and Americans simply meet and talk.

A dinner meeting between Murata and a small family is wrenchingly emotional as he describes the horrible deaths his family met that day in August, 1945. Openly weeping, eyes fixed on the neat blue handkerchief in his shaking hands, Murata describes the studies Americans conducted on surviving children.

"Even when we were studying in school, soldiers would come

For both Mrs. Tominaga and Mr. Murata, the belief in possible "victory" in a nuclear war means Americans are now willing to risk such a war under the leadership of Ronald Reagan. It was this threat which moved them to act.

Duckworth agrees that this lack of information is one of the film's shortcomings. "I started the film thinking enough background had been done already on the arms race and who's profiting from it," he says. "I felt there was room for more of a purely emotional statement."

For his next project, Duckworth plans to remain on the subject of hibakusha, but in a radically different way. The film would be about the "non-nuclear bomb hibakusha" - the victims of other parts of the nuclear cycle such as South Pacific Islanders dying of nuclear radiation, uranium miners fatally affected by their exploitation to produce the uranium for bombs, and other links in the chain. Duckworth hopes to begin the film with a visit to Canada by Hatsuko Tominaga next year. Having developed close ties with Indians she met at the New York rally, she is returning to visit Canadian Indians suffering the effects of uranium mining.

Despite the tragic nature of both *No More Hibakusha!* and its proposed companion film, Martin Duckworth remains convinced of the need for hope in the face of opposition. "You have to live with a sense of purpose and mission," he says, adding a faint smile to a serious face. "Out of that joy comes."

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work. "You have to believe things can't go on the way they are - you just say, 'Goddammit, I'm going to do something to try and stop things getting worse'," he says.

*No More Hibakusha!* is just such an attempt to put the brakes on a mad situation - the threat of nuclear war.

The film is centered around three people, each representing a generation affected by the nuclear attack on Hiroshima. Hatsuko Tominaga is nearly seventy and was a grown woman on August 6, 1945. Tadahiko Murata was five years old when the bomb was dropped, and Hiroko, a woman in her twenties, was born a "second generation hibakusha" because her mother survived the attack at the age of 11. Among the many things this film

ostracized from society because her mother was a survivor of the attack. Japanese society, fearing late-arriving genetic defects, has created a strong taboo against marriage to hibakusha. This taboo prevented Hiroko's cousin from being wed. Hiroko also fears she will fall prey to some unknown defect passed on through her mother's radiation-bombarded genes.

The film evenly splits its time between establishing the characters in Japan and following their trip to New York. Originally, Duckworth had not heard of the New York rally, and planned the film as a straightforward profile of the people. All this changed when he heard of the New York trip. "I caught on this was going to be a huge event in their lives," he says. "I was also assured some-

and pick us up, saying 'Hey you! Hey you!' But no matter how sick a child was, they'd never treat it. A piece of candy was all the gave us when we were leaving," he recalls.

However, some background knowledge on disarmament issues is required for the film to be fully appreciated. Through the film it is clear the overwhelming reason the hibakusha decided to become more visible was the acceptance of the "Limited Nuclear War" doctrine by the United States. This "Limited" nuclear war could be fought in Europe, Asia, or in some other location, supposedly without a global war resulting. Under the theory, some nuclear weapons would be used, but victory could be achieved without the conflict expanding.