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## Tree Of Hope Lighting Ceremony at SF City Hall

**By Dennis McMillan**

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The Tree of Hope lighting ceremony took place at San Francisco City Hall on Dec. 2 and featured special guests such as actress Sharon Gless, atomic bomb survivor Takahashi Tanemori, and singer Veronica Klaus. Over 5,000 origami cranes hang from the Tree of Hope, which was donated by the Delancey Street Foundation. The Rainbow World Fund - the LGBT and friends international humanitarian organization - in collaboration with the Japanese community created the first Tree of Hope four years ago. RWF has been helping people all over the world who suffer from hunger, poverty, disease, oppression, and war - the only organization reaching outside their community and the only relief organization that is LGBT-based. RWF is an all-volunteer run organization. Only 4% of donated money goes for operations, so 96% of all dollars raised goes for direct relief.



The Tree of Hope project was inspired by the story of Sadako Sasaki, a child whose journey and death several years after the bomb was dropped in Hiroshima transformed the origami crane into a symbol of world peace. Porter William of TV's Entertaining People served as emcee. The San Francisco Boys Chorus opened the ceremony with holiday carols from the sacred to the profane.

"As we raise our community's consciousness, we raise funds to support land mine eradication, hunger projects, drinking water projects, global HIV, disaster relief, and more," said RWF founder, Jeff Cotter. "We are building bridges all around the world." He explained the purpose of the Tree of Hope, saying, "We try to inspire hope - in a belief that things can change for the better and that people can empower their lives." He said, "It encourages people to really think about what they want for the future of the world."

Senator Mark Leno thanked Mayor Gavin Newsom and the First Lady for joining hands with RWF to bring everyone together and inaugurate this holiday season with a beautiful and unique tree lighting. "This tree is about recognizing that we do need each other now more than ever to come together and realize we can only accomplish that which we can imagine - that which we can dream."

Linda Mihara, an origami expert, further elaborated on Sadako Sasaki, a little girl of 12 years who became ill from the bomb, who heard the story of the legend of 1,000 cranes: that if you have a wish you want granted, you fold a thousand cranes. Sadly she passed after completing 640 paper birds, but her determination lived on through her fellow classmates who completed the rest. "Because of her

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courageous story, the origami crane achieved significance as a symbol of peace and hope," said Mihara. Each crane on the Tree has someone's wish written on it – from the famous to the unknown.

Takashi Tanemori, activist and atomic bomb survivor, told his compelling story of being eight years old when the bomb fell, a mile from ground zero. His entire family was killed, and life as an orphan was not easy. At age 18, he immigrated to California to work in the fields of Solano. In 1985, he discovered through an epiphany that the only path to peace is through forgiveness. Today his purpose in life is exposing and defeating what has become humanity's greatest enemy: fear and hatred that causes darkness in the human heart. He is active in the World March for Peace and Nonviolence, the largest peace march in human history – standing over 99,000 miles and crossing six continents, where San Francisco is their only stop in North America. "I think it's time for us in San Francisco to rise above the fog and shine, shine, shine," said Tanemori. "We have the ability and the heart to do that."

The nephew of Harvey Milk, Stuart Milk, noted that his uncle at the age of 19 in 1949 had a column questioning why ROTC would be on campus, teaching future teachers about war and division, "rather than teaching we are all the same and should be working on inclusion and the celebration of our diversity, not what separates us."

Sharon Gless, who played the P-FLAG mom on TV's Queer as Folk, shared the podium with Olivia Otsuki (who contributed to much of the origami folding) to read a few of the wishes on the tree. Several follow. President Barack Obama wrote: "A world for our children – more just, more fair, and more kind than the one we now know." Jane Goodall: "A world in which people live in harmony with each other, and with the natural world, and all the wondrous animals with whom we share the planet." Secretary of State Hillary Clinton: "I wish for a world where all people are treated with dignity, respect, and equality – no matter who you are or who you love." David Arquette and Courtney Cox Arquette: "Wishing love to all of those in search of it." Mayor Newsom: "A world where hope begets freedom, where opportunity is equal by justice, where the health of our planet is imperative." RuPaul: "Love for all." Rita Moreno: "Celebrate love." Sharon Gless: "I wish for a world where all people are free to love and marry whoever they want, amidst the backdrop of acceptance and tolerance from their fellow man." Gless concluded, "I wish you all love!" Then they lit the tree strung with clear fairy lights and a large silver star at the top.

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