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Autobiography & Memoir

Hiroshima in the Morning
Rahna Reiko Rizzuto
The Feminist Press
978-1-55861-667-7
(August 31, 2010)

In 2001, Rahna Reiko Rizzuto decides to write a book about the survivors of the 1945 Hiroshima nuclear bombing. With her husband's encouragement, she successfully applies for a six-month fellowship. As she prepares the household and herself for her departure, her husband asks why she is going to Japan. She replies, "Because I got the grant."

But there's far more going on in this project than that simple answer would imply, and further, as Rizzuto embarks on six months on her own for the first time, in Japan, what she expects to do and what she eventually does are very different. The events of Sept 11, 2001, which take place during her time abroad, change everything.

Rizzuto's work begins in a search for identity as a person apart from her roles as a wife and mother. She seeks a connection to her ancestral country and to the realities of Hirsohima's destruction through the stories of the survivors she interviews. Curiously, before 9/11, the interviewees say very little about their experiences. Only after the news of the attacks on the United States do the survivors begin to share their stories, in vivid, horrifying detail. In their view, Rizzuto has gained a commonality of experience with them.

In this meta-biography, Rizzuto intersperses short narratives from these interviews with her own experience, as she becomes more at home in Japan and with herself. As one identity gathers substance, another falters. Rizzuto's marriage begins to unravel, and she is wordless in the face of her husband's accusation that she has changed. The space between silence and story, the slippery quality of memory, and how one person might attempt to retrieve and connect to history are the tropes that create the book's infrastructure.

This is nonfiction written as a novel because, as Rizzuto explains, "I can tell you the story but it won't be true. It won't be the facts as they happened exactly, each day, each footstep, each breath. Time elides, events shift; sometimes we shift them on purpose and forget that we did. Memory is just how we choose to remember." The dreamy quality of Rizzuto's

writing deftly matches these perceptions.

Rahna Reiko Rizzuto's first novel, *Why She Left Us*, won a 2000 American Book Award. *Hiroshima in the Morning* is a deeply affecting record of the author's exploration of story and memory, and an intriguing addition to existing 9/11-related books.

J. G. Stinson