

# Memories bring back fear of nuclear war

My memories, though I was just a seven-year-old boy, remain vivid.

October, 1962.

President John F. Kennedy vs. Nikita Krushchev.

The United States vs. the Soviet Union.

The Cuban missile crisis.

As a child growing up in New York City, there had never been any doubt that if a nuclear attack against America ever happened, my home city would be at or near the top of the target list.

As this showdown developed, I remember clearly getting a sense from my mother that something terrible might be happening.

I don't pretend to have understood it at the time. I know we all got together as a family and prayed a rosary that night.

Our prayers were answered. The crisis calmed. Krushchev withdrew the missiles from Cuba.

But the fear of atomic annihilation remained for a long time to come.

Fifty years ago today, the world changed forever when the United States launched an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima.

From that moment on, the potential for worldwide devastation from increasingly powerful nuclear weapons could never be ignored.

Anyone who attended school in the 1950s, 1960s and even the early 1970s will remember air raid drills. By today's standards, it seems foolish. But periodically, much as schools have fire drills, we would have drills about how to respond to a possible nuclear attack. The plan? At my school, St. Sylvester's in Brooklyn, it was to have each student duck under his or her desk.

I know it sounds ridiculous now, but at the time everyone took these drills very seriously. Fooling around during one of these drills was the fastest path to the principal's office and detention.



**Dennis Lyons**

Also in New York City, as well as in other communities, a siren would go off at noon each day. The idea was to test the system that would be used if an actual emergency occurred. In

Youngstown, I'm told, a siren still goes off each day at noon.

I remember, in a bit of dark humor, the joke going around that if the Russians ever did attack us, it would be at noon, because we were all so used to that siren going off nobody would pay any attention.

Today, the Gazette begins a three-day series of stories looking back, both at the bombing itself and the legacy it left the world.

We've spoken to many of you who remember the bombing and to others who shared their thoughts of the aftermath.

Staff writers Pat Bradley, Teresa Sharp and Paul Stephens join with writers from USA Today and Gannett News Service in an attempt to give some perspective to this seminal event.

I commend their stories to your attention.

We've relaxed quite a bit since the dawn of the atomic age. The breakup of the Soviet Union capped a gradual move away from concern over somebody "pushing the button." The fear I felt at the age of seven, thankfully, isn't a part of life for today's seven-year-olds.

Thank God. They have enough problems we didn't have.

But the legacy of Aug. 6, 1945, lives on. It lives on in the waste from the Manhattan Project, which gave birth to the bomb, that remains buried in Lewiston and Tonawanda.

It lives on in the photos and stories of those who survived the blasts and the thousands who didn't.

And it lives on in the minds of all of us who can never forget the fear.

*Executive Editor Dennis Lyons' column appears Sundays.*