The World Friendship Center’s 50th Anniversary
By Tanya Maus

When I began as the new Director of the Peace Resource Center (PRC) at Wilmington College, I had not yet heard of the World Friendship Center (WFC) in Hiroshima, Japan. Yet, on my first day, I received a package announcing that the WFC founded by Barbara Reynolds in 1965 would be celebrating its 50th anniversary. I knew immediately that I wanted to represent the Peace Resource Center at the WFC’s 50th Anniversary to ensure that the ties between these two peace centers founded by Barbara Reynolds would remain strong. I also felt that if I failed to attend I would miss an irreplaceable opportunity to connect with the history of the Peace Resource Center as well as the history of Barbara Reynolds and her peace activism. Thanks to the Isaac Harvey Fund, I was able to travel to Hiroshima to celebrate the 50th with the members of World Friendship Center and deepen my knowledge about Barbara Reynolds and the heritage of the PRC.

On my first day at the World Friendship Center, I was able to affirm the importance of the relationship between both the PRC and the WFC by presenting a beautiful plaque to Directors Richard and Xinia Tobias on behalf of the President’s Office at Wilmington College. (Image 1) During the following days, I learned not only in greater depth about Barbara Reynolds’s deep devotion to the hibakusha (atomic bombing survivors) and anti-nuclear activism in Japan, but I was also able to meet her family members. In particular, after my presentation at the WFC regarding the PRC at Wilmington College, Barbara’s daughter, Jessica Renshaw and Barbara’s granddaughter, Margot Backus (who is a professor of modern Irish literature at the University of Houston) peppered me with questions about future plans for the PRC and urged me to continue Barbara’s legacy of peace-building through outreach to our campus and community. I have since remained in close contact with family members, and many (including Jessica) plan to attend our own 40th Anniversary at the PRC on September 10 and 11 this fall.

As I participated in the beautiful anniversary ceremony at the Shukkeien Tea Garden, I heard Barbara’s family members, fellow activists, and atomic bombing survivors speak of her profound influence in their private lives and in their political actions toward peace. (Image 2) I saw how crucial Barbara and the World Friendship Center have been in building an international community dedicated to sharing first-hand experiences of the atomic bombings, a history of peace, and to creating a nuclear free world. Not only does the WFC organize PAX trips to United States where Japanese activists tour areas surrounding nuclear test sites and meet with American peace activists, but the WFC also organizes an annual peace camp devoted to peace and reconciliation in East Asia. Last year students from Japan, Korea, and China attended the camp in South Korea, this year it’s in Tokyo, and next year the camp will be in China. We hope to invite a Wilmington student to serve as a camp councilor in for 2016 in China.

As part of its community of peace, the WFC also maintains close ties with the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, one of the largest and most active peace museums in the world. As a result, we were able to spend over an hour with Yoshiyasu Komizo, the Chairperson of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, which oversees the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, and the museum’s Director, Kenji Shiga. Through the WFC, I also met Steve Leeper, former Chairperson of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation. During a brief conversation, Steve offered to send the PRC the “David Swain Collection” of atomic bombing documents that Swain, translator for Nobel Literature Laureate Oe Kenzaburo, collected during four decades of living in Japan. We are eagerly awaiting the collection, which is due to arrive at the PRC this summer.

The WFC’s efforts to create community and to preserve a history of peace were revealed during the 50th when family members of Daisy Tibbs Dawson visited Japan for the first time to both celebrate the WFC’s 50th anniversary and to walk in the footsteps of their mother and grandmother in Japan. Daisy Tibbs Dawson was part of a now historic group of four young individuals who, led by Quaker Floyd
Schmoe, went to Japan in 1949 to build homes for impoverished atomic bombing survivors in Hiroshima. (Image 3) The group was made up of Schmoe, Emory Andrews (the young Baptist pastor of a Japanese-American congregation in Seattle), Ruth Jenkins, and Tibbs, who had recently graduated from the University of Washington and was teaching school children in the south. The group was unique at the time, not only because it was embarking on a mission of peace to build homes in the devastated city of Hiroshima, but also because it was made up of both men and women and was racially diverse, as Daisy Tibbs was African-American. During the WFC’s 50th anniversary celebration, we gathered for a dedication ceremony of the Schmoe House Museum, the last remaining house that Schmoe, Andrews, Jenkins, and Tibbs built, and which through the help of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum has now been turned into a museum (Image 4).

Through these experiences at the WFC’s 50th Anniversary Celebration, I came to further understand how vital the archive at the Peace Resource Center at Wilmington College is to preserving a history of the Japanese experience of the atomic bombings, a history of the pacifism that was born from the bombings, as well as the history of Quaker peace activism. Furthermore, the connection to the World Friendship Center in Japan, with its strong ties to a global community of peacemaking, is an essential part of the PRC’s identity. Following my visit to the WFC, I returned to the PRC with a renewed commitment to both protecting and promoting our collection as well as developing new programming and opportunities for our students that relate not only to Japan, but also to creating a more general awareness for the necessity of non-violent solutions to conflict at the local and global levels. Once again, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Isaac Harvey Fund for giving me the opportunity to travel to Hiroshima, Japan and join the World Friendship Center’s commemoration of 50 years of peace building, a historical moment that affirms Barbara Reynolds’s legacy of peace not only at the WFC in Hiroshima, but also at the Peace Resource Center at Wilmington College.
Seattle singer-songwriter Mike Stern sings at the WFC. The image behind him shows Daisy Tibbs and Ruth Jenkins, among others.

Family members of Barbara Reynolds and Daisy Tibbs Dawson gather at the dedication of the Floyd Schmoe House Museum on 4/10/15 as part of the WFC’s Anniversary Celebration. Front Row (right to left): Michiko Yamane (Chair of the WFC Advisory Board), Amanda Walker (third daughter of Lisa Reynolds Walker, great granddaughter of Barbara Reynolds), Ashlee Walker (youngest daughter of Lisa Reynolds Walker, great granddaughter of Barbara Reynolds), Jerilyn Backus (daughter of Margot Backus, great granddaughter of Barbara Reynolds), Lisa Reynolds Walker (granddaughter of Barbara Reynolds), Margot Backus (granddaughter of Barbara Reynolds). Second Row (right to left): Jerry Renshaw (husband of Jessica Reynolds Renshaw), Jessica Reynolds Renshaw (daughter of Barbara Reynolds), Cleavon Steele (grandson of Daisy Tibbs Dawson), Debra Dawson (daughter of Daisy Tibbs Dawson), Craig Dawson (son of Daisy Tibbs Dawson), Koko Tanimoto (daughter of Reverend Kiyoishi Tanimoto), Imada Yoko (researcher of Schmoe house and Daisy Tibbs Dawson), Joan Dawson (wife of Craig Dawson), Kaellee (oldest daughter of Lisa Reynolds Walker, great granddaughter of Barbara Reynolds), Kinza (second daughter of Lisa Reynolds Walker, great granddaughter of Barbara Reynolds), and Scott Walker (husband of Lisa Reynolds Walker).