

Celebrating the New Year 1968/1969

W. D. Ehrhart

1.

We were bar-hopping in Hiroshima—
a strange and ghostly place,
nothing standing older than twenty-three years,
the whole city obliterated
by the first atomic attack,
scars on the hills around the city visible still.
Peace gas, Peace cigarettes, Peace candy bars:
white dove logos just about everywhere.
We'd been to the Peace Park already
where the only reinforced concrete structure
surviving the blast still stood,
a hollow, ghostly skeleton,
and the guestbook signed by visitors;
someone had written "Remember Pearl Harbor."
A fellow American, no doubt.

2.

But we were here tonight
to celebrate the New Year:
Fat Pat, Smitty, the Big Swede, and me.
God only knows what the locals thought of us,
but they liked our money

and we didn't make any trouble.
Somewhere along the way, we picked up
a bunch of young Norwegians,
merchant seamen, their freighter in port.
When the bars finally closed,
they invited us back to the *Arthur Stove*
and the party went on from there.
I remember beer, and a table loaded with food,
and a string of little paper Norwegian flags.
We somehow must have gotten some sleep,
but I don't remember when.

3.

I do remember stopping at Miyajima
on our way back to base the next day:
the Great Torii rising out of the bay,
the floating Shrine of Itsukushima,
the Five-storied Pagoda,
Sika deer by the hundreds,
gentle as house pets, unafraid.
And the women in all their New Year glory,
finest kimonos to start the year off right,
hiding their smiles behind their elaborate fans,
two little girls in kimonos, sisters perhaps,
so impossibly cute you wanted
to curl them up in your arms
and take them home to your Mom.

W. D. Ehrhart spent three years in the US Marine Corps, including service in Vietnam, Japan, and the Philippines, earning the rank of sergeant. His most recent book is *Thank You for Your Service: Collected Poems* (McFarland & Co., Inc., 2019).