

LONG ISLAND PRESS

Op-Ed: Explosive Play Ignites Discussion

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A staged reading of the play *Atomic Bill and the Payment Due* was held on Long Island on Aug. 6 in commemoration of the 81st anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The event was sponsored by the South Country Peace Group and co-sponsored by organizations including the Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives; Veterans for Peace LI Chapter 138; Pax Christi Long Island; Long Island Progressive Coalition; North Country Peace Group; and Back from the Brink, among others.

The playwright is Libbe HaLevy, producer and host of *Nuclear Hotseat*, an award-winning weekly podcast that its website says is “listened to by audiences in over 132

countries around the world” and “syndicated for broadcast” on the Pacifica Radio Network. She spent 13 years writing the play that has received awards itself..

Its subtitle is: *An Explosive Two-Act Play*. It is indeed explosive.

As an article just out in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* about a new TV documentary, *Bombshell*, begins: “There was more to the Manhattan Project than just creating an atomic bomb. There was also the effort to spin the story afterward, by co-opting the press and presenting a benevolent picture of atomic power that minimized the horrific human toll of the bombings. The head of the military end of the Project, Gen. Leslie Groves, even went so far as to tell Congress at a hearing in November 1945 that radiation poisoning was ‘a very pleasant way to die.’ Many journalists went along with this effort at spin, including a star reporter for *The New York Times*, ‘Atomic Bill’ Laurence, who was embedded with the Manhattan Project and became its most vocal cheerleader.”

The threat continues today — bigger than ever. At the start of this year, the *Bulletin* set its Doomsday Clock to 85 seconds to midnight — the closest it’s ever been to “global nuclear annihilation” since its creation in 1947.

Bombshell also exposes Laurence. But there is nothing like a theatrical piece, drama, to enable people to feel and fully comprehend a person and an issue. *Atomic Bill* does that: The production at the Bellport Community Center received a standing ovation.

A group of the actors in Bellport — and director Tara Lydy — traveled to Long Island from Ohio, where *Atomic Bill* premiered at the 50th anniversary celebration of the establishment of the Peace Resource Center at Wilmington College. Five performers came from the Acting School at the Gateway Playhouse in Bellport.

HaLevy herself played the central character.

And there is a character in the *Atomic Bill* named Karl Grossman — me — and I played that part. (I never did that before.) When HaLevy began her program, she heard about Laurence; she telephoned me from her home in California and I helped fill her in and have been a source of information since. My appearances in the play include confronting Laurence, a model for those today in media who are cheerleading for nuclear technology and the feasibility of nuclear war.