



## **LEGACIES OF THE KOREAN WAR**

Oral History Project

*www.legaciesofthekoreanwar.org*

Interview with:

**Insook Won**

First Generation

Born 1939, Seoul, South Korea

Interviewed by:

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### **Japanese Colonial Period**

#### **Liberation from Japan**

My name is In-Sook Won. I'm 75 years old. I was born in South Korea, 1939. I was in the period when Japanese occupied the Korean land. And I grew up about to six years of age, until World War II was over, and then Korea was liberated from Japanese occupation.

[In] 1945, Korea was liberated so after that, Korea was in lot of chaos because capitalism came in, [and] South Korea [was] now better. And then communism was spreading to the south, with a strong hand, so that people got mixed up. A lot of young people like the theory of communism: no rich, no poor, you know, just like people live same rights, that kind of thing. So many people—young people were mixed up. My brother was kind of in that category. He was doing business, I bet. He was not at all communist that time. That 'All one land, one Korea' at that time. Of course, you know, Kim Il Sung was in China during Korean independence movement, but that's about it. But Korea's 'One land, one nation' at that time so my brother was normal at that time. But after the Korea was divided by demilitarized zone, without the militarized zone yet [the 38th parallel], that time after that, you know, more chaos happened.

#### **Pre-War Period**

Before the war started, I was in elementary school. It was quite a normal environment, even though my brother was in prison for communist activities. But I didn't know. I was innocent child. I was in fifth grade at that time so I didn't know in any serious way what my brother was doing. My father was involved in some kind of shoe trade business, but he was not doing this at that time. And my older brother was good provider. He was businessman, you know, so he did very well. So our family lived with prosperity in Donam-dong in Seoul.

We had five children actually, you know. Little ones died early on, but I was the second to the last. I have a younger brother, and also an oldest brother. My first sister—the first child of my parents, got married, and had her first child. I was same age as her daughter. So then, my second oldest brother—the communist brother—and the next brother was ten years apart, ten years older. I had more memories with him because he was closer to me.

But South Korea became very much oriented to make the country as a democratic country. We're progressing well in 1948, that time, and we selected the first president, but North Korea stretched their hands to—you know, to make 'One nation', communist nation. So they were reaching out to South Korea. My brothers were in that category—you know, tempted to join that group. My oldest brother was in prison already before the war happened, before the war broke out. Because when we lived in Seoul, he joined the activity of [a] very strong group of communist you know, idealists, so they were doing movements [activities]. They were gathering together doing you know, some kind of meetings, you know—very strong meetings. Because Korea was one nation, but under the Japanese, no freedom, no independence. And then when Japanese left, [Koreans] didn't know what to do politically. What is better—capitalism? Looks good—it looks you know, attractive. But communism—very, very idealistic. There is no poor, no rich-class people. We live equally well. Many people young people got idea, so they just kind of you know, followed the ideas.

Because my uncle—fifth uncle, my grandfather's other son's son—he became very, very strong member of Communist Party from North Korea, and he was really going after my two brothers. So it's been a few years already, before Korean War happen—already working on them, you know, to introduce communism to them, brainwash. That's main reason, I think.

When I was seven, eight years old, we lived in Donam-dong in Seoul, and my parents were Confucianists so we have a memorial service for ancestors like 30 generations up—like that. And we had memorial service in the midnight, you know—we opened the gate. The soul, you know, comes into the house. And then we just kind of set a memorial table. We bow—you know, always sons bow in front of table and all that thing, respecting memory of ancestors. And then, I remember that my father and the two brothers—older brothers—went to remote bedroom near the gate. And they were arguing about communism. My father didn't like communism at all: "There's no society [where] there's no poor, no rich. That cannot be." But [my brothers responded:] "No, Father, it's not like that. We like the communism because you know, we believed in theory." So they were arguing—their voices getting louder, louder. I remember that. It's my experience. Oh, I came out. It's wintertime, cold, and I came out, you know, maru, is wooden floor. I heard that, but I was seven years old barely. What—what do I know? That's all because I remember much, much later their arguing stuff.

All that happened, and South Korea was trying very hard to be a democratic country so they were becoming more against communism, so they started to arrest people—they [who] defied the rules, the communist activists. So my oldest brother was caught so he went to prison.

### **Korean War Memories**

[On] June 25th, the war started, but we citizens of Seoul, we didn't - maybe knew about it, but I was a child. On June—three days later—we heard the sound of artillery in the distance. Then we knew something's happening. And that's whole reason—kind of chaos, no transportation. People were walking everywhere, going somewhere because it's a war situation. But we didn't hear any gunshot, no—no bomb explode, nothing like that. Because, for one, South Korea didn't have any defensive power so we were just kind of—North Korean communism came into Seoul. I mean controlling—I mean, you know, Seoul is in the siege like that, under communist power.

And then one week later, after the war happened, my oldest brother came home. He was freed man because North Korea occupied Seoul so he was freed man already. He came home, and then within few hours, he left home. He joined a communist regiment—soldiers group. He left. That was the last we had seen him. That was last. I remember his face was quite pale-looking, but he was healthy. He was in prison. He had rice and beans and no sunshine. He's kind of pale-looking, but you know, he had to leave right away. I think he was very crazy about communism. And he joined army, [North] Korean you know, army so he left. He left, I guess. You know, I was little. I didn't know anything, but what could he say? And his wife, two children, and mother and father—all that thing.

And my second oldest brother, you know—a few days soon after, he came home. He was already—he had the communism planted inside his mind already, my second oldest brother, 21 years old. He was a journalist already for communist newspaper. And he came home with big

bag of rice. With rice, you can survive. And he left very soon because he joined communist guerilla group, and he went south, about four hours south of Seoul. And then to fight in Jiri Mountain because South Korean soldiers were regrouping because they didn't have defensive power. They were organizing again. Again they had a stronger defensive power at that time. So North Korean communist guerilla group—they had big, very hard war there. My brother was dead. It's speculation. He didn't go back to North Korea, and he didn't come home. He evidently died there. It's assumable, but it's a fact. He died there. We could guess that because a lot of people died—you know, because North Korean soldiers were weaker than South Korean soldiers so many of them died there and never came home. He never came back, but that's the kind of conclusion. He died there. He couldn't go anywhere. He died there. He was only 21 years old. I have more heartache for him.

My oldest brother—he was old enough. You know, [he had] his wife and two children, so it's less sympathy, but my younger brother, you know, younger, second oldest brother—I have more sympathy on him.

And I didn't know, but I was lucky. My mother's younger brother lived in countryside, about one hundred miles south of Seoul. And my father took my sister-in-law and their two children—put toddler in the basket, you know, in the bicycle and then I walked after them, following, six of us. My mother stayed home—and we all walked about three days maybe to my aunt's place. We stayed there very well fed, just like normal childhood. The war impact—the losing family was not really touched [us] yet because I was a child. My father took five of us, but he returned home right away. Then he went to Kaesong for grain two times, and the second time he didn't return. That's what happened.

I was the oldest child, and so, I was sent to Seoul back, before the North Korean—I mean Chinese soldiers aid soldiers [came]. I followed someone. My aunt arranged that. I came to Seoul on the train with them, and then came home. I hadn't seen Mother for several months maybe. June—about four months, five months, whatever. And then I joined Mother, but I felt the sadness, even though she was happy to see me—daughter came home alive. Of course, alive, but still but she had sadness.

Oh, my father—oh, the end of the story. My father—because Korea was—I mean, the city of Seoul [was] isolated for three months. And then, people were really almost dying because no food. The grains were getting less—or ration for the grain, less, less—so people are almost died, many people. So my father went to Kaesong, where my sister's family lived, over seventy miles to north. And he's good bike rider. He went with a bicycle. And he came—he loaded something, whatever -while I was in countryside with my aunt's family. He came home, and he was beaten by robbers on the way. And he got hurt, you know—like bandages, all that thing. And he rested, and he went back again to Kaesong, you know, second time for the same reason. And he never returned because General MacArthur and then the U.N. soldiers, whatever—they just landed in Incheon, one hour away west of Seoul. And then they came, and then they took Seoul, and then pushing toward north—like that. Then in the war zone, in the chaotic war zone, my father was on the way, or he just stayed there in Kaesong. We never knew about him. Or he was coming back, and then something happened while [he was] in the war zone. Something happened. Who knows? Nobody knows. We never exchanged any letters—nothing for forty, fifty, sixty years, nothing.

I lived in Seoul, and then you go out to the mountain, you know, closer to DMZ, whatever, not far, and go up one hour away climbing. There you can see Kaesong, the city of Kaesong, but there, my sister's family lived there, but there's no way of knowing if they're safe or they're living. OK, so that's the situation. So city was already in hard war because South Korea was going against the communist power.

And then my sister-in-law and baby, and then my mother and me, my brother, and the oldest nephew was staying aunt's family still. And then the Chinese volunteer soldiers were joining the North Korean army. They were going—a multitude of them. So the news was that January 4th, they are coming. It's the next year, coming, so at this time was a stronger war, much more, so we had to flee away. Many people, at that time, ran away from Seoul, so we had to run away—went to countryside by special transportation.... We got a transportation with special arrangement that my sister-in-law's uncle made so we on a truck, and had gone to—not that far, maybe one hour and a half away from Seoul. And on top of the truck, on the cargo, on top of the truck, we rode, and then went to Osan. Then we could walk to our aunt's place. That was second refugee—second time I went back to my aunt's place.

Oh, one year, full year, I stayed there, and went to school, elementary school, fifth grade, continuing fifth grade, maybe sixth grade, too—like that. But I didn't graduate. About one year I stayed, so one year and a half I stayed totally. It's a countryside school, but it's very peaceful, and my aunt's family—my aunt is a farmer, you know. Husband is not capable because he was mentally ill. So we were well fed. And then I had four cousins and sister, and then two younger cousin-brothers, and one older teacher—you know, teacher in elementary school['s] brother. So thirteen of us, we lived very, very protected. I lived a very normal childhood there—nothing much missed, because you know, safe. No fighting] because it's deep in the countryside. But several miles away could be the war, you know, [and] affect us there [where we were], but it didn't. The school opened almost every day.

In August, Korean soldiers—communist soldiers—came. Communist soldiers—those Korean communist soldiers came to our village, our aunt's village, and then took our house—part of the house—and then just stayed over, but they had meals in other places, I think. And then they were really well-trained, very well-mannered. And they were, you know—they were, like, tuning up their rifles the next day on the maru wooden floor. And they left after one night so you know—like that. So I've seen them—well-behaved, you know, well-trained soldiers that time, North Korean.

*Interviewer: Were you scared?*

No, not really. But, yeah, when in Seoul I saw, after I went to South Mountain [Namsan] for three days—three days and a week, we're coming back to Seoul. The first time I saw North Korean soldiers [they] were marching in Seoul on the street, nearby our house. Their tank was rolling, and then the soldiers with the red scarves were marching on the street—saw them for the first time. And then when they came to our village, we are not scared. They were well-mannered. They were just—you know, [I] wasn't scared. But my aunt knew what was going on. Communism is such a bad thing. Never become a communist, and she was so relieved they left.

I was ordered from my aunt's family to go alone to join my mother in Suwon. Suwon is a city in between Osan and Seoul, in the middle. I went in the wintertime alone, during the war. I didn't know why for a long time we could not go to Seoul by our house because government did not allow Seoul citizens to go to enter the Seoul because still the war is going on. They prohibited citizens to cross the Han River [and] go into the city. So we were held up in Suwon, my mother and I. We survived there several months or longer—less than a year.

Then—then this armistice treaty: I didn't know what is armistice. Nothing we knew. I didn't go to school; nothing I knew or heard about it, you know. Then after that, we could cross the city of Seoul. Of course, I was a child. I was not going to school at all, not—no school, nothing, even though my husband was—went to school, to school [sic] at that time, but he didn't hear. He didn't know much about, you know. And it depends what school—where you are.

### **Postwar Period**

And I went back to Seoul, reunited with my family. Six of us went back to Seoul, gathered together. [House] still there—all same. I mean, you know, house was not bombed so it was still in good contact. Then we didn't have any breadwinner, no male, you know, to take over so we had hardship, you know—really kind of difficult period. My sister-in-law, you know, had the two little children. My mother, you know—what could she do? She tried to do some business, like making rice cake or whatever. That wouldn't do good earning.

Then I had a wonderful opportunity to work in the bank. Central Bank is, like, a very good job. At 15 years of age, I was hired to start working. That was gold nugget, actually for my family, so I was breadwinner for several years. I think a very important source income I brought to my family. And I was a hope for my family because I was important person. So I worked daytime and went to school in the evening, you know. Very, very hard. But what could I do? Other people ask me—oh, because I was young and to work in the bank already, they ask me, “Oh, how is your family members?” They ask me that. I answered them: “I lost two brothers and my father—I lost my father.” Then they have sympathy on me. What could sympathy do—help me—for me? Nothing. I just had to be faithful what I was doing.

And then to improve myself unconsciously, consciously, I just was good student, went to school, and then soon after, few years later, my high school teacher noticed that I'm interested into music. She recommended me to go for college study in the future seriously. So then I went to all this, like, evening schools, learning German because German, you need to know foreign language in singing. German evening school, all that thing, and I didn't go to college right away because I was working. I was tied up. And then after I graduated, I went to other teachers, you know, voice teachers. I went two different places, and after two years' period of time, I went to evening school for German—all that thing. And then I had [unintelligible] method. He was a college professor [at] that university I was going later. Then due to that connection, I took lessons from him. I entered music school that time.

I was not really that critical person—kid, you know, to know the tragedy. Of course, tragedy hit me because I had to go to school and work—all that thing—and depressed my mind because I wasn't like other ordinary kids who go to school in daytime. But I went to school in the evening,

and all this, you know, [while] I was doing adult job in the bank. So I was really you know—psychologically, I was really kind of inferior to other people. Then I had to push myself. I had to help myself, just something constructive, or what I do, faithfully what I do. That's me.

I became stronger because of the war. Because war happened, I was not in easy good environment because my father is not there. My two brothers who are very supportive of me—they were gone. So I had to help myself. I had to become stronger person to overcome my situation. And good thing I had a good job so I could make money, support my family. I could spend my money for private voice lessons. I could afford. That's what I really like—to survive. That's my sole hope: to work on what I want to study. So I could afford to do that. So I was happy. But, of course, I was always trying very hard.

### **Religious Life**

During the war, my aunt's family started going to church. I followed my cousin, and [when] I was eleven years old, I started going to church. And then in the village, there is a small group meeting, and there's an old lady who was really supportive of the group. And I learned hymns, all that thing. I went to country church Sunday services twice, daytime and evening, so I received Christianity really purely in my heart.

Actually my parents were Confucianists, and when I was seven years old, six years old, I followed my friend to church, and when I came home, my parents, both of them just called me into the room, and, "If you go to that Christian church you go one more time, I'll beat you". My father threatened me, so I never went to church again.

But because of the war, I could believe in church, you know—Christ. So I listened to Christianity, and my third cousin—she's four years older than I—I followed her to go to her family errands, like marketplace. I went all the things. She and I went to mountain one day in the wintertime to get oats because only fuel we had is pine leaves, pine branches gathered on the mountain. And then that fuel is used for cooking, for heating floor. So [she said,] "Let's pray. You and I say prayer." So I went under the pine tree, sat down alone. My cousin went to another place. And under the blue sky, I prayed. I felt the Holy Spirit coming down on me. I said my first prayer alone, "Oh, God, I believe in you. When I grow up, I want to be good Christian girl. I want to be—I'll be faithful, you know, Christian girl." I promised to God, in a way, [in that] short prayer, but I did that. That was very important moment in my life.

I started going to church alone. Since then, every Sunday I started going to church, without fail, alone in my family. That continued. So I went to school [at] that time; I entered the school. It's dark already. Wintertime it gets dark early. Then I went into it [school], and most students had left so barely anybody there. It's scary. But I went into a small practice room. Piano is there. I went in. Then I prayed first. Then I recited Matthew chapter seven, verse seven: "You knock on the door. The door will always be opened for you. You ask, then it will be given you. And then you sick, you'll find opportunity"—like that. It's in the whole seven, eight verse that there was the start of my day in the practice room like that.

So that—my faith—helped me to overcome my difficulty. [It was] very, very important, steadfast because other people, who can help me? Nobody can help me, right, [with] my future? But that [prayer] was good support. Really, I draw my strength, my belief, or my faith through the prayer like that....

But after I finished that first semester, I wanted to continue school, but unless I quit my job at the bank, I could not continue my school. I really didn't know what to do, so I thought about it, prayed, "Oh, let me go to university, daytime college." Then the student dean—I met him [and said,] "I've been working at the bank, but now I became a student. Now I'm facing the second semester. There's no way I could continue unless I find a job. Is there a possibility to work?" He said, "Yeah, it's possible. There's an evening college—evening engineering college. You can work there. Then you can go to school daytime." It was perfect answer. How did God—I mean, I searched, I prayed, then that opening came. So my evening college job was much lower salary, much more work for much less, but I didn't care. I could go to school. So I finished the school.

### **Emigration from Korea**

Of course, I was studying voice seriously. I had quite a nice voice, and I was studying. And after college, what should I do? I want to study in the U.S., continue studying. And in Korea, I don't have much else—not much anything to offer me—so I want to go to U.S. I had a dream. So I found out I can pass government exam—history, Korean history, and then English exam. So I went to evening English academy, how to read Time magazine—all that—and then studied Korean history. I studied for a month so I pass exam. And I was allowed.

Then I applied, but I didn't know how to apply. I didn't know names of the schools then, and then because I worked in the evening college, there is a professor who came to U.S. He was an architect. He came here for five years. So I asked him, "I want to go to U.S. to study more, but with my voice training, I want to get room and board somehow—connected to church because I've been already going to my church. I want you to find out what could I do. How could I connect to send letter to?" And one day he came early. He took me to United States Information Agency in downtown Seoul. He took me there, and showed all the yellow pages on the wall and pulled out United Methodist Church. That time, it's not "United Methodist"; it's just "Methodist Church." So I pulled out yellow pages. I select about seven churches. Then he composed a letter—short letter. I sent seven churches my letters. Then a couple of months, I didn't hear anything. Then one day, third month, one letter—the letter came. The lady wanted to give me room and board—room and board. [She] have little two daughters, and they have a room. They have a bath—have my own bathroom, all that thing. [It was a] very nice letter, thirty pages long, beautifully handwritten. So I was relieved to come to U.S. I have room and board. Oh, before that, I apply scholarship. I got a scholarship at the University of Miami. That's why—because of that, I asked the professor, "I want to go to University of Miami. Then how can I connect my skill to church? I can sing solos. I can sing solos and in the choir." So he helped me in writing letters....

One thing I was very guilty [about was] when mother died because she lost so many family members—that I left also myself, leave my mother behind, came to another land. I was very,

very guilty so for two reasons I was really sorrowful for about six months because I left my mother. My mother couldn't understand, but she was proud of me. I was studying so hard and going to America to study, you know, what I want to study so she was proud of me.

### **Life in the United States**

So I left, but I gathered all my money—my retirement from bank. I worked about seven years maybe. [I had] the retirement money, and then I asked the help of my cousins, from relatives, [and] counted all the money, but money was not sufficient to buy airline ticket—seventy dollars short. The travel agent said that “If you'd ride the bus from—from LA, when you land in LA, you ride a bus all the way to Miami, four days, straight four days.” [I said,] “OK, no problem, I can do that.” So I came—landed in LA and rode the bus four days straight, day and night. So I arrived at Miami. So I started studying there.

We arrived in Texas. I mean, we were passing by Texas and no buildings anywhere—just like a dirt road. On both sides is like a small—it's not quite a building. And then I saw Texaco station. I thought that was the Texas sign, the state of Texas—I considered as a Texas sign. So we kept going. [I wondered,] “Wow, Texas is this long?” I asked in Louisiana, “Where is this place?” Then someone said, “It's Louisiana.” Oh, no wonder. I thought Texaco sign was Texas sign. Then somewhere, we stopped for dinner, and then I asked someone—I watched the people what they were ordering. They just ordered whatever they ordered. But I looked in the window, and there was a gravy bowl but thought that was soup bowl. So I pointed to that thing, and I got the gravy. And I tasted. “Wow, this is salty gravy. It's not quite like a soup. Americans eat this salty soup?” I thought.

At first Christmas, I mean, my hostess family—they were very good to me, you know. And then she said to our church pastor, “Well, she is new in this country, and we are going (the hostess's parents live in Washington area)—since we are going, she should have an opportunity to go together.” But so someone kind of anonymously kind of contribute, you know, fund to buy, I mean, train ticket. I went Washington. And then I met, of course, my Miami friend's father is reverend in Washington area. He just picked me up and all that thing. And then he is a pastor, you know—minister of Korean church—and then they had a choir practice. Of course, I was recruited, and all the choir members came and practiced.

Next day was Christmas Day service—Sunday service. I went there, and on the choir loft I was sitting, and someone was walking inside the chapel, you know? And I saw him. I knew we were singing together in the same choir in Korea so we knew—we knew each other—so I was very happy to see someone I could trust, someone I could trust because I knew him. My husband—you know, Duk-joong Won—we met in Korea. We sang in the same choir—choir in Methodist Church, and we knew each other. And he walked in so I was very happy. It was such a surprise to see him, and he finally recognized me. I was sitting in the choir loft. He was surprised, too. So we met after social hour, and then we met one more time—the snow, heavy snow—but we met in Baltimore because he lived in Baltimore area. One time, we went to international students' party together and then went back to school after. And we exchanged letters that time—all the time. And then we proposed. I visited once to Washington area. I had

opportunities. Others maybe could reach me but didn't click to me so finally, I mean, you know, that was the best person.

I was offered to remain at the University of Miami—study one year and a half longer. My voice teacher recommended but I was not into mind to really stick to that idea because I was already [leading a] very lonely life as a girl. And also, I had difficulty—my host family left Miami and went to New Mexico, and so I didn't have a place to go. I had a hard time, and my church raised, you know, the dormitory fund for a year so I went to dormitory. That was very nice. But my teacher told me that financially, but I didn't buy that option. It was kind of emotional thinking, but still I did that. I got married when I graduated, and we came up to Washington right away.

*Interviewer: When you met him in Washington Christmas day, was it love at first sight?*

We were very happy.... I don't know. Some could call [it] love. I guess it's half love or whatever, you know? I guess so. People told—someone who reads my story, like it isn't a love story, something. But we met in Baltimore. I wouldn't call it love, like a mistletoe was hanging in the entrance. I didn't fall in love. I didn't have such a mind to fall in love because I was less than three months in this country. I didn't have that kind of leisure mind to, you know, to fall in love like that. I would call it—but it's not entirely rejection, not, not [sic] entirely the opposite idea, but close to love maybe. Maybe. (Laughs) So it's hard to claim it, you know? I guess you could claim it if you want to....

I really started as a poor graduate student, down at the bottom—no car, not even housing for a week. We built up to be very, very successful because of my husband, I guess. I went to school. I went to Teacher Corps. It was my opportunity for my career. I went Teacher Corps for intern two years, after I had two children were born. So I had a hard time two years. I have all the teacher certificates—all that. Music teacher even—state of Maryland gave me, but I never used it. But I taught in Korean school. I taught ESL class for five years after I finished in my Teacher Corps and one year teaching, you know, at public school, and one year, I was laid off. And I followed five more years teaching.

### **War Legacies**

Oh, I'll tell you, ten years ago, 2005, I had a little bit sickness. I realized, well, I don't know my length of life—how long. How long I could control—I don't know. But I want to write about my story, how I overcame my life story—that with difficulty, Korean War, all that thing. So I want to write. But I was not really capable of writing in English well. So I struggled a lot. But still, you know, I wrote quite a bit, but all that story-writing, and then remembering, and go back—all the thing, you know, made me to cry a lot, you know, just like a cry baby, cry a lot, but still made me to who I am.

So even for many years, I repressed my telling to other people that my brothers were communists. I couldn't tell them freely because you're kind of repressed. "Repressed" is the word, right? Repressed in the society. But not anymore because I'm old enough, and then now

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it's free so it's okay to tell my friend or whoever I met freely now. And then I examine myself. That's the way—I think I'm sure I became stronger because of the difficulty....

*Interviewer: Talk about why you didn't tell people.*

Because it was not proud thing. Because I didn't have much to show to other people. My parents were—you know, my very intelligent, my capable two brothers just disappeared like that. I didn't have anything to rely on, nothing. But the difficulty—I know I developed myself to be better. I could sit idle—what be happy, whatever, but I didn't want to be. I want to go—I mean, I was young. I had the strength. I want to fight back for the future, nothing to lean on so I just really went for it. So I could claim who I am now because of that. Now I can. I'm free. I can - if I publish my book, that I can freely say that how I was.

I mean, my brothers were—I tell people, my friends here, “I have two communist brothers.” You know, I could tell proudly. In 1960s or '70s, I couldn't talk about it because the society was against communism, you know. Communism. You have your family members you know, had communism, and they ran away. Well, it was such a shameful story. And then [there was] nothing to gain. It's a shameful story. I couldn't make the story to them. And all the society, the environment or the atmosphere in the society was you cannot talk about it freely because you're afraid or somehow you're pressed down.

But I was sad. I didn't know I was sad, even though [on] my wedding day, I had this sadness holding me back. But gradually, I can a little improve myself, you know? Anyway, I have a happy marriage. My husband is a very good husband—very intelligent. How difficult his life was, but you know all the things so—but took a while to relieve all the thing, you know, like that.... So it's—so it's good to write my own story so I can release: release how my second older brother—poor, poor brother—he died there. Nobody celebrate his life. Nobody remembered his name. No any nation didn't remember his name. He's not even South Korean soldier, North Korean soldier—nothing like that. You know, it's a sad story.

*Interviewer: Did this happen to a lot of families?*

True, that happened, but my family is the worst case, in a way. Communists becoming—my husband could say very proudly, you know, communists persecuted his family, and he was Christian proudly. My family was Confucianist, and [there was] no religious background for me. All the thing, but other people had that—but especially my family, two brothers, you know, breadwinners are gone. My father was gone. My sisters lived in North Korea, and you cannot see them any more permanently. Only women left. I was oldest child. That was the worst because they [my brothers] were communist. That's the worst story to find. My sister-in-law—his wife, communist wife—my sister-in-law was victim, the most victim maybe. And then she was called into CIA agent to have investigation, to have inquiry: “Where is your husband?” He came while you went to countryside for second time, and he visited. He visited—he came to our house. Our neighbors told us. But I'm sure the CIA agent knew about that, and they will really try to get out of some question to answer through my sister-in-law. But my sister[-in-law] knew nothing—nothing about anything. So they called her three times, and they quit. They knew we didn't have any connection or we were just victims. They left us alone.

The most impact I received because of the Korean War was I lost two brothers. My father was not financially strong to do anything for our family. My two brothers were very, very able, and smart—very, very intelligent. And they disappeared like that. And the impact didn't come to me because I was still child. But as I started working to see, then I had to help myself everything. Then that really remained [for] the rest of my life—how sad it was, how difficult it was mentally. But [at] that time was—that was my faith. I had to overcome, and then all that years, I overcame that. I was kind of proud of that I overcame....

So that made me—that's what I am. So I'm really made into go for that direction—what I want to improve myself. That led me to come to U.S. and study voice—selected the path to be a singer and studied it all. Music has stayed with me all my life—except [for] the Teacher Corps [for] three years [when] I didn't sing. I lost my muscle—breath-control muscle, you know, diaphragm muscle, but I regained it. It took so many years, but I'm still singing. That's my breath of life, yeah.

My mind was very—had good resolution. I don't want to be sit idle, just wait—just get along with my faith. But I wanted to help myself. What I like to do, I like to do—I would like to pursue. That's my goal for my life, for anything else. I mean, even without the Korean War, but still Korean War made me stronger—stronger to knock on the door—almost impossible. Where could I reach? But I had prayer—I had prayer, knocking the doors, with almost nothing, with nothing, I knocked the door.