



## **LEGACIES OF THE KOREAN WAR**

Oral History Project

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Interview with:

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First Generation

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Date of Interview:

May 30, 2015

### **Japanese Colonial Period**

In fact, I had a fairly good life because my dad was educated in Japan, and he was a graduate of Tokyo Imperial College. He went to Japan, and he came back to Korea. By then, he was a veterinarian. And he worked as a veterinarian. In the meantime, he also studied to be an MD. So eventually he became an MD. So that's how I was growing up in that family circle. And my mom was educated in Ewha. In those days, Ewha school—“*Hakdang*,” that's what they called it. And so their match was rather a unique match because they were very well educated. During that time, I was not feeling anything because I was fairly well treated everywhere I went. And also during that time, other people had difficulty for food, but I had plenty of meat because he [my father] was a veterinarian and he was controlling the animals so I had no problem eating any food item. So I was fairly well treated, and I had no idea what was going on other than we had Japanese [occupying our country]—you know, World War II.

That war I remember, but—I don't think anything of it, you know. Even Japanese occupation, they were talking about that, but myself, I didn't feel anything, any pressure or anything. My dad went to an office that was a government one and my mother was, of course, in those days, a housewife. And so I really didn't feel any kind of pressure.

My name was then Kanehara Sumiko. That's a Japanese name, and then, of course, my surname became Kanehara and so my dad changed it. So my sisters changed it and my brother changed it—Korean names to Japanese names, but I don't remember what they changed it to. And I think my sister's name was Toshiko—Kanehara Toshiko. But I'm the only one that was in school in those days so I used my Japanese name all the time so I remember my name. But my brother is the younger one and my sister's younger so I don't think they really used it because they never had any time to use it. They didn't have any opportunity, so that's why I don't remember their Japanese names.

Also, I remember when I was about thirteen, fourteen years old, and I went to the butcher shop and the butcher shop was operated by Japanese. And when I appeared there and I said I would like to get some meat, oh he always treated [me] very nicely. It's not like a thirteen year old kid came in and talking. He treated me as “up there,” so you know, it never occurred to me that there were two worlds. I always lived in one world under Japanese occupation and had no pressure of any kind, and because of my dad's position, I was well treated, even in school, even by the teachers. All those people were treating me very nicely, and I myself really felt I am very progressive kid. And I always felt we are well off, so kind of a bland type of life I was leading and anything memorable will be that I was happy under that occupation. I had no idea that anti-occupation forces existed....

My father, a veterinarian, was working in the government. In those days, there was no such a thing as the Korean government Japanese government. And so, since he was so educated and he had a veterinarian job, we had to move a lot and went to Pong-dong that was in Gyeonggi Province. And there, my father—I think he took care of the animal population at the same time. Now, at that time, I had no idea why he went to young men gatherings, but he was teaching something. But that was the training on the job, how to take care of animals, the cows and, in those days, the cows and pigs and chickens. So we had a huge house, a huge warehouse, and there, a lot of people brought in eggs. But it's not like eggs they are selling nowadays. What

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they have is straw, tied up with ten eggs in a straw case and then tied up the other end so that's how they take care of the eggs. And those came in, lots of them, and they were supposed to send it to the military supply because they don't have enough, so we are collecting that and sending it to the military supply. Those eggs will be feeding the military so that's why constantly people were bringing in eggs and then the eggs were shipped out. So, at that time, I had really no idea what he was doing, but now thinking back, that's what it was.

So, then we went from Pong-dong to Chuncheon, part of Kangwon Province. And there, Father worked this time in an office. And then, at that time, he used to be—they call it “*kide*” [a level of government pay-grade]. That was lower than higher class. And then, he received *kishi*—more like a governor's rate—pretty high level, especially as a Korean. It was almost impossible to get that[but he did] because his appointment came from Imperial Palace. And then he finished that job and then he was assigned to go to Daegu so we went to Daegu and then he was reassigned back to Seoul.

...So [during the World War II,] third and fourth grader, high school kids were either making uniform or shoes for the military, and we were making consumer goods. So I don't know where we got that—some kind of twine-like straw, twine-like thing they gave us. So towards the end of World War II, we were not studying anything, just making war efforts for the Japanese. We really worked hard for the war effort, making clothing and shoes for the military. So they [the goods they made] were sent to the war front. So that's how we lived. We didn't really do education. We did the war effort. That's what we did....

We had to go to the store. We had to line up. Everybody received a ration. And so when we got to the ration line, whoever is in the line—they must speak Japanese language. Otherwise, they won't get a ration. So those people, especially the older women, they have additional something [needed something else, i.e., a bus transfer] but [they] like say, “*norikae*” transfer, then they called it “*norikae*.” And then, they will get some ration so Japanese actually really, really practiced the language to all the people. They must speak Japanese during World War II, otherwise we won't get anything so that's one way to really use as a weapon to propagate their own language. Ration—we got tangerine because later, Japanese had tangerines so we got a tangerine and then rice a little bit and then some of those barleys [*sic*] and some beans, but very small amount they receive, and that's how we survived.

### **Liberation from Japan**

During that time, August 15<sup>th</sup> came along, and so we heard the emperor. They said the emperor is talking about something so after that, we all knew so war ended. And uh, Korea is now independent. That's what they said: “We are independent.” I had no idea what the emperor was talking about, and then, everybody says that the Japanese lost the war so we had celebrations—a lot of people on the street, and then all of the sudden, I notice that the Korean flags, people waving. And see, I had no idea that such a thing existed. And then, we are now changing the education system. Up to August 15, we were using Japanese. Then, after August 15, we are using Korean. And we actually did not have any books written in Korean, so we have to translate from Japanese books to Korean. Also we really did not have even paper, so scraps of

paper we use and then we will write down all the things in school without a textbook so teacher is only one who has a textbook and we are really writing down all of that.

I didn't even think of my identity because I just took the Japanese name as my name and before that was a Korean name, "Kim Ok Ryun." So I guess that's just one of those transition periods so I didn't have any feelings. That's what they said, your name is "Kanehara Sumiko" so I took that, and somehow my dad was telling me don't talk about much of anything against the Japanese. I had no idea about the Japanese occupation because I thought they were always there. It never occurred to me there was an anti-Japanese occupation force out in Manchuria in China. I had no idea. So that's how I grew up. And then after the war, after World War II, then I realized all those people came back to Korea from Manchuria and China and even from the U.S. So then I knew, oh, such a thing existed, but I was totally blind about that.

Well, I know I was well treated. That's why, even to this day, when people are really talking about the bad Japanese, I don't get that because I never suffered anything during that time. At that point, I said, "Oh—oh my gosh, I had no idea, you know? All these [Korean] flags exist. The songs exist." And people all put on the Korean attire. And when they were liberated, my dad and my mom were worried that since he had worked for the Japanese government, they might arrest him. But it never occurred and after liberation, he got the certificate of MD, so he was able to practice his medical field so I didn't feel anything bad. So World War II ended, I just thought, "Oh, this ended and it changed. A lot of things changed." And my dad's occupation changed from veterinarian to doctor. So I really didn't have any bad feelings, except that after liberation, there were not enough schools so higher-grade kids were in school, but little kids like my youngest sister—who was seven or eight years old—they were having school in the fields. They just sat there listening to it. And then, of course, because of that, she got all kinds of pneumonia and all kinds of disease. But for me, I was then fourteen years old so didn't catch anything. Besides, I was well fed during even wartime so I was the strongest one, but my sister was not.

Before the ending of World War II, we were making war effort for Japanese military people... So we really did not study because we were all out there to put our effort to the Japanese military supplies. So then, even after World War II, we had the same situation because we don't have any textbooks and the teachers were all educated in Japanese education system. So they came back, but I don't know how they learned Korean. So they wrote in Korean, then we would copy it from blackboard, and then we studied that, but it was just not very highly educating. It's just the education is there. I was lucky because I wasn't growing up in rural area, so I had to go to school. I just thought I had to go to school, period, so I went to school and high school. And then, I moved from Daegu to Seoul. Then, I went to Ewha High School. In those days, there were four-year high schools. But then, American education system came in after World War II, so we made a system like here [United States]: junior high and high school. So that's what they implemented in my time. So I'm the very first one who graduated from high school and finished the middle school and went to high school so I had six years of high school. And after that, I went into Ewha University.

I don't know how I managed it, but...sometimes [during the Japanese occupation] I heard my dad and my mom, they spoke in Korean because they don't want me to know so they all talk in

Korean. So I heard about the sound of it. So, when I went to school, they changed the system to Korean, but we are not totally Korean-speaking. We are still using Japanese. Certain words we still keep on using Japanese word. And it just came to me, and I learned that Korean language is not so difficult. And also one time—this is really funny—I was in high school and the PE teacher was teaching us. He was educated in Japan. And then I said, “Oh, I have a trouble with my neck.” And then, I said, “Mogaji.” [Laughs] That's what I said. Then the teacher was saying to me, “You have such a rough way to talk.” It was supposed to be “mok,” not “mogaji.” Then that teacher was scolding me so badly, and then said, “I don't even know what kind of family background do you have to talk such way. ‘Mogaji’? What's that?” [Laughs] So I said, “Well, was it a bad word?” She said, “Yes, you don't talk like that. You have to say “mok.” So I said, “OK.” So I did not know some derogatory way of talking in Korean, and so I was corrected for that. I became fluent Korean because I have to practice with my parents. So I became fluent and, uh, so by the time I came up to Seoul, then went to Ewha School—[Ewha] High School—by then, I knew pretty good in Korean, and then, I went to Ewha University.

### **Korean War Memories**

I entered Ewha University—I think it was in April. [By] April, I had registered. We had only couple months in the university, and war broke out. And even they said, “War broke out,” and I thought “Oh, just a little incident.” But then, there was June 25<sup>th</sup>, June 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup> came. We could hear very muffled gun sound. It's closer and closer, but then we never even think they would be in Seoul so fast. So June 28<sup>th</sup>, we woke up and the city was filled with criminals and all sorts of North Korean soldiers because the criminals inundated in the street because I lived in area [where] little further out, there was a jail. And they were all incarcerated there.... I was right in Seoul. Nobody really proclaimed it [the start of the Korean War]. All the government announcement said was “Keep your position where you are—never to move around hastily. Government is here and so you have to stay home where you are.” So we all trusted that announcement is correct.

Going back to June 26, I was in the house, and one of those South Korean soldiers, I think he lost his company, so he was heading for his house. Here, we say uphill, then that rich people live uphill, but in Korea, rugged area, that is [where] poor people live. And he was heading for that up rugged area. So even to this day, I feel I have no idea who that was. Only thing I know is [that he was from] the South Korean army. He had [on a] full army uniform. I wonder if he survived or somebody told him, “He's a South Korean soldier,” so he was killed. I have no idea. Even to this day, that's sixty years ago, I had that experience, I often wondering about that unknown soldier and whether he survived. And then I said, “Oh gee, war is terrible stuff.”

And then, June 25<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>—June 28<sup>th</sup>, the jailhouse was open so all those criminals flooded in the street with the commanding liberation front North Korean soldiers. I can tell you: North Korean soldiers are very really tough guys. They are not clean. Of course, they were walking down and then the fighting—all that. They had perspiration all over. They were caked with dirt. They would smell, but they never touched a female. And compared with the South Korean soldiers, they were spotless. They [North Korean soldiers] clean uniform, and most of the time, they had a female [soldier] with them. So I thought, “Wow, no wonder that's why these people are coming into the South so fast.” And within three days, Seoul was captured.

And then we were told the communist party said all those students [must] report to the school. So we report to school. And usually school-room has a front door and a back door. So they locked up the front door. We all have to go to the back door. And then, there is the person sitting there. And then, we were all told about communists: how they are good. You never miss a meal. “We will provide you a good meal and the system was so good. And you're going to go to north. And we will give you knapsack and their little rice and water and you're going to go up to north because along the way, all you will stay in those houses that we provided for you.” And they wanted me to sign up. So since the front was locked, everybody has to go in the back door so everybody before getting out has to sign it.[a pledge document] It had the address and my name and the pledging that I would go to the north. In order to exchange, I think, what they have to do is exchange us to send them to North Korea. And then, they brought North Korean people down south. That's how they were trying to do.

Sign it: “OK, I will go to the north.” So we signed it. And I thought “Gee, no.” What are we going to do? I signed it. They will look for me. So I thought how am I going to get out of this thing? So for about two weeks or so, I was freely roaming around, but then all of a sudden it dawned on me and also my parents the idea [that] since you signed up, they will come into house and to grab you. So you have to hide somewhere. So we had a large chest that's back against the wall. So we pulled the chest out about a foot or so. Behind there, there is a space. So I was hiding in that space. I just hid in that space, and then my mom always give me the meals, and I eat there, and I hide in there. And then I thought, “Oh this is awful life. What am I going to do with this?” I can't stand. I can't sit. The space was so small. So I said, “I can't do this all the time,” and I was going to drink water. Just so happened somebody saw me. “Oh, there's a girl there.” So naturally, the communists came and said, “We saw your daughter staying here. We have to take her out.” So I was taken to communist headquarters—at local headquarters in somebody's home that they took over and they made it their office.

They already communist, but they want to make sure I talk like a communist. So that guy's throwing question like this: “Right now, that Han River, the bridge was broken. The bridge was destroyed. Now, how we can get people across Han River? What to do with it? Now, bombing all. How should we win this war?” What else I can say? I can say: “oh yeah, to that end, what we have to do is put all the stones on the head and then throw in the river so we will eventually make a stone bridge. That [is] what we'll have to do. That [is] what we going to do. Then, we can walk. “ See? That is crazy propaganda of communist. I mean, you cannot do that. You know, water is there. Current goes back and forth. The—the stone will be moving. All that. How long we have to do that? And then, we have to go through the bridge and from the bridge we drop those stones, but they are not going to drop in a straight down exactly same spot. So that guy said, “Oh, now the plane is here and dropping bombs. What will you do?” That guy was saying I have to make out that I say communist talk and that's what I did. And the only answer I can think of is “We keep on doing it—keep on shooting or something. Otherwise, we won't be able to win the war.” “Win the war” means the communist war....

You're going to talk to these people or they just bothering me all the time. It's any time they say you come out then I have to go. I cannot make an excuse unless I'm dead, you know. So every day they were doing so-called youth program and just bothersome. For me, I don't need a youth

program. I need to have to go to school and I have to finish the whole thing, but they just—little things, bothersome type of things. People doing that. And then, they say you have to sing. So I says, “What do I sing?” I don't have—“Well, you—you sing that communist propaganda song.”

So then pretty soon I hear that there is a Han River. They have a bridge there, that the bridge was broken and they [South Korean army] bombed bridge so people and all that was on the bridge dropped into the river. So people said, “We cannot even move out of Seoul because the bridge is not there.” So that guy asked me, “What would you do now? We don't have any bridge? How to get out of here?” Then they all mustered all young people, and we were carrying the rocks on the head, then we go to that river and put them in there, just thrown in there. So the idea was we put enough rocks in there and then we can walk over the rocks to get to the other end. That's the idea. So every night, we do that, and then every night, the airplanes were flying over it.

And, you know, in those days, we had straw roof, thatch roof, so when high-speed plane went right over it, that house just collapse, just simply collapsed at the speed itself will making that straw—that thatched house collapse. And right behind our house, which was on the second story at the hospital—behind that [was] the thatched house. Since that [plane] went through so fast, that was collapsed. And then, at the same time, our house had bullets that came through, holes all over the house, but we survived that. So it's bombing, and people are just going all different directions, and we were thinking about that. It's in case bullet come through. At least we have to have protection so we all had bedding and comforter. We put the comforter around us and then walking around.

Sure enough, there was the dead soldiers, then another soldier coming in, take off his [dead soldier's] wristwatch and whatever he had, and put it on him. So some guys had four or five wristwatches and because in those days, wristwatches are rare kind of an item. So they do that. And took off the shoes, and they put them on. So at that time, it never occurred to me that a dead body is a scary thing. We just saw dead body: “Oh, another one dead.” And we moved around. We didn't think much of it. I didn't even think they were going to be rotting away or anything like that. So it never occurred to me that “Oh that's dead,” and that “Somebody's taking his shoes off and wristwatch.”

And then one day the airplane is dropping all the fliers. So then those fliers say, “Go to such and such a place.” That was instruction to us: “Civilian must go to such and such a place.” That happened to be a tailor's machine company—sewing-machine company's headquarters. They have large front yard. So we all went in there because those fliers said that's the only place you can keep your life safe. So that's where everybody went. And then, there we are either cooking or talking, and we were staying there.

Finally, the South Korean soldiers [were] marching into Seoul in single file. Then, I guess somebody told the soldier, “He's a communist,” so the South Korean soldier grabbed this guy and give him this shovel: “Dig the hole.” So he was digging the hole—about a foot high. Then the South Korean soldier says, “Kneel down.” So he squatted down, and then before we know, in front of our eyes, the South Korean soldier was shooting. And then, he just collapsed, and I thought, “Wow.” I said, “Oh, he's communist so he was killed.” But it never occurred to me

whether he was innocent to die or criminal. I have no idea because never had, you know, due process of the law. So I thought, “Well, whose father, whose brother that might had been?” And so then, the UN forces and South Korean army all marching toward the North.

You know, but I would give you one more episode: so communists was go home, and now UN forces came in and South Korean army in Seoul came in. Then, what happens is civilian so-called interrogation group [was] set up. And then, they grabbed me. They nabbed me actually because you are the communist now. That was 1950 because first the communists came down, and now UN forces came up and then went up, and then again retreat from there. So I was caught in [between] two different ideology. One, they were communist came down. They grabbed me. They used me for the communist propaganda. And now, UN forces came in. They grabbed me because “You're a communist. We have to punish you.” So I was incarcerated in a little cellar [with] about fifteen people. And then, they were interrogating. They were torturing. And I could hear man goes out and scream goes out because what they—two by four board was put right under their knee and then squat down, then hit that board, then he will jump, then scream comes out. So that went on. And we could not even get out of that cellar for bathroom or anything else. We just sat there, fifteen of us. I think I stayed there about two days and then finally they called me. So I says, “Oh gee, I'll be interrogated and also probably tortured.” So I went in, and then, of course, thing they said in Korean: “This bitch coordinated and cooperated with the communists. So you have to be punished.” So I said, “I was not cooperate. I was forced in and I was almost inside hell.” [Laughs] I was ready to say, “Heck, if you defended this country, nobody would go through this thing. Now, you guys went down, and now come back, and interrogating me because you left me here? That's why.” But I couldn't say that. If I say that, probably they would hit me, so I couldn't say that, but inside of me—that. Another way I was thinking: “I'm going to fight you because you guys didn't do the job very well and now picking up somebody else and then try to punish me.” So they go on talking like this, then finally they said—one guy said to me, “Do you know teacher so-and-so?” I said, “Yeah, he's my English teacher.” [Then he asked,] “Do you know teacher so-and-so?” [I answered,] “Yeah, he's—he's my French teacher.” [Then they said,] “What did they think of you? Now they see you as a communist.” [But] I hadn't met them since the war. I hadn't seen him or I don't know what—what they were thinking about [me possibly being a communist].

In the meantime, my mother petitioned in in my neighborhood that she was not a communist. She petitioning and brought that petition with some money. And then, bought those people. So they said, “Now you can go home.” So after the other interrogation, then they can let me go. My mother bribed them so that's how I came out. And it took me long time to get out of that terrible agony out of my system. And then, I finally said, “You know, somebody told me he was not a communist, but the way they treated him so badly, he became a communist.” I said, “Hey, that's not very good. That's not a strong will. That won't do any good.” That's the way I felt, you know? I was not a communist, but you guys left us here and then communist came and grabbed me, they brainwashed me, and now you come back. So I felt I can see why they will become a communist.



### Refugee Life

And then, you know, the famous MacArthur's retreat—so go all the way up and then they were retreating during December of 1950. And so we were supposed to evacuate because no longer they were able to defend that Seoul. So my family packed a lot of stuff and the comforter and all of that and we got into railroad station, Seoul Railroad Station, and we have no idea where those that train goes. It's not train. It's a flat car actually. So flat car—there was four, five of them linked to this train. So we just got on. We just got on there and sat there. We have no idea which way we're going, but it moved, so luckily moved down south.

So we went all the way to Daegu, and then my dad said, “You know, it's a place where a lot of rice is growing, so we are going to go that direction.” But then order came through and said, “No, that area already taken over by communist because they came down the mountain range to take over there.” So only thing we have left is Busan. So now we have to head for Busan. So we did go by using a flat car and all, and it was just packed with people, packed with people. Actually, there is no room for anything. Some of them are standing because no room—standing, some of them squat down. And that was December so it was awfully cold, and I was crying because it's so cold. But luckily, all family's there: my dad, my mom, and the three kids. We had a suitcase so we carry suitcase, and finally we reached Busan. Oh, and everywhere people. Everywhere people. We reach the [*sic*] Busan, and everybody was getting off the train, and the streets was inundated with people and no place to go. So my dad went to one of his, you know, subordinates [from] when he was working in the government, Japanese government, and went there, but they said, “Oh, we have no place. You have no place to go.” And the hotel[s] were all occupied so literally homeless people we had become.

So we were sitting on one corner, right out of the train station. In those days, they were using coal to make the train move so soot is getting all over the place. And even then, we were saying, “Well, at least we are down here all together.” But we didn't have money so my mom had her ring, so she and I went to the jewelry store and sold it, but by the time when we got there, I look at my hand. Every crease was filled with soot and we haven't washed our hands for so many days. It's with coal shiny, and my hand just shiny as can be. [Laughs] And it was awful. And thinking back, that jewelry-store man actually bought that ring was I think a miracle because he could have said, “Oh, you—how do I know this is yours or somebody else's [that] you maybe steal from someplace else?” But he bought [it] so that was our survival fund. So we had this three-pound coffee can, so there we bought some rice and put it in there and we are building—actually on the street—we are building three stones and some little bit of paper, whatever, burnable stuff there. We are making rice there. And then, we are making rice. Sometimes MP came—American MP came and kick us out, you know? “No, you can't stay here. This is a military zone. You cannot stay here. Get out, get out.” Then we had to grab that uncooked rice, coffee can, grab that, and then move away. And then, the fire we built, we have to put it out. But then, sometimes we don't have water to put it out. We just leave and MP will do something. So we lived like that on the street about a month—one month or so.

And then, I don't know how we found out, but we moved some place then. There was a house and then out there like a warehouse. So we just got in and used the squatter's right and just sat there. And that house had a well so we get the water from the well and the cooking. And we stayed, I think, on the streets like that for three months. And our bed was our suitcase. On top of

a suitcase, we lie down and sleep a little bit and my parents was sitting in the dirt. So that's how we lived for three months.

And then, finally, my dad's subordinate said, "Oh, we found one room for you." So we moved in there—not apartment, somebody's house, in one room. Just one room we got. Even that, in those days, big luxury. I have place to go with a roof over my head, you know? The floor under me. So I said, "This is big luxury." So other people are living in a tent is luxury, but besides tent, actually straw roof with a straw mat is the wall. And then, that post is bamboo post, so four corners there, and that's their living quarters. And some of them use a mat on the floor. And there is no such a thing as privacy. So they just live in there. So could be the ten different families living there.

But then, we didn't have any rice or eating stuff so in those days, U.S. sent animal feed and so, since my dad was a veterinarian, his subordinates all veterinarian, so they said, "OK, here's some feed so you can take this." [Laughs] So he brought some feed, a sack of feed. We are cooking that, and then we are eating, oh, what kind of grains? Uh, it's millet and beans and some other kind of barley—not the white rice. So we finally bought a huge rice pot and put it on the fire. Then my mother used to cook a huge amount because we never know when next meal is going to come so huge amount we cooked and we eat. I was eating that so many times [that] my body grows every day—grow like this [extends her arms out to demonstrate how wide she got]. So I was what eighteen years old, growing like this. So my mother was making an upper jacket. She says to me, "How come you are growing all the time I have to expand, expand, expand?" So I don't know, but that's how we survived.

That place they took over, military took over to set up a tent. And then, those people from north came down. They went through such a horrible, hard winter. They have frostbite. So mainly hands are not too bad, but the feet—all those toes are broken off. Frostbite. So then, those people coming in there, and there's no real hospital facility, but they set up emergency hospital facility. And then they have gurney. They brought the gurney in on the dirt. They just put up a gurney. Even then, it was very, very luxury item. So they lie down there, and then from the emergency hospital, they will get a dressing at least. But there were a lot of frostbite that people had. They are not the POW. They are refugees, so civilians. And I had become a nurse because I was going there. My dad was there. I got some training. So I know how to dress [wounds], and giving that shot, you know, that kind of thing, and IV—that all I learned. So I used that. I give them IV. I give them a shot and dressing. All of that I did. And then, at the same time, I went to school. Ewha University was in town somewhere, so I went over there, and I had studied, come back, and then I do that. [Laughs] And then, the other end was all those people, civilians, who had frostbite. They lived there.

And we had to set it up corn mush, and the huge pot we are stirring up the corn meal. There's nothing in it. The corn meal with water—that's how they made. And then, sometimes we have milk, but the milk is not liquid one. It's a dry powder, dried milk. So they put it in there. Then that's the great luxury—and salt. Then, they were coming in with the bowl. We just scoop out and give it to them. That's how they live. So thinking back, I don't know how we lived like that, but at that time, it never occurred to me what a bad life we have. Never—I never thought about that. At least we survived, you know?

So all this kind of things were going on, and once in a while, military people coming in and inspecting the place, actually touring the place—what they do. And then, there was, uh, military emergency hospital set up, and the Swedish people came and set it up there. And so, that hospital once in a while sending their staff to see of [*sic*] those people who are having frostbite or whatever difficulty they have. They will just give them, you know, examination. So it—it was really wartime. It was nothing but the wartime, but I felt I was very lucky.

So it was a really terrible life, but what can you do? And then, I said, “We have to have some money to survive,” so somebody told me some organization that was army camp was looking for laundry woman. So I said, “OK, I’ll go do the laundry.” So I went to the laundry shop because Korean couple pick up that like their job. So they picked up the job and then they hire somebody to wash. So I was washing and then ironing. And they have special way to do it: says—says first, slacks; second, jacket; and then underwear on top; and then very top will be the socks. That’s how we have to wash and iron, and that’s the package, and give that. In turn, I—I get no money. I get lunch. Lunch. So my mother said to me, “It is one mouth that’s gone, and I have only four mouths to feed.” So that’s what I did. Well, you know, lunch was not really white rice, I would say. That was vegetable and rice little bit, and then like brown rice. They all put them together like a little dried rice porridge with a lot of vegetable in it. So it is one bowl. There is no such thing as you have a *kimchi* here, a vegetable here, rice here, soup here. No. One bowl will take care of the one meal.

And so, in one bowl, it has a vegetable, and then some rice, and it’s not really heavy meal. And so, that’s what they gave me so I ate. In those days, I never even thought about “You have to pay me.” And everybody was so just so poor [that] I said, “At least I got a meal out of this.” [Laughs] So I got that.

At least I have some room and parents and a sister and brother. But my sister was a casualty because she was not too healthy—because she was going through childhood disease. And then, even then, kid didn’t feel anything bad. She went to school all the time in the field school. It’s not in a building. It’s a field school so there she get pneumonia and chickenpox and everything like that. And then, toward the end of that, we have to evacuate. So she—when we, uh, evacuating from somewhere, she walked out, and by the time we got to Busan, she couldn’t walk because what happened was TB [tuberculosis] in her spine. So she was no longer able to walk. But then, we had no idea so we kept on saying to her, “Try to walk. Try to walk.” And she couldn’t walk. She just collapsed. So when we got in this one room, my mom picked up a large stone, and when she was cooking, put that stone in there, and said, “Warm up the stone,” and then putting it on her legs to see whether that warmth is going to bring—because when we touch her legs, cold as can be. It’s ice cold. So she had that, and then finally that Swedish hospital just wanted to take her there to see. Like a guinea pig because in Sweden, they cannot find anybody having the—the Pott’s Disease. That what they call [it,] the “Pott’s Disease” [a form of tuberculosis]. It’s like the spine is—does this, was here, one by one [uses hands to outline a spine]. Then, one or two disc collapsed so her back was protruding. At the same time, she could not walk. So you know, Swedish hospital, in those days they only have x-rays. No MRIs or no CAT scan or that. So they look at the x-rays and they said, “No, we don’t want to operate.” Oh, they did operate some, but they couldn’t do anything because the whole thing was so jumbled up so they couldn’t do anything. So that what they said was “OK, we will just give her cast.” So at

least she didn't get worse. So they gave her the cast so she lay there in that cast for a long time. And then, she was discharged because they no longer being able to help any further. So she came back home and [was] still bedridden. And we thought maybe it was temporary. But turned out it was not temporary—permanent.

### **Armistice Day (July 27, 1953)**

That was not such big announcement then. War ended, but it's not like August 15, 1945. Nineteen forty-five August 15: there was a big event. So that was big event, but armistice signed in 1953 I—I don't think that was big event because nobody really knew. I know the government didn't announce it either. I'm sure the government felt embarrassed about it because they told us in 1950, “Do not move hastily. And we are here to defend the country.” And then, we heard that they had already left. There was no government in Seoul. So I didn't have really good memories of war ending part.

### **Postwar Period**

And then finally war was finished. The armistice was done. So we could go back home. So first thing we did was myself and my brother went back—came back to Seoul to see whether our house is still [laughs] standing. House was still standing, but lot of stuff we stowed away was all gone. And my dad says we had two panels: one was one hundred kids—Chinese kids—in pictures and the other one was old mountain pictures. Those two he thought were very special. The one Chinese kids panel was when I was born, he bought that for my mother. And the other one was when he usually go to the business trip up north and that old mountain he goes—actually “Diamond Mountain” they call it. So he goes there, and so finally he thought, “Well, that whole thing he would like to make a panel.” So that's how he made these panels, and that was gone. Those two were gone, and then, I found them in one of those furniture stores, but we didn't have money to buy back.

My sister was disabled, and finally when we moved up to Seoul, my dad gave her medicine. Penicillin, all that, plus physical therapy. My dad said, “You have to walk. Just try.” So she held the wall and keep on, you know, step and step, couple of steps every day. So she was able to shuffle and walk.

And so I graduated from university [in] 1953 because we graduated at least three months ahead of time. During that time, they want to take male student to the front so that's the reason why we got three months early. So as soon as I got out of school, I was very lucky. I was employed by Ministry of Social and Health Service Women's Bureau. They hired me. And then, when I was there, we set up, what they called “mother and children home” and the other one was “sister's home” for young girls all over the street selling themselves. So we picked them up and put them in institution, so giving them job training, those young people. The Koreans living in Japan brought us some sewing machines and knitting machines, so we give them [to] those young girls to learn how to do the knitting and sewing. So when they do that, and also we gave them that training so they can get a job. And then, this mother and children's side was mostly they were going to market and sell the wares. And some was able to do the sewing machine and knitting so they sell. They knit, and then they go out to sell that, and then

the sewing machine the same way. So the Koreans in Japan Women's Association came. They brought some of that stuff for us so we used that and then educate the women in the job training. And they had this about four, five years. I was hired in 1954, very early.

So during that time, I was speaking some English so I was sent out to several different American organizations. And I go there to get some care box and then distribute to these mothers. And Save the Children, they usually give a \$10 coupon, whatever—and that goes to children. And then, I went also to Catholic Relief Service, CRS, and they got the bulk of the U.S. goods like rice and corn meal, dried milk, and the sugar, and sometimes they got eggs—egg powder. So those kind of things went in this refugee camp and we cooked the corn meal with those. And then also, I gave to these mothers. But in those days, mothers in the homes, they were not eating corn meals [*sic*] because we never eat the corn meal [in Korea] to begin with. We never knew corn meal such thing exists and like can be a use for porridge so they don't want that. They want rice. So they'll exchange it, go to the market, [and] they exchange the rice with that.

So came back and then, we thought, “Well, we have to rotate because people are staying here three or four years.” It's very stable life there. So I went to OEC—I think Office of Economic Service, OEC. I went over there—and the Public Works. So I got the roofing paper, cement, and some of the wood [from them]. And then, I don't know how we purchased that land. Somehow we managed to purchase the land way out in Daebangdong. And that was beyond, I think, Yeongdeungpo—way out there. We start building a tenement house: one bedroom, one kitchen, nothing else. One bedroom and one kitchen. Ten of them in one building. And larger family, we have two bedroom and one kitchen. When that happens, one tenement building has five units in it. And then, bathroom is outdoor. So we built that with one lady who was this mother and children's home director. She and I did build this one, and then we sold [apartments] for forty-eight thousand won. So smaller one forty-eight thousand. Larger one is a little more. So they all bought and all filled. So I was living there myself, and I get the supplies out, you know—wherever the organization I went, I picked up and I gave to them. So that's how they lived. And it was fairly, you know, comfortable life.

### **Emigration from Korea**

I went to this Catholic Relief Service—that where he was working. And his name was John D. Selby. And there, I went and I was try to get some food items, supplies. So he gave us some. Then, while he was working there, he needed a translator. So he asked me would I translate. I told him, “You know, a good young lady don't go around with an American. So that's—they think I'm a prostitute. So I don't want to do that.” He got mad with me, and he said, “Gee whiz, I'm from Oakland. Came here to help out you guys. Now, you say just because you're walking with some—he called it ‘long-nose’—walking with a ‘long-nose’, they think you're a prostitute? What the hell?” And then, he tells me, “You too. You [have] such a crazy idea.” So I said, “Oh yeah, that's the way we think. What can you do?” And he said, can you do that? Can you translate for me?” I said, “Let me think about it.” So week later he came back: “Did you think about it?” “Yeah, but that's not going to be very good idea. No. I don't know.” Then he finally convinced me: “You have to come.” So I said, “Only—this is the condition. I will go to the place one day. Day trip and back home. That's the only way I can go.” So he said, “Agreed.

OK, OK. And you do that.” So I helped him out. So translate and take the supplies and the flours, corn meals, sugar, and all kinds of things we took.

He's a Catholic civilian working in that place. And he was sent by the New York office and headquarter[s] in New York office to distribute these items. So that's what he was doing. And then, he wants me to be his translator so that's what I did. And then, he said, “Well, now the daytime trip places all ran out. So I—I have to go to—further out.” So I said, “Tough. I'm not going to go there.” I said, “Nothing like that.” He was mad again and said that so I finally said, “OK, provided that you take one room, I take one room, and you're going to pay for it.” So he said, “Yeah, I will pay for it. I promise I will do that.” So we went further out and then—but one time, this—well, of course, the Koreans all want to see me because I'm usually going out with him. So try to influence me so they can get the supplies. And one fellow was tracking us down saying, “Oh, you stayed at such-and-such off—such-and-such hotel on such-and-such date.” And he was blackmailing me. And so, I said, “Well, see here is blackmail came in,” as though he knew we were staying in one room. That's the way he understood. But I said, “No, we are staying in two different rooms. He's using Western rooms. I'm using Korean rooms.”

So finally we—I think I helped him out about a year or so, and then he finally came to me and says, “Well, I would have a proposal to you.” So I said, “What is it?” And then he said, “Oh, I can't do anything here. Go—go into my Jeep so it was in the Jeep. He says to me, “Suppose you go to the U.S. and you can go to school if you want to? And I can provide that. What you think?” But I—at that time, I did not know that was the proposal. And I say, “I don't know. Let me think about it.” Because I wasn't so keen about that because I have already Korean government is sending me to Philippine [*sic*], Japan, and Hawai'i to get the social workers' training. And so, this was in the pipeline so this one [his offer] is not that great, you know? I can go without you. But then, he says, “Well, you don't have to come back to Korea to give them training. You can come to stay in the U.S.” And so, I thought, “Well, let me see how,” but then, the trouble was other people knew I was going with him. Whether it was [their] business or nobody care, they want to put, you know, stamp on me [that] says, “OK, she goes with him so she may not be really, you know, marriageable girl.” And I thought about it and I said—at that time, actually Koreans were proposing to me, two, three different guys. But, I thought, well, if I go to get married to Korean guys, they are going to suffer like the way I was suffering, same thing. ... This guy offered me, so I said, “OK, I take your proposal.” [Laughs]

But then, I—I was thinking, well, I was pretty brave, not knowing. Only thing I know is that he's a Catholic. He's single. Other than that, I have no idea. He said he lived in Oakland. Pretty much, you know, an adventure. So, but then I took it. And then, my mom said to me, “Well you better go. If your life is going to open up, you better go.” We are doomed here. And my dad was saying, “No, you can't go. No way. No way.” So my mom said to him—she said, “You say no, but can you afford to give her something better than this guy is offering?” So my dad kind of thought about it and not much he could do.

And yet I was working in the Korean government, I was seeing this guy, and then I said okay, I'll do that, but I was saying daytime, I said, “No, I won't get married to this guy. No way.” Then evening comes, he comes home, and says, “Did you decide what to do?” And then I said, “Yeah, not much I can do. I have to get married.” So daily change of my heart. And also, that

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Women's Bureau bosses say to me, "He's just American guy, and you go over there, and you don't accomplish anything. Here, you have great future. You will become one of our—our job you can take over," and blah, blah. So I had at least three months' struggle. And in the meantime, I was married. In the meantime, and then he applied for visa and I wasn't going to really pushing for my visa to come out. So it took three months, and he was mad. He said, "Why don't you go to the American embassy and get your visa out instead of let it sit there?" So I finally did, and then I got on that merchant ship, and I came to the U.S.

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

And when I was in Long Beach airport, first thing I saw was woman was driving. She was hitting every car lined up [as she] parked the car. I says, "Oh my gosh. What? That was my first experience in the U.S. And then, my husband says, "Well, we have to go to Oakland where my base is." So I said, "OK." And then he says to me, "Oh, I don't have enough money in my pocket." I says, "Gee whiz, now I'm really in trouble. This guy doesn't even have money now. What am I going to do?" So then he says to me, I have \$20 in my pocket, and I—I didn't figure out that was a figurative speech. I thought that was the real thing. So I said, "Wow, he has \$20 in his pocket, and here he's going to take me to Oakland by airplane. What am I going to do now?" And I said, "Oh yeah, we are deeply in trouble. I made mistake of following this guy."

So we came to Oakland airport. His brother was there, and so we drove his car and took us to his apartment and his wife was saying to me in English—of course, in English—so I was smiling at her not saying much. Then finally, she said to my husband, "Does she speak English? She doesn't speak English, huh?" He said, "Oh yeah, she speaks a little English, OK? She can answer that." But she said, "She didn't answer me. She just smiled at me—that all." [Laughs] I said, "Well, in those days my pronunciation is so poor, you know?" So finally somehow we finished dinner and his cousin—my husband's cousin—was offering his house, saying "We have extra room here so you can stay here until you settle down." So we stayed with his cousin about three months.

And then during that time, my husband said, "You can learn how to cook all that in American way." So I said, "OK." Every time we cook, his cousin's wife does—in those days, packaged lima beans and some other things she had, but mainly lima beans. Then boiling the water, and salt put it in there, and then little butter. And she dumps that box of lima beans and boil it. And then, drain the water out and the more butter and salt stirred up, and then serve. Jeez. We said, "This is [laughs]—this is the meal?" And only thing I have to learn besides that was how to make a cake. But then, even cake, she doesn't make it out of scratch. She buys a box and stirred up with the milk, and then put it in the oven, and it come out. And then, she says, "Frosting, you have to make this." So she says, "OK, now on, you're going to make a cake and the frosting—everything now you do." So I said, "OK, I do that." So I made the frosting, but this time, white granular sugar. That's what I used instead of powdered sugar. I did not know powdered sugar versus granular—only sugar I know was granular sugar. So I did that. She says, "You know, why is this so rough?" I said, "What? I used this sugar." So she—she was amazed actually. She said, "I don't know how you can manage a frosting with that granulated sugar instead of a powdered sugar." I said, "I don't know—using breaks but how come it's not breaking?" So that's how I know that powdered sugar exists. So I stayed there 3 months.

In the meantime, my husband was asking me, “Well should we rent an apartment or should we buy a house?” So I kind of said, as though I was a dummy, “Can you rent a house and then get money back later?” He said, “No, no, no. This place, we rent it just every month. You spend the money. That’s all. When you buy a house, what, oh you buy a house and you do the down payment and blah, blah. You do this, but that house is ours.” So I said, “Why would you spend the money for renting? Then buy a house.” So we looked around at this—Albany and this area, Berkeley, and finally we ended up in Albany. One stinky house. So upstairs is a living quarter and downstairs, base room—basement, little room there. And there was this fellow was renting that little room.

And then, realtor told me, “Oh, you are not going to come in to see the owner,” and told my husband, “Tell Joanna not to come in. You are the only one coming in talk to the owner.” So my husband went in and talked to the owner and said OK, we’re going to buy this house. I had never seen the house so I was outside waiting. And then, he said, “Oh yeah, we agreed to buy this house.” So finally they have to sign it, so I have to sign it. So then they say to me they can’t do much—“Even though you are Asian, anything is too much because already they signed it, ready to go. So you can come and sign it.” So I went in and said this. Then, surprisingly, this widow was very happy to see me. So I said, “Gee whiz, this—this realtor really does not know what to expect.” So our first house I have never seen inside, other than outside. And then the house was purchased. Because in Albany, in those days, had discrimination, very subtle discrimination. At that time, there was no such a thing as a black person in Albany. Even Asians they don’t want because they say Asian moves in, black moves in, then the whole town housing values going to go down so they will just not selling it. And then, if there is some competition going on between white and black, even though they lose money, they would choose white. That was the reality.

My husband told me when you go to the U.S., there will be no discrimination. So I told him, “Yeah, there was no discrimination. I could not even see the house and then you went in and bought the house.” I’m openly saying it now because that was discrimination. Once I moved in that house, I didn’t feel anything from neighborhood. Instead, that neighborhood said, “You coming in here actually doing a better job than Americans are doing.”

Because when I came here, I ended up as a housewife. And then, housewife I was about three or four years. I said, “I’ve got to go make a living myself”—the reason being that in case this guy decided, “Oh, I made a mistake. I’m living with this Korean girl. Well, she doesn’t really know much about the U.S. system” and blah, blah, take off. Then, what’s left? I have to have my own livelihood here so that’s why I went to work. And funny part of it, when I came here, I always felt kind of uncomfortable and feel, oh, this guy may feel “Oh, no, in Korea [she] looked great. She was a graduate of college and working and all this, great, in Korea. But when she comes here, gee, she’s not that great after all. Then I made a mistake”—he took off. So I always had in my pocket his brother’s name, his brother’s wife’s name, address, and his older brother’s name, and his [older brother’s] wife’s address, cousin’s address, cousin’s name, his wife—always carried in my pocket. So in case—especially when we travel, he said he’s going to put the gas in it [the car], and then he said, “I’m going to go the bathroom and will be back.” Then, I wondered—I wonder whether sometimes he comes back, so. [Laughs] And so, I always kept



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that so in case I was stranded some place, I would say to police, “This is—this is the people I know.” So [laughs]—so that's kind of fear I had, you know?

And then, only reason why I have to go work. I've got to go to work, was because I have to make myself independent instead of, you know, depending on this guy. So that's why I went to work. The first place I went to work was IRS. I took a test, you know. [Laughs] In those days, I was taking English test and then arithmetic and then typing test—all that I had to take. So I did take and then I got passed. So I waited and about three months or so later, IRS called me back and says, “You—you come to work for us temporary, of course.” I worked there, IRS, but in so different working environment. You have to be on time. You have only fifteen minutes of coffee break, thirty minutes' lunchtime, fifteen minutes' coffee-break. Four thirty comes—you, whamo, out. [Laughs] And then, I was—even to this day, I couldn't help thinking and here with my English, barely I'm making it, and when I went to the IRS, I'm GS2, and a GS3 and 4 are my bosses. They says to me, “Do this. You—fifteen minutes [break],” or “It's [the break is] over.” I said, “OK.” And then, usually I have to examine the paper, the forms they [*sic*] coming in—941 form, 941. I have to do that at least seven hundred and fifty. And I do every day over eight hundred forms. Well, it's not just regular form so I have to check the return, bam, bam, bam—goes like that. Daily eight hundred—over eight hundred. And then, I was three months—that was three months' appointment. So that three months is over, then they will renew another three months—like that. And during that time they gave me, uh—I was good worker so \$75 cash award I got. [Laughs] So that was the beginning of my federal government entry work. [Laughs]

I'm lucky. I made it. I made through, you know? And it's when I go to the organizations, they always think of me as “Oh, her husband provided her so well, so she's living well.” But I say, “No, my husband did not give me life insurance. My husband didn't give me my pension. My health insurance—all this I made it myself.” So when I talk like that—especially Older Women's League, that was my first organization I joined after my retirement—and they always talked to me like that. They all looked at me: “How did you manage to do that?” I said, “I went to work. What were you doing?” [Their answer:] “We didn't go to work.” I said, “Well, that's why. I went to work.” And then these women in my age group—they don't have all the insurance, no husband, pension. They were all broke, literally. So they—they felt “How did that little Oriental girl manage to do that?” And I say, “I'm aiming it when I came to here and all that fear I was living—I get to make myself. What do I have to do? I will support myself.” So that's what I did, and it turned out all right, and my goodness.

Yeah, marriage turned out OK. And I learned from him lot, too, you know? Of course, I never know the stock market. [Laughs] I never knew the stock market so first thing, I—we moved in at the Albany house, and he was working. I wasn't working so I said, “Stock market.” So he was teaching me. So I said, “OK, I will save money and then we'll work on it.” So I think about six months or so and I saved up \$1000. So I said to my husband, “OK now I have \$1000 so let's invest in the stock market. What are you going to buy?” He said, “Ford company.” So I said, “OK, here is \$1000. You can use this money.” Well, not necessarily cash--in the bank, but that amount is floating around was about \$1000. “Use this to buy Ford Motor company.” So that's what we did. That's how I dipped in, uh, the stock market. The one time my husband said to me, “Oh we have this much money, then you're going to buy this stock, and call up a stockbroker so-

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and-so, and you make a deal, and then buy it today.” So I said, “OK.” So I called him up and I said—well, for instance, it was \$50 so I thought the \$50 he was going to save, and he was quoting to me, and he says, “Oh, you have to pay \$50.50.” Fifty cents more. Why? Because you're a buyer. A seller wants less. So that's how I learned the stock market, you know. [Laughs]

### **War Legacies**

I think that the country has to be strong. There's no other way. If country was strong, they could defend themselves. We would not have been the victim of the Korean War. But we were, as I said, just happy as can be. Those military people, they just clean, military uniform, slacks all sharply lined, and having good time—not so much of war training or anything like that. So that's why said country or any organization, any individual must be strong to defend themselves. That's the thing I got out of the war, and I'm still believing it. That's what I told my seniors: “You have to know how to defend yourself.” You—you don't have much of a physical strength. I don't mean physical strength. I mean financial. If something goes wrong, you have to have a—your own saving to use it and then make it bridge until you get over there. That's what you have to do. Nobody's going to help you out. The other day I said that somebody came to me and said [to] our chairwoman, “Why did you buy so many bag of rice?” I said, “Emergency. And in case we have emergency, you guys don't have anything.” And by the time you felt “I have to buy rice and go to the store,” maybe they all gone and the empty shelf you're going to look at it. But if you come in here, I have some extra rice, so I will give you some and you can go home and cook yourself. So that why I have hundred bags of rice there [laughs] and water.

So they said, “I don't understand why you so much worried about. This is America.” I said, “Hey, this is America—not necessarily all the time happy.” That's what I told those Americans. ... You know, America they thought resource is, you know, limitless. That's the way Americans felt. And but, you says, “America won the World War II,” but to me, America lost World War II. Why? Well, you had Marshall Plan. You made Germany new, Italy new, Japan new, everything new. Look at you. Your Ford Company's crashing and everything's old, breaking down everything. You think you win the war? You won the war. That what you think, but lost the war. Those guys have got stronger than U.S. Do you think they will come and help you out when this country needing some special help? Do you think Japan will come and help you out, or Germany's going to come and help? No. You have to help yourself out so resource must be reserved, not because we have plenty of reserves, just throwing out. No. So I think—I think—that's the thing I really got out.

You have to be strong. If I'm not strong—if—if I really depend on my husband all the time and say, “I need this much more, I need this,” then he would say, “This woman is always asking for more money, more money.” But I will say when I need. We got so much money [that] if [we] need something, I will get out of my reserve fund [and] use this. And he doesn't think I'm nagging. But if I don't do that, then he thinks I'm nagging, then pretty soon he will say there must be some better woman than this one. [Laughs]

Oh yeah, the young people should know about that [Korean War veterans]. That's why I'm setting up this, uh, Korean War veterans' celebration and memorializing every year now.

This one--in another month or so we're going to have one. Then, I'm going to give them recognition, uh, certificate, and with some food items, I'm going to pack in a basket and then give to them. I had started with seven of them three years ago, I think—four years ago. And now, I have only five of them left s I don't know how long it's going to last. And until then, I will do.

And then, this year, first I will memorialize the June 25<sup>th</sup> war. And then, after that, we are going to San Joaquin Valley—the National Cemetery, and see how much trees have grown because when I first went there, it was 2005 and look at them: it's only California warriors buried there. I think 2,955. And they just opened up that national cemetery, so there was no trees to speak of—all just the low brush type of thing. So when I felt—I said, “Wow, here those guys whose age is my age. They came [to an] unknown country, and they died, and they were buried here.” I was in Korea, and I went through the war, and here I am living—not only living, but also, I got so many awards from the U.S. government. And I was—I went twice to White House Conference on Aging, Commissioner of the California Commission on Aging, Commissioner of Alameda County, Commissioner of Contra Costa County—all these thing[s]. Longterm care, you name it—all kinds of things. And I said, “I am having all this successful life here, and since then I have seen so many things, you know, those things happening. And here, these people who’s my age, not knowing anything, just lying in there.” And I really felt bad and so, I talked to the Veterans Administration. I said, “You know, when I went there, there was no trees. And can you look at the trees so I can provide you something.” So they said, “Yeah, that we have to look at the dirt there, the quality of the dirt, and also whether all that, we'll put them together and see what kind of trees are going to survive in that climate.” So I said, “OK.” So they came up with the trees. So I talked to the cemetery people. I said, “You know, I am going to donate fifty trees and I will pay you the money to the VA.” The VA said, “We have no mechanism to take your money in.” So we finally arranged it with the gardener. And so, fifty trees they are going to provide, and I'm going to pay them to do that garden. And then year—within year, [if] any of the trees die, they going to do the replacement. So that was in 2005. So this year, we most likely go there and see how many trees have survived, [laughs] how much taller it has become, you know? So I always feel indebted to those soldiers. So I have to do something, and that's the only way I can. I felt as though they come alive. They was lying there, and they say, “Oh, this is awfully hot this place. And I can't endure this kind of terrible weather. I wish somebody would bring some shade over me.” So that's why I said I have to make them shade to make them feel better. And I say, “I'm here living and you are not living. You are in—underground. I've really become sentimental about that. Because of them, I'm living. Because of them, I have enjoyed all good life and there were so many award[s] given to me.

### **Cold War Repression**

*Interviewer: That must have been a very confusing time.*

It was. It was. So in fact, it was so funny. I kind of thought about this when my French class, there was the story—that's the French island somewhere, French people coming in, those kids all talk in French. [Then] some other country coming in to take over, then they talk some other country [language]. So they totally confused and that's story we learned from French teacher.

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So I thought, “This [the Korean War] is the same.” I—I thought, “Why they so confused? Why would they do that?” But then, I would say I could say the exact same thing. So I had to survive, so even though I'm not a communist, I act like a communist. And then, when South Korean army came in, and the government set up, then I would say I acted like one [Communist] because to survive. But that kind of a thing—that stain really concerned me when I got married to my husband and then they were going through full-scale investigation. I thought, “Oh, I'm going to fail because I cooperated with the communists.” But luckily, that didn't come up so they gave me a visa.

And then, after the Korean War, as I stayed at Pong-dong, I set up those houses [for women], I met one person right in the senior center who used to live over there. And I was shocked. I said—I said, “Do you know that place and so-and-so?” And she was shocked that actually I was the one who built that place. So that was a small world. Well, because they [former residents of Pong-dong] know—they knew I cooperated with the communist, every day they would call me out, then say the other way indoctrinated: “You do this. You do that. You do this. You do that.” But then they kept on saying something, needling it, just kept on needling me and say, “You are the cooperator. You are the sympathizer.” No, so that part was, uh, finally over because they realize I grew up, and then I finish school, and I was, you know, employed now with Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. So I'm doing a good job so they didn't bother me after that. And it's just a lot of history behind me that I would never talk to the people because people don't understand a lot of things what I did.

So I don't talk. Only time, I talk to my daughter. I said, “You know, if we were at the war, this—this thing is happening so you are very lucky you haven't gone through all that so you're very lucky. But this was going to happen. And so just listen.” But then, once in a while, she send me email and she said, “Yeah mom, and I can understand now.”

*Interviewer: You didn't want to tell people what you experienced?*

Especially that between the communist came and made me their person, and then South Korean came back and then indoctrinating their way of doing things and because I was cooperated with the communists, that kind of thing I won't say anything to anybody. But now [at] my age, I said, “I'm not hiding that. What am I hiding for?” And perhaps they better know what really did happen—that during the war, it's not just evacuate from here to there, from there to here. It's not that. Real story's what I'm telling you. They grabbed me. Communist grabbed me to indoctrinate because I'm educated one. So—if I stick around the communist, probably I would be persecuted because I'm educated well. They used me. After my use is over, cut it. And South Korea the same way. If they felt I was a sympathizer, then bad, then they will probably send me some place—either jail or, you know, sentencing to death.

So that's why I never even talk about it. I don't think my husband even knew. I don't talk about it. But now, so many years away and are gone, so I will tell them, “That's the way it was.” No, this part I never told: I was put it in a cellar and stayed there and then come back and interrogated. I have never told anybody because that part is my real bad part of life because I had to do some bad things. I had to—not that I was a communist, but to survive. And it's just not that I'm proudly saying it, but I'm saying it because that was the experience.

And also, another thing is if—especially as Iraqi wars [*sic*] and all these wars went on, they grabbed somebody coming in, interrogated the, all that, I just often wondered whether they grabbed the real guy or somebody type of thing and then grabbed and then killed him, death sentence, all that. I said, “How do you know really?” Person's mind is that only that person will know. You cannot see. So you will know that you really did justice or unjust? Nobody knows that.

What you going to do? [When the South Korean military interrogated me, they say,] “You told the people, ‘This, this, this.’” So I said, “Yeah, I did.” [Their response:] “Why? You're communist, right?” [My answer:] “No, I wasn't the communist, but I was told to do that.” Then they say, “You bitch.” [Laughs] So just because somebody tells you to kill yourself, you're going to kill yourself? “You bitch”—talk like that, you know? So I mean, I was, at eighteen years old, you know, going through all over this. It—it's a [*sic*] really tough, as I said. I thought I was a young and vivacious happy person, but here I was thrown in here as though I was real criminal here—so that is tough one.

And so, when—whenever they have a war, I will say, “Do they really know what a war [is]?” And I say—like Obama says, “We are to go in such and such a place and fight.” And I said, “Who you going to kill, really?” And then, also U.S. reporters all sent back and say, “Well, we killed the civilians and this—this many people, indiscriminated [*sic*] bombing,” blah, blah. But they don't know. What happens is those communist soldiers with their guns and what not commingling with the civilians from the top, and they see few of those communist soldiers are there because they want to live, too, you know? So they want to commingle with the civilians. So then, they say, “Those soldiers are here. We'll drop bombs.” Then it could hit the soldier, but it could hit, you know, civilians then. Then, the reporters from rear line, those guys say, “Oh, we killed so many civilians and all that.” But I know why civilians are killed—because these soldiers are commingling. So that's why. It's a lot of things that those reporters are talking about that they don't even know what they are talking about.

And also, I feel as a President or Congress, what do you know? You have never even seen war.... But, I always say—wherever I go and talk about the wars—and then I will say, “You know, Korea has never fought any war of any kind, especially World War II. Yet after World War II, Korea is the only country never participated in the war was cut in two pieces, as though that land wasn't their own land. Why? Why would we be victimized by superpower?” ...Nobody will think of me as a wartime-experienced person who is going to go against the war. And if you're going to—I'd say, “If you're going to have a war, Obama, you going to go front line. You stand in there. You the leader.” Like [the] Middle ages, those warriors first go to the front line. When I said—when we impose something like that [on our leaders] from the people, Obama will not exercise war....

I think war affect [me a] great deal because if war was not there, I used to be—you know, people say, teacher always said, “You such a little—little crybaby.” That what always say to me. If teacher says something, then I cry. If they do something, then I cry so they always called me “crybaby.” And during the war, all this thing went through, and I have become very strong woman. And because of that, I probably most likely survived in the U.S. and become what I have become.