



## **LEGACIES OF THE KOREAN WAR**

Oral History Project

*www.legaciesofthekoreanwar.org*

Interview with:

**Jungran Shin (Mother)**

First Generation

Born 1950, Pocheon, Gyeonggi Province

**Sanghyuk Shin (Son)**

1.5 Generation

Born 1972, Seoul, South Korea

Interviewed by:

**Ramsay Liem and Deann Borshay Liem**

My name is Jungran Shin. I was born in Pocheon in Gyeonggi Province in 1950.

My father was born in Hamhung in 1917. He graduated from Yong Seng Middle and High School in Hamhung and came to the south in 1948. When he came, he first worked as a translator for the American army and then he did a small business. He kept failing, so he lived a difficult life, and in 1976, he immigrated to the United States.

My mother was born in Wonsan in 1922. Wonsan was [on the coast of a] beautiful ocean, but she married my dad and came to Hamhung. When she got married to my father, she came to Hamhung and she started going to church.... In 1949 she also came to South Korea. After she came to South Korea, she gave birth to myself and my younger sibling, and [later] we all together came to New York.

### **Pre-war Period**

#### **Family Separation**

I have an older sister who was born in 1943 and an older brother who was born in 1946. And I have two younger brothers. And in 1949, my mother took my older sister and brother with her to come to South Korea. When she left Hungnam city in North Korea, she got on a boat to cross the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel secretly because it was being guarded by the North Korean army at the time. Because of the situation she didn't even have opportunities to say goodbye to her own parents and their siblings.

(Sanghyuk Shin) I think my grandmother, when she left, she wasn't expecting to leave for very long. She was just going south to meet up with her husband. I was told she didn't expect it to be a drawn-out trip; she was going to be back soon.

(Jungran Shin) The reason my father came to the south...I don't know the exact reason, but he probably came to find more freedom.

### **Japanese Colonial Period**

(Jungran Shin) My mother once told me this story about a very poor lady who was living in her neighborhood during the Japanese colonial period, and uh...she was told by someone one day that if she goes away to some place and works, she could make a lot of money. So, because she was poor, she followed this person...but it turns out that the place she went to was a public brothel, and she didn't realize until she got there. So it was so-called comfort station. So because she didn't know that she would be working for a comfort station, she was under such a shock, and she got this disease, this psychological disease of drinking too much water. So that's how she died; that's what I heard from my mother.

I heard that in Hamhung my father's father, who's my grandfather, and his brothers were Christians at the time and they had to go through a lot of persecutions because of that. So these three brothers had to leave the country and they went to Manchuria, and Russia. They went through a lot of hardship and could not return until the liberation. So my father has memories of

growing up in Russia and Manchuria. When I was growing up, I remember my dad speaking a little bit of Russian and Chinese.

(Sanghyuk Shin) Most of these stories that my mom has been talking about are not familiar to me, I'm hearing them for the first time. I feel like I have kind of bits and pieces of pictures of what my grandparents' lives must have been at that time during the Japanese colonial period, and during the war. I mean, they're still bits and pieces, but as my mom is telling these stories I feel like the pieces are more coming together a little bit.

### **Postwar Period**

(Jungran Shin) My earliest memories when I was growing up around 1954...I believe we were living in Shindang-dong in Seoul. At that time, a church nearby was bombed as a result of the war, so one of the buildings was destroyed. Because one side was destroyed, when it rained, rain leaked, and when it snowed, it snowed on us. I remember going to that church and attending service.

### **Korean War Memories**

#### **Refugee Life**

(Jungran Shin) When my mother came down to South Korea in 1949, it was a place called Pocheon [where] they settled down. This place is very close to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. What they thought was that because Pocheon was very close to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, whenever the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel is lifted, we will be going back to our hometown. So that's what their intention was. That's why they settled there. But then the Korean War broke out. I was 6 months old at the time and my mom said that up until the Korean War broke out, the information agents from South Korea and North Korea, both agents, would go back and forth across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. So they would drop by at our house and my mom would cook for them and feed them, and my father made friends with them. They [my parents] would sometimes give things like watches or other things that we would need...so that was what was going on up until the Korean War broke out.

After the war broke out, my mother and father took our family from Pocheon; carried me on the back, and my father carried my sister on his back. At that time my sister was very sick...they held my brother's hand and came to Seoul. We came with the refugees and we finally arrived at my mother's aunt's house in Seoul. But that family had already escaped, and we were left in Seoul. When we were at that aunt's house, we heard bombings, shootings everyday, and it was like a sea of fire. Seoul was entirely a sea of fire. We lived in that place until the January 4<sup>th</sup> retreat. At that time many men were taken somewhere and taken as soldiers, so my mother recommended and my father escaped somewhere alone. My mother took [care of] three children on her own in that sea of fire. While she was alone, she witnessed a lot of scary things; she saw people dying, she saw people's legs cut off, she witnessed a lot of horrible things and cried a lot and lived there until the January 4<sup>th</sup> retreat.

(Sanghyuk Shin) I was just telling my mom that she should tell the story about when my grandfather came back to Seoul, but she's saying I should tell it. [laughing] So I guess, growing up, I've heard this story a number of times from...um, I think primarily from my grandmother.

And I guess my grandfather, after fleeing the south and hiding away for...I guess the duration of the war, so it must have been three years, um, came back to Seoul, and, you know, on his way back-I have these vivid pictures in my mind as they're telling me the story of him- just kind of walking over dead bodies in Seoul where all the houses were burnt down and all the buildings had crumbled. He sees dead bodies all over the place, and he finally reaches homey that time he has pretty much given up on the idea that his family is still alive...and he comes in and actually sees his wife and his three kids there! So I have this kind of a vivid picture of what it must have been for him and for my grandmother.

(Jungran Shin) As my father left to escape, he gave my mother 3,000 won, the last thing he had at that time. So my mother went to the market and bought things with that 3,000 won everyday, and also, since it [where we were staying] was a house where people escaped and left, there was some food left over. So, I believe that's how we survived.

(Sanghyuk Shin) I think for me, just kind of growing up partly with my grandmother and having even as an adult, lived with her for a little bit in New York, I can almost see how her personality may have developed, just from the war, because she was such a survivor. I mean, I can picture her doing whatever it took, whatever was necessary to feed her children. I think at that time, even during the war and even afterwards, she would do whatever it took—she sold um, anything that anybody would buy, she would get into all sorts of different little businesses, and I think it was really her that kept the family together. Of course, as a child I didn't really appreciate that about her. She was very strict and I was afraid of her all the time. But as an adult, I can see perhaps some of the forces that shaped her personality.

For me most of what I know about my grandmother and my grandfather during the Korean War and its aftermath is from my grandmother because as a child, we lived with my grandparents for a number of years. But as children, especially at that time, it's not like they told a whole lot of stories about that time. As an adult, I had to kind of press them to tell me stories, and I think by that time my grandfather had passed away. So most of the stories that I have now are primarily from my grandmother.

(Jungran Shin) When I was growing up, my mother always cried missing her parents and siblings who were in the northern part. After my mother took care of her children and worked all day long, as she was sewing at night, she always cried and wondered when she would be able to see her parents and siblings and tears rolled down as she was sewing, tears rolled down. I grew up watching that.

She also wondered, "While I'm alive, won't there be a day when I can exchange letters? I can't wait until that day... I just want to know if my parents have passed away or are still alive..." She lived wondering that. "If I can find out that fact alone, then I would be happy.".... When my mother was crying, I cried with her and said, "Mom, when I grow up, I'll help you. I'll definitely help you and let you meet your family. I'll make sure [Korea] is reunited." I promised her at a young age.

Uh, my sister...while we were going to the south on the boat from Hamhung, we experienced a storm. For four days, we secretly rode the boat from the north. But when the boat was in the sea

storm, when everyone was exhausted, everyone was throwing up, and they were crying out that they were going to die and were crying out for help and praying to God. My sister was 8 years old at that time. She remembered everything. As my mom was crying and praying, she tied the three of us with the baby blanket that she used to carry the baby on her back, and she cried and prayed that even if we have to die, let us die together. She tightly tied the three bodies and cried and prayed. My sister remembered all of that.

.... My father always told us that our division is because of the Westerners. He always said that the Russians and Americans were the ones who were responsible for the division of the country, and he was really mad all the time. And he was very anti-Japanese and very anti-American.

.... When I was growing up, I said awhile ago that I went to a church nearby. The pastor's daughter of that church came in holding a black baby when the war ended. So I remember the neighborhood people whispering and those children who were immature cursing at her and making fun of her by calling her a foreigners' whore and by throwing rocks at her. My mother always pitied her and said, "That's not her fault, but why are you all treating her like that?" I remember my mother always pitying her.

And another memory that breaks my heart is when the sun was setting, the village was filled with war orphans who went around every neighborhood and alley carrying an empty tin, begging for food. So at poor homes, they gave rice that they didn't even have...they gave barley rice and cold rice. My mother felt bad for them and cried. However, I remember the beggars not being able to go even near where the rich people lived because they always had dogs in that alley.

Something else that I remember more clearly is when I was young, I lived with the wife of my father's older brother. When I was growing up, I heard that my my uncle was a Communist, so he was shot to death. During the 6.25 war, my aunt had one daughter, but she died from a disease because my aunt wasn't able to take care of her. So she was left alone. During the January 4<sup>th</sup> retreat, she refused to escape because she asked, "Why would I escape to save myself when my husband and daughter are dead." When she lived with us, she took care of me.

After that, my aunt took me and went to her daughter's grave. As soon as we got there, she fell on the ground and cried, "Ah Myung Sook, Myung Sook, I'm here. How could you leave me behind and?" I remember her crying like that for a long time and then standing up and coming back. She took me almost everyday and had a good cry and came back. I don't know if she had no desire to live, or if her mind... if she was shocked, but she disappeared one day when she was going back and forth to a relative's house not in her right mind. That was left as a pain in my heart.

### **Postwar Period**

#### **Cold War Repression**

(Jung Ran Shin) I went to school until I immigrated. I received an anti-Communist education. In that anti-Communist education, when you wrote an essay, you wrote things like we have to destroy Communism and we have to get rid of the Commies and reunite our country. I received that education, and even in the posters on the street walls, a red monster appeared and bothered

us, but we had to destroy the red monster. And after that, if we saw suspicious people, we had to report them-spy. When we reported them as a spy, we received a lot of rewards. I received that kind of education until I immigrated.

When school started and when we brought the books we received from school, my father always read through those books. Among those books, there was always a subject called morality. But when you open that book, from the first unit up to the last, it was all about anti-Communism, let's destroy Communism.... We have to, our soldiers have to destroy Communism and put our flag on top of Baekdu Mountain. When my father read things like that, my dad would get upset and say, "Those bastards! How are we going to achieve reunification like this..." I grew up in that kind of an environment.

(Sanghyuk Shin) Mom, but, wasn't it dangerous for grandfather to criticize the government like that and say things like that at the time?

(Jungran Shin) Of course, it was. Very.... However, people whom my father confronted at home and even outside were similar to my father. And also, even if my younger uncle had a different opinion and argued with him, "Brother, you don't know very well. It's not like that," they argued. But those people didn't report my father.

(Sanghyuk Shin) Were there a lot of people who were thinking the way grandfather thought?

(Jungran Shin) I believe there weren't many people like that, and even my younger uncle said, "President Park Chung Hee has helped us this much and saved us... You don't know very well, brother." He always criticized and cursed my father.

At school, they actually didn't teach us that everyone in North Korea was Communists, but instead, they said that the Commies were bothering our poor brothers, so our brothers aren't even able to eat ramen noodles and are starving. That's how they taught us.

(Sanghyuk Shin) Actually, even when I was growing up in the '70's, I distinctly remember my favorite comic books were all like...the bad guys were all North Korean Communists, and they were depicted as wolves. I remember just this scene of these wolves eating chicken and all this really good food and being wasteful, throwing it away, while the people there are starving. So it's interesting to me that that kind of stuff, the education I was getting in the '70's, is very similar to what my mom grew up with as well.

I was second grade—I went to first and second grade in Korea, so I don't remember having to write essays. But I think I remember having a poster competition. I can't remember whether it was me, myself, having to do that, or whether it was my one of my cousins because we all lived together in one household. But there were poster competitions all the time with this sort of patriotic theme of how we're going to achieve unification by invading North Korea and all of that...so I remember some of that.

(Jungran Shin) I have never directly met a US soldier and I was never able to. One day while my mother was living in Shin Sa Dong, she experienced a bizarre circumstance. The war was almost

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over and she was settling down and living well. Some people we called, “cat’s paw”, a cat’s paw took a US soldier and went around and knocked on each house and asked, “Do you have girls? I want to sleep one night with you...” So my mom yelled at that cat’s paw, “You bad guy, how can you be a cat’s paw and take the US soldier around just because you don’t have any food to live on? And you have no right to come to a middle-class house and look for a woman.” She yelled at him and kicked him out. I remember hearing this story from my mom and my mom being angry, but I personally have never met a US soldier.

My husband was my older brother’s middle school and high school friend. So we met while he came to our house often. After that, he came back after serving in the military, and I was a college student. So he asked me to go out and hang out, like in the libraries and theaters, so that’s how we started dating.

[After we were married,] I was just an ordinary housewife. So the time period I lived in Korea after I got married was eight years. During those eight years, I was a housewife who had three babies, and my husband worked in a financial company.

When I had my first son [Sanghyuk], I was 22 years old. He was a gift from God... a blessing, and I was very thankful. My husband was also. He said that it was so amazing. He thought there were only two of us in this world, but he couldn’t believe that another family member was suddenly added. It’s really an amazing blessing.

(Sanghyuk Shin) [chuckles] You shouldn’t forget that feeling... [chuckles]

### **Hopes for the Future**

(Jungran Shin) At that time in 1972, it was a time when we weren’t able to even think reunification was possible. I hoped that this child would grow up and serve the poor people and the people who are in pain with his body and mind. I wanted this to be his life goal. That was my hope. So while he was growing, I asked him, “What do you want to be [in the future]?” So he said, “I want to be a doctor.” “Why a doctor?” “I want to heal people who are poor and who are sick.” When he said that, I told him that I wanted him to be a doctor like this and gave him there’s Doctor Chang Kee Ryo in Korea who is called the Schweitzer of Korea-I bought Doctor Chang’s book and told my son to become a doctor like him.

(Sanghyuk Shin) You know, thinking back I kind of forgot about this, but it’s just kind of occurring to me now. I have to admit I don’t remember her giving me a book. But I think I do remember her encouraging me to become a lawyer and you know, as a child, I didn’t even know what a lawyer was. But I do remember, I think she wanted me, she thought that it was important for the Korean society to have lawyers who would protect the poor people and who would fight against injustice. And now that I’m thinking back, I do remember her kind of nudging me towards that direction. I guess brainwashing me. [chuckles]

You know, growing up, especially under both my mother and my grandmother, I was just kind of bombarded with this idea that reunification has got to be on the top of our priority in terms of something that we as a people must achieve. And as individuals, myself as an individual, it has

to be on top of my priority in terms of something that I need to work towards. So that was definitely instilled in me at a very early age. It's kind of reinforced by my also by growing up under my grandmother and seeing her shed tears.

### **Emigration from Korea**

(Jungran Shin) We immigrated in 1980. The first reason we came was that my husband's business became bankrupted. So for the first time, it was hard for us to live in Korea. My father first left Korea. But my father often said this in his letters, "If you come and live here, we will really be able to... we've already experienced the pain of division, but if you live over there, we'll experience the pain of division once again, so what do you think about coming here? Don't you think we'll be able to live all together?" My father kept urging, and so that was the reason we immigrated.

(Sanghyuk Shin) When I first found out that I was going to the US, you know, I don't remember what I was thinking, but I remember telling the neighborhood kids about it. And they would all make fun of me and say, "Oh, as soon as you go to the US all the girls are going to come and kiss you. And you're going to be kissing all the time in the streets." And I was like, "No, that's not what I want." I think I was kind of excited, but I don't think I really knew what was happening.

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

(Sanghyuk Shin) Like I said, growing up in Korea and just kind of making this big move, I'm not sure what I thought about it at the time. But once we came here... we came to LA first. And that's where my father's mom, my grandmother was. And I remember the very first meal was meat. I think it must have been like steak or something. And they actually had a fork and a knife which I used for the first time, and I was like...it was so exciting to me to actually go like this and just like ... cutting the meat the way I saw on TV. So, you know, I think it was an exciting change for me as a child. But it definitely became a pretty hard transition for me because, you know, obviously, just with the language and everything. And we were living actually not too far from where my parents are living now in Koreatown.

I don't remember a whole lot from going to school, except just a lot of confusion. It seemed like the teachers were yelling at me all the time, and I was always doing something wrong. I remember the ESL teacher rounding us up and just yelling at us for not being able to say the name of the school, which I think was Hoover Elementary. You know, there is no "V" in Korean, Korean sound, so you know, I couldn't say it. He kept on telling me, "It's Hoover, Hoover!" And I was like, "Hoo-buh." In my mind I was saying it right, but he, and I just remember being, you know... I think it was just hard for me. And I'm guessing it's like that for a lot of immigrant children. I just really felt like I wasn't good enough, and it was just really hard to fit in.

It took a long time before it got better. I think the first few years were difficult. I think as with other immigrant children, as the oldest in the family, every time we got a call or somebody came to our door, my parents would send me out to talk to them. I was kind of representing the family



any time we would encounter anybody, somebody who is not Korean. As a whatever, 9 or 10 year old, I would have to represent the family. So those are some of my memories of my first couple years in the US.

### **Intergenerational Legacies**

(Sanghyuk Shin) I'd have to say I think growing up, even though my grandparents, my grandmother in particular and my mom, they were obviously very much affected by the war, I don't think that was really part of my consciousness. I'm not sure I was able to think about it in that way until I think in college. When I took a Korean history class, especially modern Korean history involving the war, it just really was a painful topic to study. I think just kind of learning more about some of the details and the different players during the Korean War made me very upset, and at the same time, just made me feel like this is something that I need to remember, that I need to understand better and that the Korean War has very significant relevance in my life. I think that happened sometime in college.

Just like learning Korean history, kind of book learning, for the first time in college, I had this sense of helplessness almost, that Korea as a nation and as a people, which I felt so much connection to, that we had been under sort of oppression and attack by foreigners whether it be China or Japan or US and Russia. I felt like our power was taken away from us and that we were put on a course historically that the Korean people ourselves were not in control of. It was just so frustrating to sit through and learn all these series of historical events. I think there's, you know, a sense of powerlessness. Eventually I think I put two and two together about sort of my own family's history and how we were affected by these forces that were beyond our control, yeah...

When I was growing up in South Korea, we didn't really learn a whole lot about the Korean War except, you know, just fundamentally that Kim Il Sung and North Korea invaded peaceful South Korea. And we owe our salvation to the US who came to our rescue. I guess that's the common narrative and that's what I was instilled with.

You know, in the US growing up, obviously they don't really teach Korean history in schools, and I don't remember really being exposed to Korean history a whole lot other than in kind of more personal ways-when my grandmother would bring up stories here and there or my mother would recount stories. But I don't remember really learning about Korean history in any other way other than sort of family. Before college I don't think Korean history was a topic that I came across anywhere in my schoolwork. When I was going through the Korean history course in college, I think it really challenged my thinking. I had these kinds of simple ideas about what the Korean War was. And those simple ideas were definitely challenged. Overall it just made me realize all these sorts of outside players and geopolitical factors that the Korean War was part of.

### **Family Separation/Reunion**

(Sanghyuk Shin) I first learned about this sort of Korean American delegation, annual delegation to North Korea in 2001 or 2002. When I found out about it, I was excited that such a program

existed. But I think it was really hard for me to picture myself actually going to North Korea. It was just a foreign concept to me, you know, like me actually being able to go there. There was a kind of a mental wall. I just couldn't picture myself doing it until a friend of mine who had actually gone to North Korea with that program approached me and really encouraged me to look into it. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to go and the more I wanted to kind of connect with North Korea as a whole and also my family in North Korea as well.

By that time, my grandmother had passed away. I think it was maybe like couple years after my grandmother had passed away. I think just with, you know, the stories that I heard from my grandmother, in my mind, I just really felt like it was, I almost felt like I needed to go for my grandmother. I needed to make that connection sort of on her behalf.

I remember when I first received the notice that I was accepted to be part of this delegation, I remember calling my mom and over the phone, giving her the news that I will be going to North Korea. She was silent for I don't know how long, for a couple of minutes, and she burst into tears. I don't know what she was thinking, but I think for her and for me, we just really felt like it was almost, that the trip was momentous because there was some connection with my grandmother in particular and the opportunity for me to meet with my grandmother's brothers and nephews and nieces. I think that connection was just so powerful. So, you know, I just had to go.

(Jungran Shin) When I heard the news over the phone, I was very proud of my son and thankful. I was really proud because he did something that I was suppose to do. So, if my mom had been alive, my mom would have really liked it.

(Sanghyuk Shin) So when I went to North Korea the first time, that was in 2004, I met with my aunt, who was my mom's cousin there, and her husband. The three of us spent the day together talking about this and that. I came back to LA and showed my mom the pictures and told her about my meeting with her cousin, and you know, my mom couldn't stop crying for days. And, you know, I think it was at that time I just thought I have to go back and bring my mother along. And I think that's what she was thinking too at that time.

(Sanghyuk Shin) I remember after my first trip in 2004, just thinking, you know, and speaking with my mom and seeing that she was so hopeful that she would be able to meet her uncles and her cousins in North Korea someday, I just remember thinking, "Oh, you know, I have to try to make this happen for her." For a number of reasons, it just seemed like the timing wasn't right. Every year something would come up and we would plan to go and then the plan wouldn't work out. Then finally in 2007 I was able to take my mother on the same delegation that I went to North Korea with in 2004. We were able to go together in that same delegation and visit North Korea and meet with our relatives.

(Jungran Shin) Yeah, in 2007, when I went there with my son, my heart was beating and I cried after thinking about my mom. But before I went, I thought, "I am the most dutiful to my parents out of all the children. I'm doing this all for my mother." All the sad things that my mom carried forever, I believed that I was carrying that burden. But when I met them [sighs], this is not a burden that only mom carries. This is all of our burden and something we have to resolve.

And if we don't resolve it, our children have to and our children's children have to resolve it. This burden isn't only my mom's burden. It's all of ours. We are experiencing the sadness of division. That's how I felt.

(Sanghyuk Shin) I want to mention that maybe like for seven days prior to our trip in 2007, I don't think my mom slept a wink for those seven days. She would call me everyday and say, "Are we... Are we really going? Is this trip really happening? Did anything happen? Are we still going? Are we really going?" So, obviously, it was a very momentous occasion for her and for me. It was kind of a dream come true.

(Jungran Shin) When I first arrived in Pyongyang Sunan Airport, and got off the plane, for some odd reason, I felt like I had been there before, and that shabby airport felt warm for some reason...I really can't forget that.

(Sanghyuk Shin) Yeah, I think the first time I arrived in Pyongyang and actually during the whole course of the trip, I felt like I was just kind of walking around in dreamland, you know? It just seemed too surreal that I was actually there. But I think the second time around, it just kind of... I felt more comfortable and you know, things felt familiar. I felt like the place wasn't as foreign as the first time.

\*\*\*(Jungran Shin) When I visited North Korea, I went to Hamhung to meet with the relatives. When my mother visited them in 1990, she had two brothers alive at that time, but after 17 years, one of them, her brother, passed away. So I met the youngest uncle there and his children and another uncle's children. They had their children too, so I met nine people all together.

(Sanghyuk Shin) So my mom, when we visited Hamhung, my mom actually knew some of the sights. And she's like, "Oh..." you know, and she was recalling all these stories that my grandfather had told her growing up.

(Jungran Shin) Hamhung. Nitrogen, like a fertilizer factory. My father used to work there. But when the US army attacked during the 6.25 War, the nitrogen fertilizer, all of Hamhung turned into ashes when the planes flew over. A while later, when the planes flew by and attacked again, it turned into ashes... It was like that.

When I met him, I was meeting my youngest uncle for the first time, but he looked just like my mom. So I was really surprised. I held him and cried, but it felt like I was holding my mom and crying. So it was very amazing.... And when I met my relatives, I realized how much my mom had missed this family, these people of the same blood. But in reality, *anyone* [italics added] I met seemed like my relatives and my blood. That's how I felt.

### **Intergenerational Legacies**

(Jungran Shin) In 1955 my grandparents both passed away and that's when my mother did not know what happen to them. She kept saying that whenever she saw someone her parents' age, "Oh my parents must look like them if they were alive." So, I feel like when I saw them [older people in North Korea] it was not the just the sadness that my mom had to go through herself but

also everybody else's sadness including my grandfather and grandmother's.... So, that's when I thought this pain of divided families is going through the generations. First, from my grandparents to my parents, and to me. Now to my son's generation. That's why I thought that way.

### **Family Separation/Reunion**

(Sanghyuk Shin) When we were in North Korea, we met with my mom's lone surviving uncle and his children and also my mom's other cousins and their children; and also my mom's niece's daughters. So there were four generations of our relatives that we met, the youngest being, she was like 30 days old at the time they brought her to meet us. So it was nine of them altogether that we met.

So my mom and I were in Pyongyang and they lived in the north Hamgyong province, which is the northernmost province. So we met at a midpoint, at Hamhung, which, as I mentioned before is also my grandfather's birthplace and hometown. We rented out a house and got together at around I think like 5 or 6ish? So we had dinner first and then went back to the house and just spent the entire night just talking about this and that, sharing pictures, passing the baby around. It's funny. I wasn't exactly sure what to expect. But as soon as we met them, things felt so familiar and it was just like there was no moment of awkwardness or anything. It was just like I'm meeting up with my cousins in New York, you know?

So we spent a lot of time talking and this and that and then of course, suddenly one of one of my relatives gets up and she's like, "Oh, now we have to start singing." She busts out in some song. I think the first song might have been Arirang? I can't remember but, of course, we did the rounds and everybody did their song. We had a video camera too so they made dedications to family members here. We stayed up just doing that until we were just like too tired to even open our eyes, until maybe like two in the morning. So it was great.

Then the next morning, we had breakfast and then took some pictures on the beach and then separated. So it was definitely too short but a very meaningful time.

There're two of them that stand out the most in my mind. One is my younger cousin, sort of second cousin. She's in her twenty-something. It's funny. She had like so much life and energy. As soon as she saw us, she was just like going two hundred miles an hour just talking about this and that. When she saw I had a digital camera, she took that away from me and became the official photographer. She had never seen a digital camera before but she picked it up just like that and she started using it. She figured out how to delete pictures that she doesn't like and so she was, you know, taking everybody's pictures and then she's like, "Oh, wait! I'm not in any of these pictures!" So she started complaining and gave the camera back to me and demanded that I take pictures of her. Since she had such a strong, vibrant personality, she definitely sticks out in my mind.

And then one of my uncles-must be in his forties-so not too much older than me. He was more kind of quiet and reserved. I found out that he is apparently just extremely well-read. He loves to read, kind of a bookworm. I was talking to his sister and she was kind of shaking her head saying, "He's such a bookworm." If only he had followed his dream and pursued a scholarly

career. But instead, because of pressure from his dad, he ended up going to a technical school and learning, I think, an electrical trade and ended up working in factories for most of his life. I just really felt kind of a connection to him. Just somebody who wasn't able to pursue his dreams.

(Jungran Shin) When we parted, I felt so empty and it felt like a dream. Everything was disappearing. And this is not the end, that's what I thought. It's a series of miseries.

(Sanghyuk Shin) I felt like even though our meeting was extremely brief, it felt good to get to know some of my relatives as actual people with personalities and dreams. I felt like that brief connection just meant so much. When I think back to North Korea and my relatives there, they're not sort of this vague concept of poor, starving people. I have names and faces. I know them in a personal way that's different from before. So, that meant a lot to me.

### **Intergenerational Legacies**

(Sanghyuk Shin) Even Korean-Americans my age, a lot of us don't feel a connection to Korea or the history. I think a lot of us don't have kind of a sense of urgency about reunification. So, when I think about that, it makes it difficult for me to picture giving my daughter some of the feelings that I have or that my mom has about reunification and the tragedy of separated families. I think it's a pretty daunting task. But I do think that Korean-Americans, whether we recognize it or not, there is a small part of us that *is* somehow deeply connected to Korea and its history. I think it's given me quite a bit of value to be able to explore that connection and to learn about it and to try to do something about reunification. Perhaps try to correct some of the injustices and the painful history.

So I'm hoping that I would be able to encourage my daughter to explore that connection as well. Hopefully, she would benefit quite a bit by connecting with Korea and this sense of need for reunification and somehow contribute to righting historical injustice.

(Jungran Shin) The world Dan-Bi [Sanghyuk's daughter] will be living in...I don't want her to carry this pain of separated families into that world with her. This is what I want to tell her: Whoever it is, everyone has their own thoughts, different ideologies, and the freedom to express all of them as long as they're alive. But, as Mr. Yun I-Sang [Korean born composer and unification supporter] the Korean people are like the sky; the [differing] ideologies and beliefs are like the clouds afloat in the sky. So, clouds, whether white clouds or black clouds, no matter how they clash, after the rain, they are gone and what's left is the sky. That is what a race, a people, is. And also the sea-the [clashing] thoughts and ideologies are like waves when the waves get rough. But the sea takes it all in acceptingly. That is like our race, our people. That mind, that spirit is what I want to leave behind for the child.

What gives me joy today? First of all, yesterday, my son became a lawyer. So I believe that would enable him to do what he really wanted to do. That is, to wipe out the tears from the people who are in pain. So, while he keeps doing that, I believe that we will have a day of unification that we all hoped for.