The Origins of the US Army's Korean Comfort Women (2)

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Chapter 1. The Korean War As I Experienced It

The outbreak of the Korean War

Although people become more forgetful as they get older, it is said that one's childhood memories remain the clear. I have vivid memories of what I experienced at the age of ten during the Korean War, which even today I have still not been able to forget. Granted, because each person can only recount the things that they personally remember, in a way our memories are somewhat imprecise. Some parts are remembered in great detail whereas others slip out of mind. At that time my psychological state was a chaotic mixture of emotions, of bitterness, fear, and fascination, but I never felt the sort of pacifist worldview that says that war is totally wrong.

It all started on the morning of June 25, 1950, a Sunday. That day we were supposed to go see a military procession or something like that near the 38th parallel. I was awakened by my mother and while I was eating breakfast an explosion ripped through the air. I turned to face my mother with eyes open wide. The loud booms continued for some time. After a while we realized that shots were being fired from north of the 38th parallel into the south. Far in the distance we heard the sounds of vehicles being driven and what seemed to be people cheering. My father said that we need to "evacuate".

My father said the word "evacuate" quite naturally, but it is not a common word in our language and it sounded unusual to my ears. It may have been a word used quite often before World War II.

My father needed to evacuate only my older sister and me first. He said that he would gauge the situation and evacuate later if necessary, so he stayed at home with my mother.

My older sister and I departed with relatives for Seoul. Seoul was about forty kilometers away, a distance which we walked amongst a crowd of refugees.

I could hear intermittent gunfire far off in the distance, but I got the impression that we were well ahead of the enemy. The suburban town of Uijeongbu is located between Seoul and my home village close to Mount Dobong, so we decided to stop for the night at the base of the mountain. I had heard that there were wildcats in the area that looked like tigers, but what was even more scary than wild animals was the roaring of artillery.

The following day we reached my uncle's house in Seoul. Not long thereafter, his home would be crammed with several of our relatives' families who were evacuating from the surrounding countryside. Later, when my mother arrived, I realized how serious the situation was. We all made my uncle's home our temporary refuge as we evacuated.

At night, when my uncle came back from work, he was stunned to see such a large number of uninvited guests in his home. He had been a police officer when Korea was under Japanese rule and continued to work at the police station after the end of World War II. We all respected him for being the most successful member of the family. However, he did not believe our story that we were fleeing an oncoming war, so he told us, "You can stay here one night but tomorrow you have to go back." He spoke to us so coldly, just as we felt that we were free from the uncertainties of war. As a police officer, my uncle believed that he was well-versed in intelligence matters and would know if a major war was brewing.

And yet, that was the night that the war came to Seoul. In the middle of the night the booming of guns filled the darkened skies. The sound of artillery and panicky civilian voices were audible from the eastern side of Seoul right through to the western side. At my uncle's house, I thought about all the trouble we were in while the gunfire outside grew louder and louder. I felt as if the artillery shells would fall right onto my head, but I managed to convince myself that my cotton mattress would protect me. I crawled underneath the wooden floorboards, covered myself with the mattress, and held out there, all the while shivering with fear.

The next morning everyone else was gone. Everyone who had stayed with my uncle had evacuated at some point in time. Alarmed, we were about to go too, but by then even the owners of the house, my uncle's family, had slipped away. Ultimately we, who were the last ones left behind, decided to evacuate with my cousin, who had been raised in our house as a brother, who was fleeing south with his wife.

My mother put some money that my father had given her into her stomach band and we set out on foot, but when we reached the bank of the Han River we found that we could not cross as the South Korean Army had dynamited the bridge. We had to pay a steep fee in order to charter a boat to get across the river.

At the place where we crossed was a middle-aged man drenched in water who was weeping loudly. He said that his boat had capsized in the river and that his wife and children had been swept away by the current. He himself almost drowned but finally managed to clamber onto the shore. We did feel bad for him, but we carried on past him just like that. We could barely handle our own problems and had no time to care for others.

Breathing a little easier after having safely crossed the Han River, we met up with other relatives along the way. However, that night, while the booming of the artillery continued, we could not even see the road in the pitch blackness and we ran through a field of green onions near what is the Gangnam District of modern-day Seoul. Because there were so

many of us, we made a considerable commotion trampling through the green onion stalks, and we were afraid that we might be found by the enemy. Also, though we found a storage shed in which to spend the night--it was a terrifying experience. While we were all huddled together in the shed, some people cried out when a searchlight passed over us.

As my mother ran out of money, our relatives gradually split from the group. We felt betrayed by the ones who left us. However, my cousin and his wife stayed by our side during the evacuation and we were grateful to them for looking after us right to the end.

The next day we continued to flee southward. In the sky, we witnessed several Soviet planes attacked by American planes, which then plummeted to the earth in smoke and flames. It was an interesting sight to see.

Before long, the money that my mother had received from my father ran out, and we carried on by begging. When my mother had money, she was able to share some of it with my cousin, but now the three of us were a burden to him. We stayed for a while in a farmer's barn and my cousin went around trying to sell crab and clams which he had gathered from the seashore.

Next, we arrived at Namyang, which is in the Gyeonggi Province west of Suwon, about forty kilometers from Seoul. Because the North Korean Army was advancing along the central roadways, it seemed like a safe spot. Namyang thus became the final stop of our evacuation and we survived primarily on grain and other food that my cousin and his wife received in exchange for farm work. We spent over one month there.

Photo Caption: A scene of devastation in war-torn Seoul

By the beginning of August, we had been away from home for forty days. However, when we heard that the North Korean Army was still marching southward, with no sign that the military situation would change, we realized that there was no point in continuing to live as refugees. We decided to return to our village.

On the way back we felt anxious about the war and worried about whether or not our father was safe. First, we walked forty kilometers to Seoul, and then, from there, another forty kilometers to our village. There was not a single car on any of the main roads leading north of Seoul. We tried stopping by our uncle's house along the way, but it was deserted. North of Seoul we saw about ten foul-smelling corpses abandoned on the roadside. They were covered with noisy flies which swarmed into the air when we passed by them. The sight of this did not make me feel any pity or fear. I felt only a horrible stench stinging my nostrils.

By retracing the path on which we had evacuated forty days earlier, we passed through the place on Mount Dobong where we had camped out. Not one building in the once great town of Uijeongbu had been left standing.

As we approached our house in the evening my heart began to race when I heard our dog barking at us. My father, still at home, was deluged with congratulations from the rest of the village on the occasion of our safe return. That night, amid wailing and cheering, we held a big banquet. The other villagers who had returned before us were living relatively peacefully, and our relatives who had left us on the way had also already returned. My father had waited for us, not knowing whether or not we had survived.

Evacuating our home village had been a journey, but it was also a valuable learning experience for me. I was able to experience first-hand a whole world about which I had no knowledge. I learned that my relatives could not be counted on, and I also learned that, though we were fairly well-off because of my father's business, without money, I was useless and only a burden to others.

I felt extremely grateful and indebted to my cousin. He had lost his parents early in life and because he was raised by my father, he was registered in the census as his adopted son. Because of this, my cousin never stopped looking out for us as family members.

Under North Korean rule

After the start of the war, my father's business ran into trouble, so we made a living through farm work, which we had not been used to up to that point. Still, the rice crop that year was excellent. I believed that it was during times of war that farmers were freest and most powerful, because soldiers came to them to buy food.

Under North Korean rule, our harvests were not impeded, but there were political changes. We children sang the “Song of General Kim Il-sung,” with lyrics that went "the crags of Jangbaek still gleam"**.** I recently visited North Korea, and hearing that old song again made me feel really nostalgic.

In addition, the local police station was taken over by the North Korean Army and the town hall became the North Korean Office of Internal Affairs. The North Koreans tried to mobilize the people and have them work there, but the villagers did not cooperate. They probably knew that North Korean rule would not last long. If we had collaborated with the North Koreans, I suppose that we ourselves might have been prosecuted later by South Korea. My father rubbed crushed garlic on my older sister's arm to make it swell up, and then refused on the grounds that she was sick.

The second son in a family who lived about a hundred meters from us was a communist. He was also a graduate of the university in Seoul and went around wearing the square academic cap which had been a prized status symbol since the period of Japanese rule. He was in a romantic relationship with my second cousin who had crossed over the 38th parallel from North Korea as a refugee.

Once, just before the Korean War began, he showed me and my second cousin around Seoul. The two of them doted on me back then. They took me to see a silent film in Seoul's

Dongyang Theatre and I had a lot of fun listening to the live narrator. I also remember walking along the central thoroughfares, Jongno and Jonggak, and going with them to the famous Hwasin Department Store. I still carry these pleasant memories with me even after all these years.

But, in spite of this, his romance was of a type that the village had never seen before. By tradition, marriages in a South Korean village were arranged with someone from outside the village. Marrying someone from within the village was unthinkable. Therefore, the relationship was bizarre to us, but because he was "a big shot communist", no one raised a word of objection.

However, he apparently had work and connections in the wider world outside our small village, and soon enough he left us, never to return. Because her boyfriend was a communist, my second cousin, who he had left behind, ended up working at the Office of Internal Affairs, where she had to carry out indirect surveys of harvest yields, including rice and even chestnuts. Her work there would lead to a terrible tragedy later.

Three months after the outbreak of the Korean War, North Korean rule had momentarily restored peace to my village. Although we had made a political transition from President Syngman Rhee's democracy to General Kim Il-sung's communism, regime change barely made an impact on the farmers. Nonetheless, we still felt ill at ease. My father sometimes got information about the situation of the war and shared it with the other villagers after nightfall. President Rhee was counterattacking again and even said that our village would be "liberated". "Liberation" was a word that we had all heard a lot since the end of Japanese rule. At home almost every evening we debated the merits of Rhee's democracy versus Kim's communism. It wasn't clear which side the villagers favored, but they seemed to be generally leaning towards Rhee.

As usual, the crops in the fields were ready to harvest in September. We reported on how much we expected to harvest, and the administrative officials appeared in person to coach us on how to count it. They said that they would count the number of grains on one stalk of rice and then calculate and report on the whole crop based on the dimensions of the field. The farmers feared this might be a precursor to the mandatory rice quota that took place under Japanese colonial rule, but nothing happened to disturb the peace of the village.

Then. on the night of September 15, I was at home as usual, shelling green peas with my paternal grandmother, while talking about politics. At that moment we heard a sound like thunder far in the distance. My father, who had sensitive ears, ran outside and looked into the skies above Seoul, which were glowing as if it were dawn. My father understood that this was no normal phenomenon.

Photo Caption: The UN Army's Incheon landing

We later learned that this was General MacArthur's "Incheon landing". Seoul was recaptured on September 27 and the UN Army continued northward. Though we expected that our village would also be liberated at that time, we never caught sight of the UN Army. We only realized later that that UN Army had made it all the way up to the far northern border of Korea by advancing along the major highways.

We did see North Korean troops fleeing north on foot. They were truly a defeated army. Three of them burst into our house asking my father to carry their shells and demanding food. My mother acted fast and served them right away, and after eating, they left in a hurry. My father was saved.

It was either that evening or the following evening that a whole family living in a village two kilometers from us was cruelly massacred. All eight family members plus their cow were put to the sword because one of their sons was an officer in the South Korean Army. It was the birth family of a woman who had married into a family in our neighborhood. She went back home to bury the corpses and hold a funeral, and when she returned she told us that the children had been stabbed to death in front of their parents before the parents themselves were killed. Her story spread throughout our village, but fear prevented anyone from condemning the deed openly.

Return to South Korean rule

It was in these circumstances that our village was liberated from North Korea and brought back into the fold of President Rhee's democratic system. The North Korean Army left the local police station and the Office of Internal Affairs went back to being a town hall.

A few nights later the police station was attacked. The attack was the work of North Korean soldiers who came down at night from the mountains where they had remained hidden while the rest of their army had retreated. Stunned to hear that "Even farmers are not safe", my family and I began spending our nights temporarily encamped near the highway in front of the train station where South Korean soldiers were stationed. The general unease of the village hit a high point after a girl and two young teenagers went missing.

Meanwhile the South Korean officer whose family had been massacred returned to his home in a rage, and his village began to discuss whether or not to punish those who had aided the communists. The officer captured and killed those who had collaborated with North Korea. He bound them and had them walk to a pit dug by a man carrying a shovel. He had them stand near the pit, then shot them from behind and pushed their bodies in.

I myself saw the execution grounds while having fun sliding over the ice on my sled. Back then, I didn't think that seeing a man get killed was particularly scary, so I kept on playing undisturbed until they were finished and went home. These sorts of revenge killings continued until winter.

Our own village was debating what to do with the family of the communist university graduate. He himself had not returned to the village, but his parents and his elder brother were still living there. The villagers met several times and engaged in long, heated arguments over whether or not to punish the family. Finally we reached a decision that we could not punish fellow villagers. From then on the members of that family were grateful to their fellow villagers. They actively helped out in events and other such activities, and we lived amicably with them. The villagers did what they did not because of any religious code of conduct like Christianity or Buddhism, but only for the sake of their own clear conscience.

Nevertheless, the girlfriend of the university graduate did end up being punished. The villagers first discussed whether or not to report on her activities, but that night, while we were still deliberating. her elder cousin ran into her house with a stick and beat her over the head until she bled. That, however, was not the end of it because next she was summoned by the South Korean Army and interrogated.

Her treatment by the South Korean soldiers surpassed even the North Koreans and the Americans in cruelty. The South Korean soldiers kept her detained for more than ten days and violently gang-raped her. Tragically, unmarried and a virgin, she was rendered unable to bear children. She would later move to Seoul and adopt a daughter who she raised alone, but I heard that she spent the rest of her life isolated and unhappy.

For a while she didn't return to her home village, but eventually she started to visit periodically. Everyone tried to put aside the painful memories of the war. It seems that forgiveness was natural for us because we had all been hurt many times during the war and had all done many things of which we were ashamed.

The invasion of the Chinese Army

It was a cold winter that year. Close to New Year's Day, rumors were swirling that Chinese communist forces were piercing the noses of the people they captured, running string through them like nose rings, and then dragging their victims along with them. We were all still gripped with fear when, in the middle of the night at about 1:00 or 2:00 AM, we heard some kind of music with bugles and gongs. It wasn't music, but rather it was the military march of the Chinese Army. To me it sounded like the gates of hell were opening up. I was dressed at the time, but remained still under my blankets, unsure whether I was asleep or awake. I heard someone banging on the front gate and calling out "hello" in garbled Korean. None of us answered back, and surprisingly, the noises fell silent. This was how I experienced the invasion of the Chinese Army in support of North Korea and the resulting "January-Fourth Retreat" of the South Korean Army from Seoul, though our village was occupied several days before that. I believe it was on December 31, 1950.

When I looked outside in the morning the mountain in front of me was white with the uniforms of Chinese soldiers. Their uniforms were green on the outside and white on the inside, but were now turned inside out to serve as winter camouflage. The residents of our

village ended up withdrawing to the south again. The Chinese did not obstruct our evacuation, but we were worried about what the South Korean Army might say to us later if we didn't flee from them. The Chinese Army covered the mountain, but by walking on a path along its base we made it to a South Korean Army encampment about four kilometers from the village. Although we told the South Korean soldiers that the Chinese Army was here, not one of them believed us. Even so, we figured that the Chinese Army was rather meek and would probably be driven away soon enough, so we settled down for the night in an empty house with the intention of returning home the next day. The following morning, contrary to our expectations, the Chinese Army had grown in size. We moved another four or five kilometers southward and observed the situation. We decided that we did not need to be afraid of the Chinese Army, and since it would make no difference whether we evacuated or not, we went back home.

By the time we got back, there were a bunch of Chinese soldiers barracked in our house. They had lit the floor heater and were asleep with their heads pressed close to the warm spots. My mother told me that they were cooking their brains and were probably dummies. She would never have let me sleep with my head so close to the floor heater.

We ended up camping out in our bomb shelter. Though I call it a "bomb shelter", it was actually just a hole we had dug behind the house. My mother and I had created it by digging through the white clay with a Korean weeding tool and gradually carting off the soil in a washbowl. I thought of it as the first thing I had made myself, and valued it more than the house. As long as we didn't try to stand straight up while we waited, it was perfectly comfortable.

The Chinese may have called themselves soldiers, but the large majority of them did not carry guns. I did see some mortars, but individual soldiers did not have their own rifles. Instead they were armed with things like shovels and farming tools. Some of the Chinese soldiers were close to the same age as me and we played together. Some of them got into fights with my friends and cried.

They were also very nervous about the sound of an aircraft and ran for cover whenever they heard one. I didn't think that aircraft were all that scary and I snickered to see how timid the Chinese soldiers were. They were cigarette pushers too. My parents, who were both in their early 50s, were handed cigarettes as if they were old men. Some of the villagers were also given Chinese medicinal herbs.

Moreover, the Chinese soldiers never showed any interest in our women. They were a good army who acted in a manner completely contrary to what the rumors had said. Not all armies engage in rape, and whether they do or not might depend on their regulations on sex. As far as I saw, the Chinese Army never committed any acts of sexual violence, including rape, against Korean women, and some think that the reason for this lies in the Chinese Army’s "Three Main Rules of Discipline and the Eight Points for Attention" which

included strict rules that soldiers "not take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses" and "not take liberties with women".

In spite of this, when the Chinese ran out of food several months later they did try to forcibly requisition it from the local people. When the villagers began burying their grain and other food to hide it, the Chinese soldiers would sometimes go around beating the earth with an iron rod listening for an echo and then digging it up. Still, because they were unable to communicate with us, they didn't do anything else once they had gotten the food. It was a kind-hearted army and I think that its conduct was very good compared to the aforementioned massacre perpetrated by the North Koreans and the cruel revenge exacted by the South Koreans. Lacking any interpreters, we could not speak to them at all, but it seemed like we could somehow understand them just from their expressions. I sometimes peeked in on the ones staying in my house and they always showed a lot of emotion.

The arrival of the UN Army

In the year 1951, spring turned to summer and the farmers were hard at work. Then, one night we learned that the Chinese were on the move. At some point in time every single soldier had vacated our house. However, it seemed like something big was about to happen so my family refrained from re-occupying our house and instead we remained in the bomb shelter. My father went to another village to hide my 20-year-old elder sister but it was completely deserted.

A formation of four fighter planes flew over our village. At moments like this the Chinese soldiers would always hit the dirt, but I watched with interest. The pilot of a plane looks down on the ground in front of him from an angle, so I had heard that once you are out of his line of vision you are safe. Naturally that did seem to be true. However, these planes appeared in pairs of two. After crossing over the mountain in front of me they circled back and dropped a bomb onto its summit. Immediately, black smoke and a column of red flames shot into the sky. Because they made a whistling sound we called them "whistling planes". We called the bombs "beer bottles" because of the way they were shaped.

By the next day, four big planes had turned into a fleet of many dozens. They plastered the sky and emitted a drone which made it seem like the air was vibrating. What I found to be even more strange and ominous than the noise were the black things attached to the wings of the planes which looked like rugby balls.

Flying to the south of the village, the planes released their bombs on a riverbank to the west that morning, and then continued bombing for the rest of the day. I had never seen such a ferocious bombing by so many planes, but it made no big impact on the village. Wave after wave of aircraft soared through the skies and unleashed their bombs in the west. It rained that evening, but there was no sign that the bombing would let up.

Next morning the weather was clear and when I looked into the sky I saw something that was different from the typical bombers. This plane was dropping parachutes. The

parachutes were bright and multicolored, and watching them descend from the sky was a truly beautiful sight. Today, I think that my appreciation of its aesthetics was rather imprudent in a time of war, but back then I didn't comprehend the reality of war and I was under the delusion that it was some kind of game. My impressions from that time are still lodged within my memory.

The UN troops falling from the sky wore mufflers that were the same color as their parachutes. Later when the song "Red Muffler" by Makihara Noriyuki became popular in Japan I was instantly reminded of those paratroopers being dropped near our village. I was told that the people still holding out in their bomb shelters had been liberated.

Among the roughly ten paratroopers it looked like there were black men and also a fully-armed man of Asian descent who might have been an interpreter. They moved into the village cautiously while holding their guns at ready. Meanwhile, helicopters buzzed through the sky and a medium-sized tank fired shells into the mountain behind the village. The mountain caught fire, but none of the troops even glanced at the blaze. That night, the corpses of the Chinese who had been shot dead in battle were burned. The soldiers also drew a strip a red cloth all the way to the field in front of the village which sparkled beautifully in the morning sun. One person said that this was a red line to mark off for their aircraft the area that they successfully occupied.

A column of about ten troops went to the bomb shelters, blowing them up by tossing grenades into them, making sure that the enemy was not present. In a neighboring village one pregnant woman who had not yet left her shelter emerged suddenly and was sprayed with bullets by the surprised soldiers who were standing at the entranceway. The bullets went through her abdomen, and UN forces called in an ambulance to take her to a hospital. She received surgery and returned home about a month later, but her baby died. In addition, there were some people who, upon realizing that not everyone had left their bomb shelters, went to check up on them. They said that some of the villagers were at a point of asphyxiation when they were rescued because they had plugged the entrances to their shelters very tightly with things like mattresses.

At the time, we had no way of knowing what the American soldiers were saying, but we did at least watch what they were doing. Upon observation, we judged them to be good men. They were in a happy mood and showed no fear. They greeted us warmly and, like guests bearing gifts, handed us cigarettes and army rations. Some of the rations came with a can opener attached, but others didn't and had to be cut open with a cleaver. Most were extraordinarily tasty, though there were also a few cans of beans in the mix which were not so good.

The village also learned of the damage done by the air raids of the night before. To prevent the cattle from being bombed, we tied them up behind a protective barrier we had built on a hill behind the village, but one of the cows who had a newly born calf was struck by a bomb. The cow died, its whole tail end being missing at the time we found it, and the

villagers decided to eat the remains rather than leave it to rot. They cut up the meat with their cleavers, simmered it in soy sauce for a while, and then ate it up. However, the old lady who owned the cow ran through the village in tears calling out for the calf, which had gotten loose, while holding out some feed for it in her hand. She chased it all over the village without managing to catch it. This was one of the saddest things I remember seeing during the whole war.

At the height of the bombing, everyone had been hiding and quivering in fear, wondering if they would survive the night, but now they were very happy it was all over. Now, for instance, we gazed at the helicopters and thought they were pretty cool. I don't think that the modern-day Korean word for "helicopter", "*helgi*", existed back then, during our early Korean education, so we compared them to dragonflies and called them "dragonfliers". We also called the fighters "zoom planes" apparently because of the sound they made when zooming overhead. Such names came naturally to us. For me, getting to see all these aircraft was a real treat.

The US Army had lost over ten men fighting in the area. The bodies were lined up by our house and then later carried away by helicopter. By contrast, over seventy Chinese had been killed in combat and disposing of their corpses was more problematic. We were instructed to bury their corpses, so my father and the other villagers tied them up with straw and lowered them in groups into a pit. On the other hand, we were not able to reach the bodies which were in or near the water reservoir, so we had no choice but to leave them where they were for the time being. My father told me that the bodies had been stripped of all their possessions, like their watches for instance. My father did not understand people who robbed corpses and he said that it was probably the doing of other soldiers.

One thatched-roof cottage in the village had been set ablaze by a bomb. The occupants were in their bomb shelter, but by the time they emerged there was nothing left but a smoldering pile of ash and soot. Actually, this place was none other than the residence of the head household of my own extended family, the Choi clan. It was a big family with a grandmother, her son and his wife, seven grandsons, and a granddaughter. When their house burned down, we lost along with it all our family heirlooms, which had been passed down for generations, including the vestments and conical hat of our ancestors.

All throughout the village, there were weapons like guns and grenades scattered about. One of my friends, who was the same age as me but was actually my nephew, invited me to try out a gun he had found and we shot at things inside his bomb shelter. The first time I was frozen with fear, but after trying it once I learned to love it. Although the sound of the gunshot hurt my ears, it wasn't so loud once we went outside and we had a lot of fun. Unfortunately, the gun was soon confiscated from us by the security officials.

All the weapons were collected up, put into a pile in a field far from civilian homes, and then doused with gasoline. A helicopter flying overhead dropped a grenade onto the weapons and blew them to pieces. The villages who heard the explosion thought it was

another bombing and scurried to evacuate. After they were told that it was just an arms disposal and nothing to worry about, they finally returned to their homes.

Sexual violence by the UN Army

When the UN Army first entered our village we all warmly welcomed its tall, smartly-dressed soldiers. We waved at them as they passed by, and the villagers, most of whom had never seen a car before, let out a huge cheer when the big unit and its jeeps drove through. What's more, the soldiers liberally distributed chocolates, candy drops, and cookies to us. Because it had been a while since any of us had had good food to eat, this seemed too good to be true. We gorged ourselves on the canned food that the Americans gave us, and we liked them more and more with each passing day.

In spite of that good first impression, the village always kept a close eye on the soldiers. The US Army had an encampment on the field and the hill in front of the village. The soldiers periodically wandered around the village in groups of two or three and on some occasions they brought along their army dogs. This did not strike us as being particularly soldierly behavior, and rumors began to circulate that they were actually on the prowl for women.

The villagers became fearful and uneasy, and my older sister was sent away to another village. Young women covered their heads with towels and carried children, and even young married women tried to avoid being targets by wearing rags as shawls in order to make them look like old ladies, though it didn't appear that the Americans were fooled by this. Women without children borrowed children from other families and piggybacked them while working. It was said that people with children were unlikely to be attacked. Even so, the soldiers never visited the village at night. Maybe they felt it was too dangerous or maybe they had a curfew to keep.

Unfortunately, the uneasy peace did not last long and soon enough, just as the villagers had feared, the soldiers began attacking women. During the day they wandered through the village hunting women. In the evening they parked their jeep on a high point of land with a view of the whole village and peered at us through their binoculars. If they spotted a woman, they sped their jeep towards her in the hopes of ravishing her. As soon as we saw that jeep we shouted out, "Soldiers! Hide!"

One evening, the villagers caught a soldier in the act of raping a woman and bludgeoned him to death with their farming tools. The villagers made themselves scarce when the military police came to investigate, and because the unit was then transferred elsewhere, no further investigations were undertaken.

On other occasions, American soldiers brought along their shepherd dogs with them. Women hid under things like piles of straw, but the dogs quickly sniffed them out. If the villagers saw this they would surround the soldiers, who then pretended as if they were on a

routine inspection and went on their way. However, there were some women who were carried off when the villagers were not looking.

One evening when our neighbors were eating dinner, a jeep carrying two UN soldiers stopped in their front yard. I knew from their red hats that they were military police. I approached the jeep out of curiosity and it looked like its occupants were not Americans, but Englishmen. My neighbors had a fifteen-year-old daughter, and it seemed like she was their target.

The girl went to hide in a tool storehouse attached to the ceiling, called a *byeokjang* in Korean. I walked up to the house to see what was happening. The soldiers entered without taking off their shoes. One of them stood in front of the sliding door entranceway while brandishing his gun, and the other one searched the house. The girl was on the verge of being found and was probably terrified. When she charged out of her hiding spot and tried to make a run for it, the soldier caught her. The soldiers grabbed the girl and stood while pointing their guns out the door. The rest of the family stood outside, shuddering with fear. It was at that moment that the grandmother picked up a steel farming rake and banged it against the floorboards. The surprised soldiers dropped the girl, quickly jumped into their jeep, which was still running, and fled the scene. Up to then, that grandmother had been treated as a black sheep due to her impaired hearing, but because of her courageous act everyone greatly appreciated her.

There was also one woman who had just gotten married who was abducted while she was fertilizing a field that was near soldiers driving a jeep. For close to a month no one knew where she had gone, but one day the jeep came back and dumped her off where the soldiers had found her.

And young women were not their only victims. One boy, just eleven years of age, one year older than me, was confronted while working in a sweet potato field with his grandmother by a soldier who demanded that the boy lick his genitalia. The soldier dropped his pants and when the boy refused, the soldier grabbed the boy's head and forcibly shoved his genitalia into the boy's mouth. The soldier used so much force that blood began to flow from his mouth. The boy's grandmother cried out beside him, but the soldier carried on as if nothing was wrong.

Around that time my father's health took a turn for the worse. He had always suffered from chronic indigestion, but this time he became bedridden and within ten days he passed away. There was concern about infectious diseases during the war, so we were told that the funeral would be kept to a small, simple affair. However, some of my father's closest friends and family members never showed up. My mother remarked that, "If it had been me who had died and your father who had lived, I don't doubt that they would have dropped by to give their condolences." It was just like the old proverb, "When the President's dog dies everyone will send their condolences, but when the President himself dies only a few of his true friends will." Up to the day he died, my father had never hesitated to lend a hand to his

family members and fellow villagers, but whatever interest they had in my father died along with him. My mother seemed fairly embittered by it all. She felt especially betrayed that my father's friends did not come to the funeral. I gained some new respect for my father's warm-heartedness as well as a new understanding and new loathing for the selfish and petty nature of the other villagers.

Embracing prostitution

Our village's time of crisis actually only lasted about two months, at most. After we brought prostitutes into the village, sexual violence by the UN Army disappeared, though even then some rumors of rape continued to circulate.

The prostitutes came in from Seoul and rented rooms for themselves in the village. The village folk, who had suffered so much from the plague of sexual violence, were glad to see them. There were about thirty of them, and we sent one of them to each lodging house. The villagers viewed them not only as protection from sexual violence, but also as an economic boon, a handy source of revenue from the money they spent on rent. Every family in the village felt this way. It was our first step towards becoming a "prostitution village".

It is entirely possible that, without prostitutes, war will turn men into horrible creatures who will force innocent girls to be their own "comfort women". Our village was a small one, but as soon as these young women joined us, the village pace picked up. US Army jeeps and trucks instantaneously descended on the village and parked all over the place, filling up once-empty fields. The coming and going of American soldiers made everything very lively. If the American soldiers were too busy to drop by, the village suddenly became deathly silent. On those days the prostitutes, being unable to ply their trade, worried about whether the Americans would come back tomorrow and they all looked very glum.

Through living together, the villagers and the prostitutes gradually formed a strong bond. Up to then the mental image of a prostitute which I had formed in my young mind was a very negative one. I thought of them as the worst sort of women, corrupted in mind and body. And yet, once I got to know them, I found many of them truly innocent. Many had become prostitutes because they came from poor families. None of them had gotten into prostitution because depraved thoughts had entered their mind or because their sense of ethics and morality was questionable. They were doing what they were doing so that they and their families could make ends meet. Their hearts certainly were in the right place.

There was one lady who took a leadership role among the prostitutes. She was very beautiful and was popular with the soldiers. Among the thirty in our village she had the most commanding presence and best grasp of English, and she could intervene if a soldier became violent.

When she came to the village she brought along with her some young girls who were in danger of being sexually attacked in their hometowns. They served as her housemaids, looking after her children and doing housework for her. In Seoul, she told people that she

let her housemaids take care of her children while she took care of her business, though she never let it slip that her business was prostitution.

She also pooled together the gifts and American dollars received by the other prostitutes and sold them in Seoul, and she even secretly rented a military truck and made a profit by using it like a taxi. She saved up the money she had earned from these ventures and bought a Korean-style house in Seoul. Though many of the prostitutes believed that prostitution was their only option if they wanted to eat, she, on the other hand, saw it as a business enterprise and didn't seem to feel any shame at all.

The villagers' sense of values had undergone a dramatic change. While we no longer needed to live in fear of sexual violence by soldiers, we now had something else to worry about. The women of the village suspected that their husbands might consort with the prostitutes, and the men, not surprisingly for men, kept a close eye on their wives in case they were trying to sell sex to soldiers. This became a source of domestic discord. However, there were also some women in the village who made money by helping the prostitutes with their chores, like doing their laundry, and enjoyed having them around.

There were even some who ended up with a fortune. A woman from a house neighboring ours was infuriated to find that an army unit had set up its tents in the field beside her home, crushing her newly-sprouted seedlings. She went to complain to the unit whose company commander heard about it through an interpreter and decided to compensate her. A truck filled with cigarettes and canned goods was sent to her house. Knowing that these things would fetch a good price, she sold them, and because land was cheap during the war, she used the money to buy farmland. She also had another job doing laundry for soldiers. She would walk along the barbed wire barricades set up by US Army units shouting "washy washy," but if she came home even a little late her husband would suspiciously check her backside for evidence that she was selling sex to American soldiers. They often had fights over the matter, but the villagers always blamed her husband for his own powerlessness in not stopping his wife from working outside the home. She thought of this extra source of income as a blessing unavailable up to then.

The village soon became awash with new English words relating to sex and condoms. The American soldiers also mixed in Japanese words when they spoke like "papa-san" (father), "mama-san" (mother), "*takusan*" (a lot), and "*sukoshi*" (a little). Basic English-style words which became widely understood included "hurry", "washy washy" (laundry), "stop", "hello", "okay", "yes", "no", "chop chop" (food), "shoe-shine boy", "three quarter" (a truck), "come on", "goddamn bitch", "get out", "to sleep" (meaning to sleep with a woman), "sleek boy" (thief), "short time", "long time", and "all night". Some pidgin-style expression also developed, such as combining "chop chop" (food) with "stop" to ask for medicine when suffering from indigestion. The villagers were making strong efforts to learn English.

The American troops spent their time drinking, singing, and dancing. They would all form a circle, fold their arms, squat down, and then dance while singing the latest American hits.

I sometimes heard them sing songs like "China Nights". Apparently the military police of the US Army did clamp down on prostitution in general, but as far as I can remember they never interfered in our village. Furthermore, the American soldiers in Korea ended up stimulating the prostitution industry in Japan as well due to the furlough system which took them back home by way of Japan.

For a time our village boomed economically and we had many opportunities to come in contact with Western civilization. The women in the village were greatly influenced by the clothing worn by the prostitutes, and the men wore American army uniforms while working. Though this was also the first time that I had tasted canned food and coffee, it was their Western-style cigarettes, or "red balls" as we called them, that had real trade value. Another strange new device that had appeared in the village was the "lighter", which was especially enjoyed by the old folks smoking tobacco.

However, the US troop presence in our village was short-lived. The army units were transferred elsewhere, and with that the village reverted to being a poor rural backwater. The prostitutes also packed up and moved along with the soldiers. We were a traditional farming community once more, though with the addition of two prostitutes who had stayed behind. One of them had had a child with an American serviceman, and the other was already over the age of thirty and had married a man from Seoul. The two of them had decided to settle down in our village and they lived happily with the rest of us. On each of their sixtieth birthdays, the villagers held big celebrations, and when they passed away there were impressive funeral ceremonies. No one ever mentioned their pasts as prostitutes.

Concerning the woman who had a child with an American soldier, a story did circulate that her mixed-race child had gone to primary school in the United States and that she had adopted him, but she strongly denied this. Regardless of the embarrassing circumstances of his birth, her maternal love for her child never wavered. This deeply moved the other villagers.

We also discovered that three people from the village had become prostitutes for the US Army elsewhere. Even so, the villagers never abused them or spread rumors about them because of this.

Perhaps war makes people more mature. Those who survived amidst the misery of war by becoming intimate with American soldiers or renting their homes to prostitutes might seem shameless to outside observers, but everyone in the village tried to mutually put aside the shame and the tragedies of the war. We all forgave each other equally because all of us were victims of the same war. To put it another way, it seems that a common experience in war is that it forces people to both open their minds and to open their hearts. We realized that everyone, regardless of who they were, was in the same boat.

Once the American soldiers had left, South Korean soldiers came in to replace them. The South Korean Army also committed a number of acts of brutality in the village. Though we

had only been under North Korean rule momentarily, the South Korean Army began to ferret out those who had collaborated with the North Koreans in the manner I have already described earlier.

As a village close to the 38th parallel, there were a lot of people who had been taken away to North Korea or who had gone there on their own. Consequently, the villagers were always beset by fears that if some sort of spy scandal were to break out many people in the village would again be persecuted. War always creates tragedies, and it also creates people who will have to spend the rest of their lives suffering from them.

It was in this context that I entered middle school. After that my mother sold her farmland and moved to Seoul.