

My Life Story

By

Yung Hwang



Story Keeper



Edie Mello

Acknowledgments

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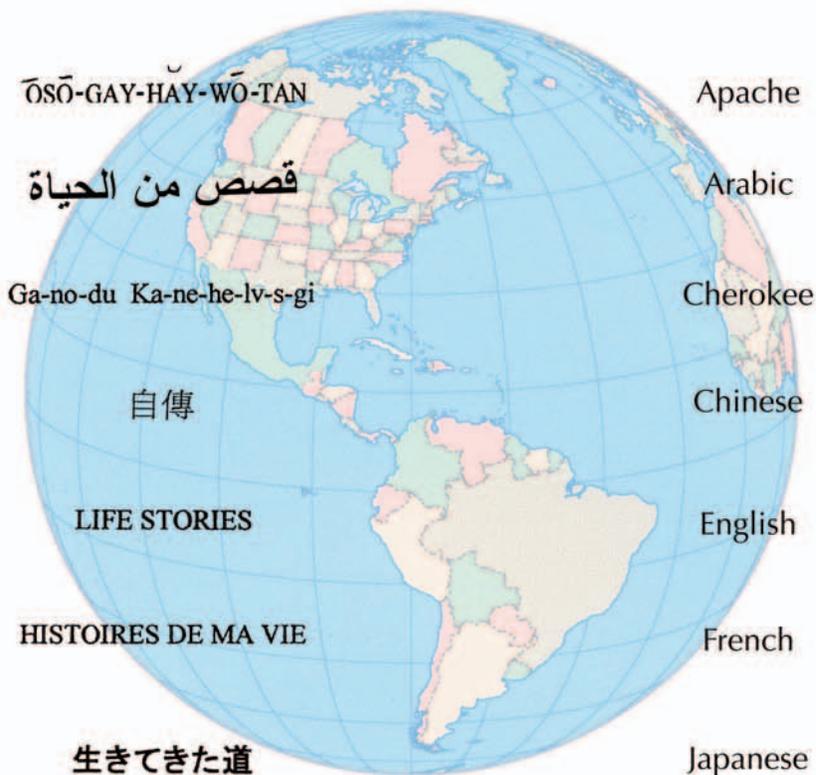
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Jim Mauldin, Coordinator
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The Ethnic Life Stories Project . . . giving the Springfield community a window to its diversity through the life stories of ethnic elders.





Yung H. Hwang

Dedication

This story is dedicated to my mother, Yungduk Kim, who disciplined me to grow and to educate myself to be of service to others and to make sacrifices for them through my medical career.

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My name is Yung H. Hwang. I was not named for anyone in my family. In the Korean language, however, my name Yung means "prosperous". My middle name is "sunshine", and Hwang is the family name, which, in Chinese, means "yellow". When I was a baby, my mother and father had a special Korean name for me, "Ilbong". "Il" means number one; "bong" is actually a bird. I don't think there is much meaning to it—number one bird? Maybe, baby bird?

I was born at home in Japan on August 24, 1935, with only my mother, father, and midwife attending. My father was a businessman, and it was business that had us living in Japan when I was born. We returned to Korea after I was five years old. The southern part of the Korean peninsula was where we lived and I attended grade school, middle school, and high school. That area is mainly farmland, producing two crops a year—barley in the wintertime and rice in the summertime.



A childhood home.

The town we lived in was a small town, far from the ocean, with lots of mountains and hills, and rivers, and pine trees. In the wintertime we ate lots of rice which grew in the summer, but was harvested in the fall. We also grew Chestnut trees and persimmons. All the town boys played together and shared life together. It was a dream place, and will be nostalgic in my life forever.

I am the son of Korean parents. Theirs was an arranged marriage, and it is a custom that continues today—arranging some (not all) marriages. My father's name was Dochul Hwang; he is deceased. If my father were still alive today, he would be 93 years old. My mother, Yunduk Kim Hwang, still lives in Seoul, Korea, and is 84 years old. I have a younger brother in Houston, Texas who is a

businessman. He is married and has three kids. I also still have two younger sisters living. (I was the oldest child.)

When I was born my Mother was 18 years old, and my father was 29. My father was late marrying because he was in business. To some extent, I look like my father. He was 5'6" tall and weighed around 145 pounds. I look like my father in build, but I also have my mother's side. I also got from my father the enjoyment of writing poems and essays. I still enjoy this. My father was a good writer, although he was never published. He wrote a letter to his children about their behavior when he had something to say. He was from a small village, so he didn't go to college or anything like that. Very few did in those days. But even with his limited knowledge, he was much brighter than anyone else.

My mother, such a great lady!, was a hard worker and very physically active. She is taller than my father was (5'8"), and is bigger boned. As a hard worker, my mother was determined to live free of debt. If she owed anybody, she paid them right back. She would give any time to anybody and anything she could when they were in need. Mother was not as educated as my father was, but she took very good care of and loved her six kids and raised us well. She was an excellent boss because of her strong will and strong character. I think I inherited that from her. My father had a gentler spirit, was more loving and tender. My mother, these days, regrets my father not being with her. She does not consider her life to be really successful because she lives alone and feels lonely and unaware.



Yung as a small boy with his mother.

In thinking about my parents, I like to think I have inherited the best from both of them—my mother’s strength of character and my father’s tenderness, which I transmit to my children. My father was much easier than my mother. He had such a good, warm personality, and gentle spirit. Mother did not give forgiveness like my father. She would spank and shout. (When I became a parent myself, I never hit my children.) But, if I had some problem, she would be the first to come, always ready to help, and she was the problem solver in the family. Her strength and commitment to her family was total and complete.

In all of my life, the person/persons I admire most would be my father and mother. But my parents were like other parents and disagreed at times. Father would expect Mother to be soft and loving; instead she was strong and disciplined. They were human, but sometimes disagreements between parents are unhappy for a child. Even with my father’s gentleness, I grew up where displays of affection were not shown to one another. My family never hugged or showed affection openly. I easily adapted to western differences when I came to the United States. With my own children, and when my children brought their friends, we always hugged, but in Korea, this would not be acceptable to do.

In my home, there were always lots of rules. Mother was not a talking person, nor was my father. She would show action. Act, and then expect us to follow. If we did something wrong, she would yell. She would yell at anybody! If a neighbor did something wrong, she would yell! One time for example, some neighborhood kids were fighting, and soon the parents were fighting, too. Mother got very upset. She was both protective and disciplinary. When she said, "Don't do it", she was very particular. Father, would let things slide—but not mother. He would think, "Oh, that kid has a problem. Well, why do I have to get involved?" He never confronted anyone for us, on our behalf. He always wanted peace.

Mother was the taskmaster. “The Early Bird gets the worm”, “No work, no food,” were her mottos. Mother was a taskmaster. Be diligent, work hard. She had lots of universal rules by which she raised her family. In some ways I am considered a perfectionist. My friends and family tell me I am, but I am not really sure. There are areas in life that require perfection, certainly in my work. One thing for sure, though, I am a take-charge kind of guy. I get in and do what needs to be done. This strong work ethic comes from my mother. She took control, and I am like that too. I identify most with my mother because I am a workaholic, constantly working, sleeping just a few hours, and otherwise working.

One incident stands out in my mind very clearly—when my mother was in a situation where she wasn’t in control. I was five years of age and still living in Kyoto, Japan. My mother took me with her to a very crowded, open market, with no walls. Then, she lost me. I just looked around. Perhaps, I was enjoying all the people in the market, the yelling and hollering, and the buying and selling. I remember lots of beautiful, colorful trains, and street cars, lots of people. I was lost in the crowd—just like one would be in busy New York City. Mother couldn't find me for several hours, I believe. She had given up and called the police department. Lost Child! By the time they finally found me, she was so happy she couldn’t scold me. Although, she could have said, "Oh, you bad boy!", or spanked me, she only stood there humming a kind of "Mmmmmmm", from the stress of the upset and the relief of having found me. She said that was the only time I was out of her sight, and the rest of the time I was very good and followed her.

Mother was right. I did follow rules well—the rules of the family and the regulation of laws, as well as the patterns of society. I always follow. I never try to get out of that line; I never break the law. I was not a rowdy person even as a child. I was calm. Also, I was a good student.

My father had a good education, and he wanted us to have a good education, too. We were within walking distance to the school (junior high) and walking distance to the elementary school. The teachers lived right at the school in dorms. When I was young, I would rather go to school, than work. I enjoyed school very much. I also loved to run. I used to run very fast; almost to fly. I was the number one sportsman in my class in grade school.

When I was in grade school, first or second grade, I had a Japanese teacher and Japanese teachers were known for being really strict. If you didn't do the work properly and have homework on time, the teacher would use a bamboo stick on you right in front of the class—ten strikes on the legs. Right there . . . Bam, Bam. And it scared me forever! One time was enough to remind me always and I didn't delay doing my homework anymore. This type of punishment is called caning.

School in Korea was very imperialistic, Sparta-style—not humanistic. There were very, very hard restrictions. That's the way I grew up. This type of education doesn't make for very happy memories, but it does build up the personality. It is a very different world here today. Here, parents can enter serious lawsuits against teachers if they strike their children. There is a difference between the Korean way, and this way, here in the United States. But the length of school is similar in Korea to the United States, with six years of grade school, three years of middle school, three years of high school, and four years of college. I was finished with grade school at the age of 12.

After the school day and work, five or six of us kids would gather together, to talk, sing, and use the blackboards inside for spelling. It was time for playing, laughing, kicking, just having fun being kids. We would talk and discuss what it would like to be grown up, and we shared lots of dreams. Sometimes someone would have one of the horses that were used in the fields for work. We would play with the horse and ride it places. There were no planned games like soccer or tennis.

In this country, kids are more active, but over there we were more studious, always reading philosophical and academic books, with less activity. When I was twelve years old, I started reading romantic fantasy books. They were not children's books at all. I saw someone at the store reading one and it raised my curiosity. So I slipped off to my room, and read, and read, and read. My mother would call to me, "It's lunch time. Come on, come on." "Okay, Mom. Okay, Mom. I'm coming." But I kept reading, kept reading.

Special places in my childhood memories are the school I attended, the mountains, and the river we swam in. I really liked hiking in the mountains. On our farm we had several animals: pigs, chickens, two cows, dogs, some rabbits, and a fish aquarium. We had a mixed breed dog named Fugi—a Japanese word, meaning mountain. This is also the name for one of the mountains in Japan. Fugi had brownish grey eyes and was a very good dog.

Holidays were special for me as a child. In Korea, there is a Thanksgiving-like holiday called Chushuk. It is just about the same time of year, when there are harvests of all kinds of crops in the fields. Take it, cook it, and eat it! On April 8th, all Buddhists come to the Temple. They light candles and do their confessions. It is called "Sawol Chopail." It means Parade Day or Buddhist Day. (It is like Christmas is to Christians.)

Birthdays were different when I was little. When I was born, my Mother cooked plenty of soup. Soup was a celebration of giving birth and the hard time of getting through it. So after giving birth, everyone eats soup. Because my birthday was in August, during the corn season, I always received corn and special rice mixed with beans. No cake!

On Korean Memorial Day all family members, even those that lived away, came together for that day, and still do, to memorialize their parents or their ancestors. It is a very reverent time of sharing and remembering. Also, it was a day for a lot of cooking. Rice, soup, fish, and fruit were all put together on the front table as a tribute or bow to persons who have passed away.

The first of the Chinese calendar year was another celebration and it comes right after the New Year here in the U.S. When I was in Korea during this holiday, the children greeted older persons, bowed, and then were given a dollar. I don't know the reason, but that is what they do in Korea. In America we celebrate two New

Year's—the western new year and the Chinese New year. We have more enjoying and special food, and dance for three days. In Korea, it is also a three day holiday—dancing, talking, playing games, all kinds of things. The Chinese New Year is one of the fondest and best memories of my childhood—all of the fun, relaxing, eating, and just enjoying everything for three days in a row!

The first present I ever gave anyone was during a holiday. I gave a bottle of Sake to the town mayor. Giving food to adults was in keeping with tradition, given in respect for the adults. (We did not have money for gifts.) Although the major was better off than we were—after all he was the mayor, and we were farmers—it made me feel very good to give him a gift.

As far as other entertainment as a child, I remember a wonderful fair or circus (not as fancy as the Ozark Empire Fair) that I went to see. I liked the high wire the best. I liked the danger of it. Once or maybe twice a year there was also a movie. We gathered in the school yard for it. It was not fancy, but we gathered, and there was a winding projector, and we watched a movie. I liked this very much. I was very sensitive, but was not allowed to cry. I was touched by the movies and they moved me very much. The people in the movies looked like angels to me—above this life and untouchable.

I have one particular childhood memory I have never told before. Our home was along the road that people traveled on to various schools and towns. One day when I was a boy, I saw a young lady on the road. She was a girl really, in about the 5th grade of school, perhaps 11 years old, very slender, charming, beautiful. Whenever I saw her after that, I tried to say something to her, but my face would become red. I couldn't talk about her with anybody because the way we were brought up, we were allowed to think only productive things, not foolish, romantic things. She was wonderful, but I could not say a word to her. It was an entirely different world back then, and a different country. It was first love, **puppy love!** What do you know when you are eleven or twelve years old, only a kid. I never knew what to say to her. I just couldn't talk. I was too shy.

When we finished with grade school, and were getting ready to enter junior high, we had to pass a test before we could advance. They don't do that here anymore; you just go up. Well, after I started junior high school, there the young lady was again, passing by, and I couldn't follow because I had things to do. But my mind could not forget her. "Where is that young lady? What is she doing?" I wondered. I went so far as to find out about her home town, and it was a small town, like Springfield, or Carthage. I wanted to see where she was coming from when she passed by my home and made my heart pound. Finally, about ten years later, I got enough courage to go to her house, but she had moved. It was too late to see her. Now, I have forgotten her name. Still in my mind, I think how slender she was, and what she looked like.

As far as religion when I was growing up, my parents were both Buddhists that believed in a naturalist approach: Observe and be good to nature and all things. The basis for the religion I grew up with was honesty—fundamental and pure. My parents were not true Buddhists, but rather found a combination of beliefs. I did not grow up with an organized religion. My father's deep love and respect for the earth and people was handed down to me. I saw people going to church and some going to Buddhist Temple, but I never went to church regularly until I went to a Christian college where attending chapel was required. That was how my religious life started—and my life has been religious ever since.

After living in Kyoto as a child, we moved back to Korea. My father was drafted in the Japanese army reserve during 1944-1945, working in troop service provision during World War II. Germany, the United States, and Russia were all involved and Korea got involved indirectly with Japan. Whenever my father had opportunity to come home, every month or so, he always brought big dried fish, rice, and sometimes fruit. I don't know where he got them, but he brought them as a gift for the whole family. During that war time, no one had any money, and the living circumstances were bad, so this was a real treat for us small children and our young mother. We enjoyed those feasts very much.

In those days Korea was very, very poor! Yes, very poor. In fact there was not even rice to eat. Rice, you see, was the main food and we could not even get that. Because of that, we had to eat barley or potatoes. Ironically, in the United States, wheat and barley is considered very good for you, but in Korea at that time it was not the choice food. Rich people got the rice, and poor people got the potatoes, and wheat, and stuff like that.

One of the main reasons Korea was so poor was because of wars. These wars gave me very many unpleasant memories. We had lots of scares. During WWII and the Korean air raids I saw so much—so many people killed. After all, Korea was under the control of the Japanese for many years. In 1945, WWII, I was a small boy and lots of people were getting over the destruction of the streets, farm buildings, everything. The Americans defeated the Japanese and ended that war.

Then in 1949, or so, the Korean War broke out. It was not a civil war, like the civil war here in the United States. It was a war of communists fighting democracy. The North was Communistic and the South was Democratic. The 38th parallel was the dividing line. On June 25, 1949, the Korean (North) came rushing down and captured Seoul. The North invaded a peaceful South. There was no one to protect the South Koreans, because we were still ravaged from WWII. Because my mind was little, I couldn't take in much. My parents were hiding in the countryside at Grandpa's house and I had escaped to another hiding place. Every night we heard the cannons—those things awful. The next morning I would see dead bodies from the air raids. I saw a person killed, right there, by the North Koreans.

In those days, it was hard to tell if you were North Korean or South Korean because each would take clothes of the others and hide out like civilians. It was too much for a little boy 10 or 12 years of age. Two wars tore up Korea. Everything was destroyed. For people to survive, they had to eat whatever was available. If we had milo (which only horses eat), we had to eat milo. We had to use greens, just whatever we could—because there was not enough rice for everyone. Here potatoes are considered good; there in Korea potatoes were a low third or fourth choice.

It was a very poor time. It was a very hard time. During my teenage years, and always, I had responsibility to help work with mother, and then take time to help my sisters and brothers. I wanted to cry from the burden, but never could. Because of the wars, my youth was not an enjoyable time, but it made my mind stronger. I took up the feeling that I didn't ever want to be part of that killing. I had to escape from that. I hated war. It makes you see how people go through tragedy, and how you can help. In that way it changed my life.

Besides the damage to the land through the war, there was other damage, too. Though my father was a physically weak person, he was strong in sensitivity, and he had strong opinions—very good, wise opinions—but was not a pushy person. As he feared, outside influences from the war (the American military and United Nations peoples) weakened the Korean culture. The North Koreans took advantage of that. My father knew that freedom isn't always a good thing. For some, freedom has in itself order, a plan and dignity; it doesn't mean we can just go outside and pee or kill someone. Is this freedom?

When you say "bad boy Clinton", that is the kind of freedom the Korean people got. Because of it—losing their traditional dignity—they were so depressed and sad. Before that the people were not familiar with the western system really. People from outside brought in bad things. First, they brought the bad mouth and nasty language, prostitution. The Koreans learned the bad parts of the western custom first and then decided that was not good. The family was affected by this kind of freedom.

After the war was over, everybody escaped to the south part of Korea. If the North Koreans caught government officials they would kill them, "Oh, you had a good time, huh? Well, my pistol is going to kill you. You will have a good time no more." So the people went further south, almost to Japan. The United Nations stepped in, thank goodness. All this was happening in my life from age five to age twelve, during the formative years.

I do not remember my first home, but I do remember the home my family lived in when I married. They had lived there a very long time. It was a small house with two bedrooms. Later on, my father extended an addition, which leaked at the junction every time it rained, so we put a bucket underneath it. My father and I would climb up together and patch the roof. My father was not a rich man, so my mother helped us by growing a garden. She also worked selling products door to door, such as creams, crafts, and soap. There were no markets or a telephone, so you couldn't call anybody. You just went and knocked on the door, and asked if they needed this.

When I was 14 or 15, my father decided he wanted to build a house, and I tried to help any way that I could. We didn't have any lumber yards like here, so everything you wanted, you had to cut down yourself. My father designed a house with two bedrooms, a big porch, a sitting area, and one kitchen. We also had a yard and a big field so that we could have rice to store to eat later. (Talking of property, when I came to the United States, I couldn't believe how every part of every spot belonged to somebody. "Gosh! Who owns this huge land?" I'd ask. I thought it was crazy for someone to own so much. Even if someone gave it to me, I still don't know what to do with it.)

When we were building the house, we asked people who had a really good house what trees they used, and we tried to use the same. My father worked on the house during the daytime when I was at school, and the only time I had to work on it was night. We had a "jigae," an "A" frame carrier for getting things from place to place. I don't know if many people have seen one. It was like carrying things piggyback. During WWII, or shortly thereafter, people stopped carrying like that. At that time, we didn't have money to buy an automatic carrier, or a motor vehicle; we just did it that way. So we built a house, dragging the logs down the hill.

After I was 15 or so, we moved to our fourth house, and then on to another place closer to school. There were six kids in the house then, three boys, and three girls. In the two bedroom house we lived in, Mother and Father shared a room. When we were very small, one of us would sleep with them also. In another room—the children's room—there were three or four sleeping. We had no beds. I had to sleep on the floor. We did have blankets. Because I was the oldest son, I got the best floor mat after my parents.

In the traditional Korean home, the boys in the families were looked out for before the girls. In other words, boys were over girls. Here in the U.S. all are treated the same regardless of sex. But there it was the men, then the ladies. As the oldest boy I was superior to my siblings. Everyone else was under me. I got the most esteem after father and mother. The girls did not own anything of their own. That was the culture then. In Korea there was no specific ritual for Korean boys, as with the Jews, who have Bar Mitzvah. Growing up to be a man was more like a state of mind. It is like a blade of grass or rice. When planted the grass comes up, but is still inedible, then later, when we see the fruit, we know, oh yes, it is ready.

I had grandparents, but they never lived with us. (Koreans have a big family system; uncles, aunts, and grandparents. All the older family members who don't have income, nothing to live on, are taken care of by the younger ones. In the United States, people go to nursing homes.) I do remember, though, that my grandmother on my mother's side of the family was just like my mother, a very hard worker. My grandfather was a soft and easy going man. I liked my grandpa better than my grandma. The Korean tradition is that the oldest boy in the family becomes the leader when the father and grandfather die. Because of this, I am responsible for everything in the household.

Responsibility isn't a new thing to me, though. When I was a little boy, right after school came work. Korea had adopted the Japanese lifestyle—getting up early, going to bed early. When we were 10-12 years old, kids in our area would get up in the morning, get together with the other students, and all go to a certain place and clean streets, cut grasses. This work habit continued while I was going to college. During college, I lived in Seoul. It is a big city. I would have to get up every morning around 4 or 5 o'clock to catch the train going to school. But, I was willing to do that, because I had a goal set for myself.

When I went off to college in Seoul, I eventually moved into a place where they provided room and board. I had some wonderful experiences living in Seoul. I wasn't until college that I rode a train. The train ride there lasted ten to twelve hours. There was so much to see, and so many adventures. The college I attended was over a hundred years old. I studied very hard. My favorite teacher was a Japanese teacher named Takayama. He was a very disciplined person. He was the same teacher that used to discipline by caning. He was very strict, but he also loved me the most.

I knew I wanted to be a doctor when I went to college, but my father wanted me to be a lawyer or a prosecuting attorney. He believed they were the ones conquering and overcoming the Japanese. But I entertained the Western style of life, liberalism, a more peaceful way of looking at things, and turning the other cheek. The western style economy and Christian style influenced me. I had a scientific mind rather than a political or military mind. Politics, torturing or hurting others, was not what I was going to do. In my mind, that was the difference. Scientists, to me, were diligent and hard working people. All of the motivation I had was from science. I wanted to approach life from the field of science, using my brain, and solving problems—not ruling others, or making laws.

The first year in college I had some criminal justice classes, though. And I went ahead and studied to take the test for law school (to satisfy my father and other family members). Just like in the United States we had two top schools, one law school and one medical school. But they didn't accept me into law school. The examination was very hard. So I was able to tell my family, "I tried, my father, my uncle, but I couldn't do it." It was the truth, but in my heart I was glad.

Because of the war, there was such damage to the college I attended that we had classes in a tent. But somehow we did have bread. Where they got the stuff for bread, I do not know, but they did. We stood in long lines for a small amount of bread to eat. Pencils were also rare. Because a missionary had built my college, while I was there I had to go to chapel, and because of that I learned to give a service. I received a gentler call; it stayed in my mind on and on.

After Yonsei University in Seoul Korea, then I went to pre-med, and college of medicine—a total of six years. My mother came for graduation, but my father could not afford to come. Medical school was very expensive—twice as much tuition as for other schools. I worked part time, and taught middle school at night to help pay the bills during my third year in medical school. After those six years of school—classes in the same building—it was difficult to step out. It was hard to readjust to society. Then the Korean Armed Forces obligated me to serve a tour of duty. As a doctor, a tour in the corps was mandatory.



Army bachelor

Graduation Day with my mother and brothers. A happy day for us all.



Yung H. Hwang, 2001

I was serving in the Army Medical Corps in Korea when I met my wife, Kapran. After I finished my duty in the Korean Army, my parents expected me to marry. Marriage in Korea is a right of passage. If you aren't married, you aren't an adult in Korea. You are only a kid, even at forty years old. Once you are married, you have more responsibility and can establish your own personality. Kapran was a beautiful young lady. One day I was talking to a pharmacist in a town about an hour from where I attended grade school when Kapran came into the store, and I thought, "Who is that pretty lady?"

Kapran is the fourth child of seven. While I was the oldest son, favored in the family, she had to grab on to what she could because others were there before. When there was a bag of cookies, she got what was left over. In a short time we got to know one another and the marriage date was arranged. We had a western wedding with flowers and everything. It was becoming the trend in Korea to follow the western custom. We were married by a local dignitary. The wedding chapel was already set up, and we paid so much, and used the chapel for the wedding. One hour—two hours. You're done.

Kapran and I have been married now 34 years. We have three children: John, Christine, and Keith. John is the doctor. He would be my rock in a hard time. He is stubborn, but then again, he keeps up the traditional role. Keith and Christine are both lawyers. Christine is just so sweet, with a strong personality, and her call is to help others. When she was at home she had many, many boys always calling her, but she has not married yet. She is very dedicated to the service of others, and does a lot of pro-bono work. Keith is the international lawyer—a negotiator, flexible.

My call for my children was to be whatever they wanted to be. The job should go along with the person, rather than the person going along with the job. I believe I should not try to tie my opinions to my children. I have one grandchild, Nathan, a year and a half old. We have pictures of him and our children all over the house. We would love to have more grandchildren.

After I left Korea, I had more schooling. In 1966 I interned one year in St. Louis, and then I went on to Chattanooga, Tennessee, for two years surgical training, then back to St. Louis where I worked for a time at Barnes hospital. I consider being the doctor I am—feeling the way I do about medicine, surgery, and helping others—one of my biggest accomplishments. A most rewarding aspect of my life, like anybody else, has been working hard all of my life. It became a lifestyle, and without working I could not survive. Years ago my profession made me the person I am. And I am staying with it.

Sometimes I treat people medically without pay. Sometimes, the payment is a "Thank you, Yung", and a big hug. In St. Louis, around 1959, I was working at the county hospital (which is no longer in existence). There was a lot of activity going on in the Emergency Room; it was raining and lots of people were sick. Well, there was a white nurse, around 40 years of age, wearing a starched white uniform, working in the ER. In comes a little black kid, bleeding all over the place, and also with an awful odor. She picked him up and said, "Poor baby! It will be alright." In that, I saw such love. I was so impressed with her compassion and love. I knew I wanted to be like that. Just as Albert Schweitzer lived a life of service to others, I had a choice about how I would live. I, too, want to do for others.



My beautiful family—Christine, Keith, John and Ann Marie holding Nathan—with me and Kapran

Besides my medical work, I have had opportunities for other service. When we moved to the Springfield area about nine or ten years ago, the Korean community needed some type sort of interpreter—a type of bridge between the Korean community and the Springfield community. They needed medical help, but also social leadership. I couldn't help with their social life, but there were things I could do. I took the opportunity to organize the Springfield Korean Community organization and am still involved with it, helping them adjust to life here.

The Korean community has an annual agenda and meets together about four times a year, celebrating certain Korean holidays. The first holiday we celebrate is March 1st, then right after school is out, around Memorial Day we have a holiday. We also have picnics in the fall and celebrate Independence from Japanese Rule on Aug 15th and Christmas.

In counseling the Korean community, I tell them, “No matter what part of Korea you come from, you are Korean and you are ethnic to this community and country. But you also live in a local community and are part of the community. Each one of you must know what your rights and responsibilities are, good and bad, whatever, and you need to know how to vote as citizens. Secondly, do not divide up because of the church you attend. Third, it is also important to remember that a very good part of the Korean culture is respectability and also preserving the language. It's important to keep teaching the Korean language, but learn English, too.



My opportunities for service go outside the United States, too. When I was in Korea about 10 years ago, I went back to the school I attended as a child. I saw needs of the children and the need for additional funds for the school. I decided to send money yearly to the school for a Scholarship Fund. This makes me feel very good. I have been blessed, and feel good to be able to give something back.

My childhood school and its current faculty.



As a medical person, I know that we cannot just treat the medical need only. I want to do some mission work. Someday I would love to go to another country and help the needy. I have an associate currently in Brazil; she sends mail occasionally to the church in Carthage. I asked about going there. There are also some things going on in Haiti, and wish I could go to help out. Despite my wish, I have a very large practice between the two offices. Working two places, it is hard to find someone to cover for any amount of time. It would be my wish to go and help others.

Because there are always so many obligations to meet, in some ways I feel as though I haven't seen my own life much. It is kind of confusing. I told my wife a few times, "I don't think I have my own life, only the life of my job." And she says, "You're a workaholic, not a normal person." I agree. I have a hard time finding time for myself because of meetings, family, conferences, others. I have a hard time trying to do the things I want to do, like go on missions.

I try to get together with a few people my age—a professor in Arkansas, a friend in Texas, a local businessman. But sometimes I have to say, “Go on ahead. I'll join you later.” Naturally they do not like it, but, what can I do? I do understand the importance of maintaining friendships. The very best friend I ever had is named Mr. Yang.

We grew up together in the same village and were teenagers together. We talked about a lot of things together, society and our futures. Growing up he would always be there. He is a farmer and lives in our village. When I went to college, he stayed there. He was very proud of me when I went to college; he had praise for me. I valued his kind words, and no matter what I do, he will give his support. He wanted to see me do the best I could. We share values and still feel that connection today. I try to keep in touch, and find out how he is doing. The last time I went to Korea he was out of town, so I missed seeing him.

My wife is very supportive of my work in the community, but worries that I spend too much time doing things, not relaxing enough. I am always busy doing! It just happens that way. I never intend to be so busy. I do not say, "I commit to do one thing or another". It just happens. Luckily I never had a bad habit develop in the midst of the stress, like smoking or drinking. One time I started to smoke out of frustration—to relax, but I never had the habit form.

In spite of how I am always so very busy, there are times I feel so lonely. From time to time I see famous or distinguished people shut themselves away in a chateau somewhere, and there are people outside looking in. In some ways I want to concentrate on a moment for my own, and in that brief moment, I want to think about my own life. Most of the time I am thinking about others, about the family, my wife, my mother. Who is going to help my mother in Korea? So I am between my own family and my mother—weak and fragile—and my brother (still in Korea) who are not well. I do not know what will happen tomorrow, but I know one thing—that as long as I am physically able, I want to keep working. What will happen if I retire?

I do a lot of thinking—especially during church, at home, and when traveling. I think about people and how they can improve the quality of life. We live in a global society, not just one place. We need to communicate that idea. We live in a global society, and we need to show that to one another. We need to teach people moving here about voting, and taking an active interest in their government. We need to share technologies with one another and not deny opportunity to others.

As far as religion goes for me, I am not as faithful as I would like to be. I enjoy attending church and visiting, having fellowship, and assisting in maintaining a good church. Because of the church, whenever I am feeling down or stressed I remember I am blessed, and still alive. I look for my blessings. I also know that we must forgive other parties that are not kind. For example, when I practiced in Carthage there was a Philippino surgeon, and he was a very qualified, good surgeon, but we clashed from time to time over patient care.

I learned that this surgeon had said some things behind my back, some unpleasant things—maybe because I was established before him, or whatever reason, I do not know. He had to leave eventually because of some personal problem, but I continued to practice there. I had some hurt feelings about him, but realized I should not have any hurt or angry feelings anymore. I realized it was better to think of his good qualities. Without going to church, I would not have had that kind of forgiveness.

With regard to local Christian/Korean-Church related activities, we have five Korean Christian churches in the area—Presbyterian, Baptist, and gospel type. Every church is not filled, though some churches have around 100 or so members. I do not know of any Koreans here that are Buddhist, unless they are much older, and even at that they blend in with the Christian faith, combining the two, as do their children.

Besides my commitment to work and service, I also enjoy writing. Naturally I write in my language. My children ask me to translate, but I tell them to learn Korean. It would be a legacy for them. One of our children reads and speaks Korean. I didn't realize the importance of teaching bilingually when my children were growing up. But it is important and I would do that differently. That's why I stress preserving the language to the Korean Community.

In my hobby of writing I contribute to a newspaper in Chicago and the Korean Journal of St. Louis. Prior to

that, I wrote to the daily newspaper from Korea, which has a Chicago branch--*Chosun Daily News*. I write essays and short stories, and contribute them. I do not have enough articles to make up a book, but eventually I would like to compile a book. Because community work keeps me busy, writing is very relaxing to me.

Some of my other favorite things to do are staying away from the telephone and snow skiing. Recently, my wife and two of our children joined me for a skiing trip and it was great fun. It had been 12 years since I had been skiing. I enjoy it so much! I fell down several times, and then I just lay down. Whatever time I have I like to relax physically.

If I could re-live parts of my life, I would spend more time writing, traveling, and spending time on my own pleasure—like that skiing trip. I would try to have fewer distractions. I would have done some other things before settling down with a family. I would like to have been a better public figure, and do better socially—becoming more committed to other things instead of work. I would like to be a better leader in my field of medicine, and have the opportunity to close the office and go help the needy. But I would still dedicate myself again to my career, doing for others, and making others happy.

If I could turn back the clock in my own life, I might have made different choices involving others. I would live life first and have life experiences first. Sometimes I imagine what it would have been like if I had stayed in my home country. I would have been there when my father passed away, and I would have been nearer for my mother. It might not have been better for me, but for my parents it would have been better. I have had to deal with some mixed feelings from my family members because of my move. Some of my siblings hold me accountable since I was the first born son and was not there for many of my family members during crises.

I do travel to Korea as often as I can to see my Mother. My sisters also live in Seoul, Korea, near my mother. Both of them are married. Mother lives near a children's park in Seoul, and likes it very much. Occasionally, I go there and stay a little while to help her out with her work, or she comes here for a rest. She visited us last year for about three months and liked it here, but she has business to run by herself back home. Hers is not a big business, but she has a rental building to take care of and is glad to get back to it. The business has become difficult because her memory is failing. There is no one there to help her and her back hurts, but the rent money provides an income for her.

Since I have been here 30 some years, I would like to have my mother living closer, so I attempted to convince her to stay here longer. About ten years ago, she agreed to try, but the U.S. was afraid she needed Social Security and disability benefits. Some people might come to the U.S. and take advantage. They never work here—just come and say, "Hey, I'm 65. I need my Social Security." The United States sees that happen more often than they would like, so that is why they have a rule and cut my mother off. Failing to be approved for immigration, she couldn't stay here and left. She is going to try again, even though she is more accustomed to life in Korea than here with us.

I had another younger sister who came to the United States, but she is deceased. Her death affected me greatly. One of the most painful memories of my life is her death, and the time I lost my father. When he died I felt awful because I couldn't make him well. And, because I was so overbooked with surgeries, I couldn't attend his funeral. Also, when my sister came to the United States I was so busy. I did not know what I was doing. She was a registered nurse, a beautiful girl. When she came to the U.S., I was busy establishing my practice, and didn't pay much attention to her; I was occupied with my own life. She didn't know what to do, and spoke no English. My wife was also busy. So my sister suffered "culture shock".

My sister was fragile and had headaches and stress of all kinds. After being here three months, she went back to Korea, and continued to suffer with persistent headaches. Finally, she ended up at the Catholic Medical Center in Seoul. I shouldn't blame the hospital or the nurses, and the people that cared for her, but something happened that was very terrible. She was in a bed, a high bed, and fell down hitting her head. Because of the

fall, she was in a coma. I am assuming that she had a concussion with head injury trauma, and that is what killed her. I was so heartbroken. I should have been there for her. I let her down. I have never recovered from the pain of losing her. I should have made a better effort for her.

My wish for future generations (no matter what other kind of life they have) is that they have access to good, valuable education and the opportunity to do good for others. You are born and then you die, but during that period of time in between—be it 25 years, 55 or 60—you have opportunity to fulfill goals. I would advise as early as possible to set a goal, and then set about fulfilling that goal. I told my own children, “No matter what your profession is, you must sacrifice, and do for others. You cannot fill your own belly while others do without”. I would like others to think of that: Sacrifice your own, and love others. Two men were my role models in this thinking: Albert Schweitzer, the German physician that went to Africa, and the former president of the Philippines, killed in a airplane crash. These men did not live for themselves but for others. Their lives were in service for others.

We have lived in Springfield ten years, since 1991. We moved here from Carthage because the Korean community needed assistance with medical needs. Being in Springfield also makes it much easier for me to travel, Which I do often. But from another angle, it is not as convenient for me to be here as in Carthage because I am still working very closely with my patients in Carthage. It becomes very tiresome driving 60 miles twice daily, twice a week.

When we moved from Carthage to Springfield, not everyone welcomed us, but the Korean community certainly did. The hospital staff and medical community also welcomed me. Sometimes others don't seem as enthusiastic about us, but whether or not it is because we are Korean, we don't know. I do not know if race is the issue.

Once a very good American surgeon recruited me to share a big office. Eventually some patients would ask for me over him. So, he asked me to leave. He had the uneasy feelings toward me. Even here, there is professional jealousy. And, maybe, if you look deep enough, you could find racial discrimination. Maybe I wasn't liked because I have a flat nose, squint eyes, black hair, yellow skin, am not tall, and have a different way of talking. Because of learning forgiveness, I am beyond being disturbed by it. I don't even feel like saying “What a little guy,” or other comments. I really don't care. It's a waste.

Interestingly enough, I applied for practicing privilege at one hospital, but they denied my privilege—not because of race but because of age. I don't have the energy to go to every hospital anyway, but that was age discrimination. They wanted younger people.

No matter where you go, there are identity crises. There are always people saying, “You are Asian, you are black, you are South American, and you are Mexican or Italian.” That just happens. When I practiced in Carthage, I was treated like a King. Then I moved here to a bigger city with a larger variety of people, and people here may think differently. But it doesn't bother me anymore.

Many people express interest in my background. But it seems they either forget or lose interest. Once, an older woman asked my wife, “Where are you from?” She had met us many years ago and asked “Where are you from, and what do you do?” My wife wanted to ask the lady, “What does it matter where I am from? What business is it of yours?” But, no, no, that is not the thing to do. Just answer the question nicely. But, sometimes people do ask again and again. They want to know what I am doing here. There are also questions about culture and the arts. People are interested in those areas.



My children didn't feel any discrimination until they went to college because they were like other people. Our children attended school in Carthage, but did not suffer identity crisis. They grew up never thinking they were different. But in college they realized they were different and had to face their own identity. Even though the minority population is increasing, many people are still thinking in a backward way. I think Missourians think conservatively. Sometimes, I think I am not a competent counterpart, because I don't speak English well enough, but I work very hard to fill gaps. I fill gaps with my knowledge, and my ability. And I feel no need to fit into any certain group of people.

Things are much better now, regarding cultural acceptance, than 30 years ago. That is the reason I try to organize the Korean community, and educate them. They do not have great knowledge. They come here and work hard to succeed. They do not even know what their rights and privileges are. When people move to this area, they chose to be part of the community. The host community should welcome them and give them prospects for their future—show them the opportunities available, and rights and responsibilities.

The number one way to reach out to a Korean family moving here would be to assist them in finding an available job they can handle. The Chamber of Commerce could organize a group to inform them of opportunities. The family may not speak English well, but most, if not all, are high school educated, many are college graduates. Many do not vote. They do not know where to register. We need local councilmen, and others to share information about voting. These people are not refugees; they are here because they choose to be here.



“DAR CCONCERT—The children of Dr. and Mrs. Yung H. Hwang, 1309 E. Highland, presented a musical program Saturday afternoon at a meeting of Rhoda Fairchild Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, at the home of Mrs. W.E.H. Knight, 1173 Grand Ave. Left to right are John Hwang, 13, cello; Christine Hwang, 9, piano; and Keith Hwang, 11, violin. The program included selections from Haydn, Beethoven, Klauss, Pescetti, Tschaiowsky, Pinto, Nolck, Webster, and Kreisler. The young musicians are students of Mary Bingham Porter and Mary Harutun.”

Carthage newspaper, 12/5/1978



Springfield, MO
2001