Letter from the Editor

The economic boom of the 60’s and the 70’s made Korea one of the most miraculous stories of industrialization in recent history. The eyes of the world are again upon Korea in light of the recent economic downturn. This issue of *Yisei* contains a variety of viewpoints on the causes and remedies for the Korean crisis. The thread that unites these viewpoints is Korean culture. “Culture of Resistance” explains how Korean culture has been fostered under constant hardship and struggle. Economic growth and the drastic changes that it brought shook Korea to its core, threatening the very idea of Korean identity. As the aspect of “being Korean” diminished in its importance in Koreans lives, a crisis was inevitable.

However, a crisis can serve as medicine if overcome with wisdom. Thus our aim in this issue of *Yisei* is to study the nature of the crisis in order to search for what to do next. We hope that Koreans at home and abroad will give this question thorough, investigative thought. There are Korean virtues such as respecting elders (“To Have Company”), that should be preserved and developed. On the other hand, we should also be critical of what defines a Korean. What it means to “be Korean” is no longer a question to be decided within the geographic boundaries of Korea. The expatriate perspective, objective through distance and broad through the knowledge of other cultures, can be a valuable resource.

Movements to bring Koreans together in order to seek a Korean identity have already started at Harvard. Korean Association began successfully this year and is growing rapidly. *Yisei* hopes to serve as a forum to explore the thoughts of Koreans and Korean Americans at Harvard, as well as give them a voice in the larger debate concerning Korean identity. Thinking for Koreans can begin here, among young adults at Harvard, and it can make a difference.

-Yunsun Nam
Editor-in-Chief
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>10TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Yisei...A 10 Year Retrospective  
by Ruth Chang '94 and One Danny Yoon '93,  
translated by Suh-Young Shin '01 |
| Korean Association  
by Juliette Lee '98 and Eric Cho '00 |
| **FEATURE: KOREAN CRISIS** |
| Putting Things Into  
Perspective: DJ Doc  
by Tae Yang Kwak, Korean Studies Dept. |
| Kwangju Massacre  
By Felix Yeung '97, Stanford University |
| Words Can't Describe  
the Korean Pain  
by Katherine Kim |
| Interview with  
Ambassador Ki-Ho Chang  
by Justin Lee '01 and Jay Moon '01,  
translated by Jung Kim '98 |
| Culture of Resistance  
by Min-hee Cho, Jhin Han, Jeanhee Hong, Jennie Kim, and Kwonjune Seung of Stanford University |
| To Have Company  
by June Mee Kim '01,  
translated by Jung Kim '98 |
| **CREATIVE WRITING-POETRY** |
| Fence  
by Abbie Baker '98 |
| Temporal Crossroads  
by Michelle Rhee '01 |
| Drivel, A Pencil's Journey  
by Jay Mok '99 |
| Mesmerized by a Gyopo Junkie  
Papermoon Diner  
by Jay Mok '99 |
| **FICTION** |
| The Waitress  
by Halla Yang '00 |
| Snapshots of Jennifer  
by Joseph Chong '98 |
| **PERSONAL** |
| Look, Little Brother  
by Thomas Sze-Long Yu '00 |
| Remembering the South's Past  
by Eugene T. Kim '01 |
| **THE BACK DOOR** |
| Book Review: Helie Lee's  
Still Life with Rice  
by Abbie Baker '98 |
| Response to a Korean Christian  
by By Paul Yunsik Chang  
Harvard Divinity School '99 |

Spring 1998
YISEI...

A 10 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

Voices of Koreans at Harvard
The following is a reflection by One Danny Yoon ’93, who was a key member of the YISEI staff during its first few years. The introduction is by Ruth Chung ’94, a former editor-in-chief. Sun-Young Shin ’01 translated their stories.

Four years ago, when I was finishing up my term as editor of YISEI, I pondered whether YISEI’s existence was coming to an end. With an attrition of the staff from more than ten to about five faithful members and a flurry of resignations, I began to worry that perhaps the Harvard community was just not interested in having a Korean-American journal, that the need for such a forum was no longer there. I distinctly remember staying up all night one winter with Eun Seok Paik (our publisher and our designer), pulling together the magazine by ourselves and wondering where all our staff members had gone. When I left the college, I thought for sure that YISEI would fold. Today, you (the current staff of YISEI) have proven me wrong. Like many new start-up magazines, YISEI had to go through growing pains before it could really stand on its own. I am proud to have been part of YISEI’s rite of passage and the establishment of a tradition that is just as much a part of Harvard as the Lampoon or the Crimson. But most of all, I am glad that

“For some, YISEI was a chance to reveal this pent-up creative urge, and for others, it was an affirmation and launching pad for their life’s ambitions.”

Korean-American students at Harvard still have a place where they can express themselves, explore their heritage, and articulate their dreams. -Ruth Chung

In the Beginning...

YISEI magazine actually started out as a publication of the Korean Student Association (or maybe it was Korean-American Student Association—I remember there was some controversy and a name change prior to my coming to Harvard). The very first issue was published in the Spring of 1988 and was designed by Howard Park. The editor was the President of the KSA at the time, I think. Finding that first issue would be difficult because there wasn’t a very big run of the 10 mimeographed pages, hand stapled and folded with a glossy cover, passed out to the students at one of those infamous KSA dinners. (Peter Kim or Jerry Kang might have a copy somewhere.)

Then, Jeane (Ji Young) Choi was elected to run the

어느 겨울에 발행인이었던 백운식 군과 디자인 담당이었던 친구 와 함께 다른 사람들은 어디 갔나 궁금해하며 발을 세워 첫지를 만은 기억이 난다. 출판을 즈음해서 이와는 이제 감이라는 확신까지 있었지만 오늘날 여러 분들이 내가 들었다는 것을 증명해보았다. 다른 많은 개인, 그리고 그들과의 경험은 고흥 시기까지 수많은 여려움을 겪어야 했다. 이제가, 크림슨이나 할폴과 엉덩이 정도의 하바드의 전통은 이와 연유와 함께 해낸 내 자신이 자랑스럽다. 그러나 무엇보다도 하바드의 한인 교포학생들이 자신들을 표현하고 한국적 유산에 대해 배우며 꿈을 펼칠 수 있는 곳이 있다는 것이 옳다 생각한다.
magazine, and she set out to make *Yisei* an independent student organization in order to get better funding and to avoid being dependent on the KSA for political and practical reasons. I came on board *Yisei* the following Fall in 1988 (my freshman year) as an art contributor, and we laid out the first issue of the newly formed *Yisei* (though it was labeled “Volume 2 Issue 1”) in Jeane’s dorm room at Old Quincy on her “Old School” Macintosh (not the SE but the one below that). We were using a pirated copy of Pagemaker to do the English text and the Korean articles were probably printed out on someone’s IBM compatible PC. I remember an ink brush drawing I did for the cover of a woman playing a traditional stringed instrument, and I remember pasting up the titles on top of the drawing using laser printouts from the computer—pretty crude, and basically, we hand-pasted the articles onto sheats of 14” by 8.5” paper and then folded it in half. The others on the first staff were Chonney Park, Barry Kim, Seung Mi Oh, Teresa Choi, Jerry Kang, and others I can’t name.

I think it was Jeane who came up with the Masthead—“Voices of Koreans at Harvard.” The articles ranged from literary pieces, to academic papers, and poetry. I don’t recall there being much artwork. There were definitely no photos. The cover was sent to the printers (black ink on glossy stock) and we went to some minister’s house in the suburbs to print the inside pages. Someone knew the mokshinim from church, and he had this ancient mimeograph machine and primitive drum scanner/film printer. First we took the layout page and put it on the drum “scanner” with some kind of film. The drum would spin for 5 minutes, read the page and etch out the film using an electrical print head. Then we put the film on the mimeograph, filled it up with black ink and solvent, and let it go. We got high off the evaporating solvent of the cooling pages like in grade school. Then we assembled the pages and got one of those long staplers to hand-staple each magazine. (By the way, that long stapler better still be in the *Yisei* library—you know, that cardboard box of stuff. If you don’t, then you’ve lost a part of *Yisei’s* history.)

“The L.A. riots were a pivotal event for *Yisei*, in that the magazine finally fully embraced politics in addition to the arts and literature.”

이제는 한인학생회 출간 잡지로 시작했다. 1988년 봄에 제1판이 발행했다. 하위드 박이 다자인을 하고 멘토십은 당시 한인학생회 회장이 맡았던 것으로 기록한다. 손으로 하나하나 고정시키고 반복기는 표지로 담임 동사관 인체중이 10장의 잡지로는 흥분하기 힘들다고 생각해, 그 악명높은 한인학생회 최초의 잡지를 모두 몰랐다. (저는 김이나 제리가 그 잡지에 갖고 있음을 알았다.)

다음에는 전(최지영)이 이제를 이끌게 했고 후원금 문제가 정치적, 실질적인 이유로 한인학생회로부터 독립하게 됐다. 나는 1학년 1학기 (당시 1988년) 때부터 이제에의 미술 방면의 일을 맡아 새로 조직된 이제의 첫 번째 발간호의 지변임을 둘러싸우는 전의 방에서 구식 매킨토시로 했다. 영어 혹은 캐나다, 캐나다, 그리고 한국 일간은 어느 친구의 IBM PC로 했다. 표지를 전통적력을 연구하는 일부의 모습을 뿌리 그림 다음 제목을 컴퓨터로 인쇄해서 그 위에 붙였다. 기사는 손으로 직접 14” x 8.5” 크기 종이에 붙이고 반으로 접었다. 이제의 1기는 박정희, 김해라, 오승민, 최태호, 강세리, 그리고 이름을 기억할 수 없는 다른 몇 명이었다.

하버드 한인 학생회의 목소리라는 문구는 전의 아이디어였던 것 같다. 기사는 문학적인 것부터 학문적인 것들이었고 그림은 별로 없었던 것 같다. 사진은 확실히 없었다. 표지는 인쇄소에 맡기고 수리는 사진의 어느 목사님에 가서 우리가 직접 인쇄해야 했다. 누군가가 오래된 동사관 인쇄기와 원래인 드럼 스케니와 필름 프린터를 갖고 셀린 목사님을 알고 있었기 때문이다. 먼저 데 이어준 만화 필름을 같이 드럼 스케니에 올려놓았다. 드럼이 약 5분동안 돌면서 필름을 글씨 모양대로 쓰이게 됐다. 그로 인해 우리는 그 필름을 동사관에서 없고 점점 잉크와 용지로 채운 다음 날 두었다. 그 다음 종이를 모아 진 호치키스로 썼다. (그러나 그 호치키스가 아직 이제 서재에 있어서 함정에... 없다면 이제 역사의 일부를 잃은 것이다.)

눈이 날리던 차슬기간 중에 모두 모여 주소록에
We all gathered to distribute the magazines door-to-door to the Koreans we found in the directory on one of those snowy Reading Period nights, and even to the puzzled non-Koreans who showed up on our list. I always made a point to give them a copy anyway, saying you didn’t need to be Korean to read *Yisei*. In subsequent years, this would become somewhat of an issue and depending on how much was printed, we would either doordrop to everyone or target just the Korean students.

The Spring 1989 semester was more ambitious, and was the first issue in the standard magazine format (8.5" x 11"). Each issue seemed to bring more interest, especially from the new recruits in the incoming classes. I was absent for this semester due to personal and academic problems. Jeane Choi was still Editor-In-Chief and I think Barry Kim (or Howard Kim) did layout. Hyun Suk Yoon was the Art Editor.

I came back in the fall of 1989 to a bigger and better organized magazine, and I shared the position of Art Editor with Hyun Suk Yoon (he was busy with MCATs, I think...) and Jerry Kang was Editor-In-Chief. By then, we had Professor Edward Wagner as our advisor and we spent many all-nighters in his cozy office at Yenching working on his luxurious Macintosh II computer and a real laser printer. An important development was being able to use his HangulTalk system to layout Korean text directly in the Quarks program. By then I had discovered the Aldus Freehand drawing program which I promptly pirated onto my Double Density 3.25" floppy. I think I spent most of my time running between Yenching, the Computer Center and the basement of Quincy (where *Yisei* used to meet), carrying my drawing pad and a pack of floppies. I made this pretty phallic illustration of the Korean Observatory for the cover which elicited a couple of snide comments.

Student publications were always a big thing at Harvard, analogous to how big acappella groups were to Yale (which I never quite understood...). So, *Yisei* blossomed in this rich and open environment; and with each issue, we were always trying to raise the standard of the writing, the artwork, or trying to get more copies printed. I remember the session at the Yenching students did not have to go to the basement of Quincy for the print. I remember the session at the Yenching students did not have to go to the basement of Quincy for the print.

1989년 봄학기에는 더 큰 야당을 안고 처음으로 표준 절자 규격(8.5" x 11")으로 발간했다. 특히 신입생들 덕분에 흥미로운 기사를 모을 수 있었다. 나는 개인적으로, 학문적 이유로 이세를 그만 봤고 진은 계속 편집장, 그리고 김 벤�紊乱 아니면 하워드가 레이아웃 을 맡았다. 온현식은 미술편집을 담당했다.

나는 1989년 가을에 더 규모있고 책임이 있는 이세에 다시 합류해 온현식과 같이 미술편집을 으로 활동했다. (온현식은 의정준 비과정으로 바胛였던 것으로 기억된다.) 편집장은 장 세리였다. 우리는 그래프 등에 어드워드 와그너 교수님을

에이델 대가 아카펠라 그룹을 갖고 머들썩거리는데 (예상의 삶이지만) 마찬가지로 하바드에서는 학생 주간의 잡지를 봉사 평가했다. 이세는 이런 풍요로운 자유스런 배경에서 빛을 틀고 우리는 매번 글이나 미술 작품의 질을 높이고 인쇄 부분을 늘리려는 노력을 했다. 불임없이 원고 검토를 하고 레이아웃을 수정하기 위해 인쇄된 종이들마저 감독했다. 초창기의 글들이 점점 나아지고 있다는 것은 우리들 자신이 작가로서, 화가로서, 혹은 집지 발행인으로서 항상되고 있다는 증거였다. 이세가
endless proofreading of articles and the reams of paper we printed to check the layout. With the early issues, you can see each one getting better, and it was a direct reflection of the staff—we personally became better writers, artists, and became more informed from working on these issues. As *Yisei* matured, we matured.

At the time and even now, there were few creative outlets for Korean-Americans because of parental expectations to excel in professional fields. I think this trend continues based on what I witnessed at the Art Institute of Chicago where I did my graduate work. I could count all the Korean-American students in the whole school with one hand, while at the same time, there were a hundred *yuhaksaeang* studying the arts. I think the immigrant mentality to pursue traditional fields has hurt our Korean-American generation by discouraging us from pursuing the arts, politics, writing, etc. *Yisei* Magazine was a haven for all those pre-med cranks who had bleeding hearts under their white lab coats. For some, *Yisei* was a chance to reveal this pent-up creative urge, and for others, it was an affirmation and launching pad for their life’s ambitions.

The L.A. riots were a pivotal event for *Yisei*, in that the magazine finally fully embraced politics in addition to the arts and literature. Editors-in-Chief Tae-Hui Kim, Daniel Choi, and others helped to give *Yisei* a proactive role in the Harvard community and beyond. We also started to explore issues more pertinent to the Korean-American experience—our relationship to the Asian-American political movement, African-American/Korean-American relations, Yellow Power, etc. There was a lot of momentum and energy during this politically charged period, and at the same time, the *Yisei* elections became heated with impassioned speeches and even fist-pounding. It was comical, it was serious, and most of all, it was healthy. *Yisei* was just a student publication, but the staff had a lot at stake in this rag.

Apathy is a comfortable companion. Sometimes I feel that Korean-Americans have nothing to bitch about or I can’t find issues out there that fire me up. When you’re out of the Tower, that school magazine you poured your soul into seems silly and almost, embarrassing, like high school photos of yourself. Then, you see the *Yisei* web page or read the latest Giant Robot on Yellow Revolutionaries, and you start to remember. You remember your history and your people’s history, and then you look around and realize that things haven’t really changed that much. Yellow people are still bitching, Korean kids, for some crazy reason, are still publishing that silly magazine, and you’re still pissed off. And that’s good. That’s healthy.

-One Danny Yoon ‘93

Yellow people are still bitching, Korean kids, for some crazy reason, are still publishing that silly magazine, and you’re still pissed off. And that’s good.

LA 화인 폭동을 기점으로하여 이세는 예술적이고 문화적인 공 이외에 정치적인 면까지 포함하게 됐다. 민권동qb 헌법회, 다니엘 최, 그리고 그 이외의 회원들은 이 세가 하버드 뿐 아니라 교외에서도 앞장설 수 있게 도왔 다. 또한 한인 교포로서의 경험(아시아와 미국간의 정치적인 움직임, 화인교 포와의 관계, 화인 파워 등등)에 더 깊이 참여하기 시작했다. 정치적으로 파열된 시기였던 만큼 이세 선거는 후보들의 일편 단선으로 채워졌고, 주먹질까지도 오갔다. 정망 외국적이고 심각했으며 무엇보다도 급진한 모습이었다. 이세는 학생들의 잠시일 뿐이 었지만 입원들에게는 아습아습한 점이 많았다.

무심신은 모든 것을 수용하게 해준다. 한인교 포들이 용역 일도 하고 화인 일도 하는 것을 감싸고 있 다. 그래서 나와서 봤 던 경신까지 분하고 있었던 교내 잠 지는 마치 고등학교 졸업협의회 사전처럼 창작하기까지 해졌다. 그러니 이세의 민턴트 올림피아나 잠지의 최신호 를 발견하면 기적하게 된다. 자신의 과거와 주변 사람들 의 파거를 기억하게 되고 그에 이르고 변한 점이 없다는 것을 깨닫게 된다. 한국 학생들이 도대체 무엇이 우로 그 놀라운 잠지로 이세까지 발전하는 것을 들고 화가 나겠지만 그게 좋은 현상이다. 정신이 건강하다는 증거이자.
By Thomas Ryou '00

A naïve freshman, I came to Harvard eager to become involved in some extracurricular activity that would spark my interest and give me something to feel really passionate about. Participating in Harvard's Korean organization seemed like the obvious choice for me. However, to my surprise, there was more than one to choose from. At the introductory meeting in Boylston Lounge, each group (KSA, KACC, Yisei, Chunsan) gave a different presentation and had their own exclusive sign-up sheets requesting individual names and email addresses. As I put my information down for each group, excluding Chunsan (hey, I'm a guy), I wondered to myself, "Why all these separate groups? How different can one Korean organization's goals be from another?"

It seemed to make sense to me that there should have been one Korean group, a Korean Association, if you will, that strove to celebrate and promote the beauty of the Korean Culture. And taking into account how small the Korean population was at this school, I failed to see the wisdom in trying to divide up an already meager supply of Korean students. But, like most freshmen, I accepted the situation in which I found myself, convinced that there was nothing that could be done. These different groups were autonomous and rarely worked closely together in order to share ideas, funds, or human resources. They met at times...
that made it inconvenient for someone to be involved in all or most of the student groups. But this consideration didn’t matter anyway, since each group seemed to be an exclusive club, a type of clique, creating social and conceptual barriers between the Korean members of each class. Each group had its own set of dedicated members, its own way of conducting meetings and events—that’s just how it was.

But not how it would be, as it turned out. Recognizing the absurdity in having all these separate organizations, a few juniors and seniors called together a meeting of the various heads of each club early in the year and pushed for the unification of all the Korean groups. Granted, this was a radical idea, but aside from personal ego’s and greed for a “position” already staked out in one of the existing organizations, there could be no possible opposition towards this proposal. However, getting this new Korean Association off the ground proved to be a long and tedious process, what with composing a new constitution and receiving official recognition as a legitimate organization from the school. But once the foundation was set through the efforts of these visionary juniors and seniors, the rewards were ready to be reaped.

From the very first KA meeting, the massive change resulting from synthesizing the various groups into one could easily be seen. No longer were meetings only sparsely attended by the 10 or so dedicated KSA or KACC members; these meetings became a large forum where people from all grade levels came to actively participate and work towards putting on events that would solidify KA’s foundation during its nascent days. In early April, on a Saturday evening in Dunster Dining Hall, the members of KA staged their first event, the grand and glorious Korean Association Culture Show. Focusing on the show’s theme of “The Korean Family,” students from Harvard, Wellesley, and MIT put on many traditional and contemporary acts, including two rousing poongmul pieces, a sambuk-chum performance, and a lip-sing rendition of H.O.T.’s “We are the Future.” The show was an unbelievable success...but not because of the quality of the acts it featured nor because of the immense turnout that left standing room only in the dining hall. The KA Culture Show was a success because it embodied all that was good about the unification process; only by pooling together the various groups’ contacts, funds, and manpower was such a large and successful event ever possible. It did my heart good to see so many dedicated KA members come together and work hard to put on such an event...stacking chairs and tables in a mad dash to set-up the seats in the dining hall, cheering on their friends like madmen during the performances, and celebrating uproariously afterwards together. It was a night to remember.

In the weeks that followed, KA put on more events, all of which were wildly successful, including the KA BBQ and prefrash dance. But more importantly, KA was able to foster the growth of a bond among its varied members. No longer were there any barriers to the formation of a fellowship and sense of brotherhood within Harvard’s Korean community. During KA’s final event, a Discussion Group concerning the role of Koreans and Korean Americans at Harvard, one upperclassman described KA as a “miracle.” He knew what times had been like before the unification, and then now, to have everyone from each organization come together in one room to hold a discussion was something almost not to be believed. Indeed, KA was a miracle, a miracle created by the efforts of many dedicated people who wanted something better for Koreans at Harvard. The goal now is to never let this dream of a unified Korean community to ever die...it happened once, and we owe it to ourselves not to let it happen again.
The "economic crisis" has thrust the Asian countries into the limelight. Americans seem to take a sick, giddy pleasure in seeing the "tigers" fall to their knees. In fact, between the discussions of currency devaluation and unstable stock is nestled the comforting assumption that laissez-faire capitalism is still the best economic system. The present American obsession with Korea's economy has, as it has in the past, diverted attention from other crises -- the political uncertainty, the education system, and the North Korean situation. At first, the thought of social ills in a country that so quickly and closely resembled Western capitalism was hard for the United States and Europe to contemplate. Now, the economic crisis seems to dwarf other problems in the eyes of the American intellectuals.

For many Korean-Americans the only reality of Korea's currency crisis has been seeing friends interrupt their studies and return home to Korea. The seriousness and scale of the crisis may be hard for us to imagine. On the flip side, it may force us to lose perspective altogether. As the Korean government asks for sacrifice from its citizens, we must never lose sight of how economic recovery takes place and the people it affects. Korea's recovery must not be a reestablishment of old orders and systems but a new constitution.

The Western press loves the recently inaugurated president Kim Dae Jung. American journalists often compare him to Nelson Mandela as the harbinger and hero of democracy. Kim Dae Jung, however, is not the first "life-time" opposition politician to become South Korea's president. That honor belongs to Kim Young Sam. It wasn't so long ago, in the exciting summer of 1987, Olympic preparations feverishly under way, that Chun Doo Hwan announced that instead of merely appointing Roh Tae Woo as the next president, there would be elections. Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam joined forces that summer, assured of their victory since they commanded roughly two-thirds of the vote. Both Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam had excellent credentials as opposition leaders, and they both had personal antipathies toward Chun and Roh: a Chun-Roh military tribunal had sentenced Kim Dae Jung to death and had ordered Kim Young Sam to house arrest for two years in 1980.

But a funny thing happened in the final months of the 1987 elections. Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam dissolved their unified candidacy, and as a result Roh, Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam all received about one-third of the popular vote each, Roh winning with only 36.5%. Politics got messier in 1990 when Kim Young Sam merged his party with Roh's ruling party, raising suspicions that Kim Young Sam threw the 1987 elections in exchange for the 1992 ruling party nomination for president. At this point, in 1992, Kim Dae Jung officially retired from politics... only to return in 1995. Kim Young Sam, on the other hand, armed with the ruling party's clout and vast financial resources, won the 1992 elections and became the first "life-time" opposition politician to achieve the South Korean presidency. Very little changed, though, as Kim Young Sam continued to exercise policies and abuses that propounded Korea's sense of national confusion and indirection.

Thus, Kim Dae Jung's long-awaited victory is the first time a "genuine" opposition candidate became president. Kim Dae Jung is the first president of Korea not to command a majority of the National Assembly - 161 of the 299 Assembly members belong to the former ruling party, now
Key Events in Korean History
Since 1945

1945 — Liberation from Japanese colonial rule;
occupation by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.;
division at 38th Parallel

1948 — North and South Korea as independent states;
Syngman Rhee President of South Korea;
Kim II Sung Great Leader of North Korea

1950-1953 — Korean War

1960 — "Student Revolution" protesting Syngman Rhee's
government; Rhee ousted

1961 — Coup d'Etat by South Korean General Park Chung Hee

1966 — Normalization of relations with Japan

1972 — Autocratic Fourth yusin
government in South Korea

1979 — South Korean President Park
assassinated

1980 — Seizure of political control
in South Korea by General Chun Doo Hwan;
Kwangju Uprising

1986 — Massive demonstrations throughout
the country; partial democratization

1993 — Trial of Chun Doo Hwan and Roh
Tae Woo, the 1980 coup leaders

1994 — Death of Kim II Sung;
his son, Kim Jong II
assumes power

Kim Dae Jung inaugurated as president

President Kim Dae Jung, 1998

President Park Chung Hee, 1961-1979

1995, Chun, Roh, and a dozen
others were finally brought to
trial. Both were tried,
sentenced, and jailed. (Chun in fact
originally received the death
penalty which was later ap-
pealed down to a life sentence).
However, barely two days after
Kim Dae Jung’s presidential
victory on December 18, Kim
Young Sam, with Kim Dae
Jung’s approval, pardoned not
only Chun and Roh, but the
other twelve men sentenced for
crimes related to Chun’s 1979
coup d’tat and the 1980
Kwangju Massacre.

With his new powers,
Kim Dae Jung has also taken
initiatives against the Agency
for National Security Planning,
formerly known as the Korean
Central Intelligence Agency
(KCIA). He has called for an
investigation into the agency’s
torture of political prisoners.

Minor opposition party, formerly NKP [New Korea Party],
now GNP [Grand National Party].

Kim Dae Jung’s first actions as president have done
little to reassure the country of a change in policy. Even
before he entered office, Kim Dae Jung had shown signs of
being a willing player in the politics-as-usual game.
Contemporary with Kim Dae Jung’s death sentence issued
by Chun and Roh in 1980 was the Kwangju Massacre. ROK
soldiers murdered an estimated 3,000 citizens of Kwangju,
South Cholla Province, Kim Dae Jung’s hometown and base
of support. Since that time Kim Dae Jung has championed
the cause of bringing the men responsible for the massacre
to justice. Fifteen and a half years afterwards, in December

Other bizarre notes about the new president include
his contacts. He has some interesting friends. Kim Jong Pil,
a prime suspect in Kim Dae Jung’s murder investigation, is
one, and he has had his finger in just about every pie since
the beginning of the ROK. Michael Jackson, the pop star, is
another. The news last December that Jackson would be
joining Kim Dae Jung’s campaign as a supporter boggled
everyone. Jackson’s history failed to comfort skeptics. A
few years before his controversial concert performance in
Korea, Jackson was asked to perform in Korea. He agreed, but
instead of cash he wanted real estate as compensation: the
entire island of Chejudo. Chejudo, the largest island in Ko-
rea, is populated by several million people and is a favorite

Spring 1998 15
honeymoon spot for newlyweds. We have entrusted the presidency and the future of the ROK to a man who boasts of close ties with Jackson and Kim Jong Pil. These are trying times, and Kim Dae Jung is in a difficult situation. The great irony in all this is that much of Korea's larger problems, which are far greater than the immediate currency crisis, require us to take a radical departure from the politics of the past. Kim Dae Jung is, at the same time, the best and worst candidate.

One immediate crisis centers around educational finance reform and affects our most important long term investment: our students. Korean public schools have chronically suffered from insufficient human and material resources, obscenely large class sizes, and outdated and ineffective pedagogical methods. At the same time, the average middle-class family pays about 50 thousand won per child for private tutoring per month, in a nation where the GNP per capita is only 100 thousand won per month. As for upper class families, some parents spend as much as 4 million won or more per month for private tutoring. There are now over 130,000 Korean students studying overseas. In the past only the best and brightest (and those who could show connections to powerful people) were sent overseas for their education.

But examinations which used to be required of candidates for overseas studies have been eliminated and one need only provide evidence that one can afford to study overseas. Even a conservative estimate of foreign currency spent on overseas education calculated at 10 to 30 thousand US$ per student, is between 1.3 and 3.9 billion US$ per year. The majority of students studying overseas were poor performers who belong to the wealthiest classes in Korea. This system is flawed in every possible way. Granted a significant minority of overseas student represent the best students, they are still only the wealthiest ones, which perpetuates Korea's status-conscious class division and continuity. This system not only wastes billions of dollars of foreign capital, but it also diverts any serious attention from the problems of the domestic educational system.

Lastly, in our immediate woes, let us never forget about the greater crisis of our brothers in North Korea. Government rations are at 100 to 200 grams of food per person per day, and by most estimates, at least 500,000 and as many as 2,000,000 Koreans have died already, mostly the elderly and young children. International concerns and efforts should not be centered myopically on merely South Korean finances or politics, but on the whole of Korea and the future of both the North and the South.

As for President Kim Dae Jung, we'll just have to wait and see. (dugo boja).
The summer of 1996 saw the sentencing of ex-presidents Chun Doo-Hwan and Roh Tae-Woo for various corruption charges, and also for the instigation of the Kwangju massacre. The sentencing put an end to a bloody chapter in Korean history. However, the student uprising in 1980 and its subsequent suppression should not be perceived as incidents that stand apart from the rest of the republic’s history. The roots of student political activism stretch back to the beginning of the republic, and are planted by various historical circumstances that surrounded the development of Korea’s working democracy. To explain the Kwangju incident in its historical context, we must trace the strains and tensions between the government and students that began to build after 1948. Thereafter, the immediate events that led to the massacre can be viewed in a more comprehensive light, placing it as a culmination and an expression of these tensions.

The Groundwork

The early republic, under Syngman Rhee’s leadership, provided multiple causes for the encouragement of both discontent and distrust. Antagonism between President Rhee and the National Assembly directly contributed to an ineffectual government’s woes. Furthermore, as more challenges against Rhee’s position surfaced, Rhee increasingly tightened autocratic rule and the suppression of civil liberties, systematically eliminating all open opposition toward the administration.

Corruption was rampant during the 1960 election. In response, on April 18, 1960, students at Korea University in Seoul started a bloody riot. On April 19, Masan saw a strong student uprising, which included university and high school students, and also teachers. These would be the first large-scale student demonstrations in a trend that was to follow.

The important point to note is that the subsequent demonstrations and protests during that month produced results. Fighting against martial law, the persistent protests continued day after day, until Rhee was forced to step down from his position on April 26, 1960.

The lesson is two-fold. The Korean government, due to its policies, had in 12 years since its inception laid down seeds of distrust and discontent between the government and its people, most notably the students, and the relationship turned sour early on. In the ensuing years, this distrust contributed to frequent protests and demonstrations. Nationalistic aspirations, hatred for the Japanese and the urge for reunification all fueled subsequent student riots and demonstrations. When demands were not met, the vicious cycle continued. Also, the success of the demonstrations and protests provided a precedent for later generations from which to draw lessons. The students learned that their voices could exert power.

The Kwangju Massacre

In the spring of 1980, the ruling party appointed General Chun Doo-Hwan as Acting Director of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) without terminating his post as Commander of the Defense Security Command. The action generated intense reaction from opposing parties. With this as a catalyst, calls for reform of the constitution. Thousands of university students from Seoul, Chonju and Taejon protested, and clashed with police in early May, 1980. However, the government’s response to all requests was slow and vague.

On May 15, an estimated 100,000 students from 45 universities demonstrated, and the situation quickly deteriorated. 72,000 students entered City Hall and the Seoul Railway Station Plaza and clashed with police. 600 policemen were injured, one killed. On May 16-17, student representatives from 55 universities congregated at Ewha Women’s University and demanded the repeal of martial law by May 22. Oblivious to their demands, the government instituted nationwide martial law—the Emergency Decree No. 10—on May 18. Kim Chong-P’il and Kim Tae-Jung were ar...
rested, and Kim Yong-Sam was placed under house arrest.

On May 18, at Kwangju in South Cholla Province—Kim Tae-Jung’s political base—200 students of Chonnam and Chosun University started demonstrations, and they were quickly joined by citizens upon hearing that Kim Tae-Jung had been arrested. From May 19-22, an estimated 200,000 people clashed with the police and the military. The rebels stormed into government offices and seized police stations. They also took hold of the Homeland Reserve Force armories, and distributed weapons and ammunition. The almost full-fledged rebellion was finally subjugated on May 22, when paratroops stormed Kwangju and stopped the rebellion, but not before leaving hundreds killed or injured.

**Scars: Old and Now**

Historically, education in Korea had been aimed at the attainment of government positions. Law and government were frequently the preferred college courses in South Korea. Therefore, it is not surprising that students became politically active at an early stage of their lives. Government and politics were—and still are—in their daily consciousness, and built up a tradition of civic consciousness and responsibility. David Stone MacDonald writes, "After years of intense concentration in secondary school to pass the college entrance examinations, students tended to treat much of their college years as a sort of vacation between test periods...there was ample time to mediate on the evils of society and to listen to dissident intellectual." Furthermore, "students generally are much more conscious of their status as the nation’s future leaders than are their U.S. counterparts. They consider themselves to be at the leading edge of political and social criticism and reform. In a time of rapid and painful social change, there is no lack of problems for them to criticize."

However, as we move on to consider the steps of student activism, we must bear in mind that only a minority of South Korean college students are actively involved in planning and carrying out political demonstrations. MacDonald notes that "many demonstrations seemed to be charades in which both activists and police played out their parts...in an hour or two, all was over...The non-participating majority of students have mostly gone about their regular business during such demonstrations."

According to Seung-shin Shim, a sophomore at Sun-Kyun-Kwan University in Seoul, "Students who demonstrate in Korea aren’t respected by most students here—I hope people don’t see them as representative of Korean college students.” As MacDonald writes, “Western concepts of personal liberty and civic rights were learned in school or from the media. While these concepts were attractive in the abstract, there was little native experience or cultural support for them.”

Furthermore, agitation among the student population can often be traced to limited and narrow campus problems. Therefore, it is not surprising that they receive only scanty support from the mass populace, as opposed to the widespread public support for the students in the earlier half of this century.

Strictly speaking, stronger support for political activism in Korea did not develop until after the expansion of the economy. The roots of students politics were laid in Rhee’s administration, but student political activism never attained the endorsement that it desired from the rest of the country. Most people tended to focus on their daily economic situation and living conditions; unlike students, they lacked the time and energy for philosophical debates over democracy and its implementation.

Although the Kwangju massacre had such far-reaching effects, and can be construed as an accumulation of tensions between the student population and the government, we must be careful before we label it as a prototype or defining model for political activism. A more comprehensive view of the status of student movements shows that its effects are exceptional and have rarely been achieved in other times. In short, Korean student activism is not synonymous with activism in the general public. The public is selective in its support, depending on the issue advocated, and does not blindly follow any uprising the students instigate.

Politics led the students away from classrooms and onto the streets. The Kwangju massacre was a bloody addition to Korea’s chronicles, and the scars still haunt the Korean people, as evidenced by the trial of the two former presidents. However, when one considers Korea’s rocky road toward democracy, it is not surprising that student activism was so rampant and uncontrolled. Examples from the past taught them to make their voices heard in prominent ways. Although the students never received full support from the rest, their continued involvement had provided lessons for their successors, and to a large degree, for the maturing government.

What lessons can Korean-American students learn? Can they learn from the activism of their predecessors in Korea, and exert a visible political presence in the hard struggles for racial recognition here in America? There is no reason they should be deterred. The more difficult question is, do they, an ocean and a generation removed from their homeland’s woes, have an obligation to carry the banner and sound the battle cries for Korea? Or are there enough causes over here in America to rally for or against? What takes precedence? And most importantly, will their own countrymen listen to them, considering their distance, language barrier and generation gap? Such is the dilemma for a bicentral generation, when they strive to accommodate both a native land and a mother land, and when they strive to distinguish between the two?

---
2 Ibid, 91.
3 Ibid, 121.
Words Can’t Describe the Korean Pain

by Katherine Kim

People ask me — styly — if I’ve heard about “what’s going on” in Korea, as if to say of an errant neighbor, “Did you hear about so and so?” They ask me how I feel, and add with a shake of the head, “Isn’t it a shame?”

Yes, I want to answer, yes it is a shame. But it is much more than that — for me, for my family, for millions of ethnic Koreans. The elusive emotion encapsulates sadness, guilt, justice, and humiliation.

To describe how the Korean people feel now, you must first understand the elation of our nation’s success. Forty-five years ago, Korea was impoverished, crawling out of a civil war, its countryside ravaged and its people haunted by poverty and despair.

Today, the streets of the capitol city, Seoul, are filled with glass skyscrapers, luxury black sedans and cellular phones. I returned to Seoul in 1995, and I was astonished at the transformation. My distant, but distinct, memories of Seoul in 1980 included peering out into the night at the planes above during an air raid drill and dropping my bicycle to stand at attention when the anthem rolled out over the loudspeakers at dusk.

It was a military dictatorship, and the buildings were cold and gray. This time, 15 years later, I saw color, I saw flesh, I saw MacDonald’s. I saw the word globalization “sgeyehwa” heralded across front pages and painted on white banners, draping the windows of corporations.

The most popular cigarette brand, “88,” marked the year Seoul held the Olympics, the year Koreans saw themselves as truly international.

People were making money, a lot of money, and spending it like mad. There was talk of corruption and decadence, and for a while, it seemed like a Babylonian fever dream. Korea was a “tiger economy,” a model across Asia, and its conglomerates (chaebols) were bold and powerful.

The memory of years of occupation dimmed in the light of newfound independence and success. Recognition brought a strong sense of pride.

Now take it away. Take it away because the country wasn’t responsible enough, because the money couldn’t be managed, the leaders were too corrupt, the people too greedy. Take pride away because Korea is now the recipient of a $57 billion bailout package, the largest in history.

Sadness rolls in with the loss of pride. It affects ethnic Koreans — whether in America or in Korea — for it is happening to our country, “woori hadda.”

The nationalism that resounds so strongly in Koreans stems from years of overcoming foreign invasions and occupations. When tragedies called for their help, citizens have historically complied — this past year, many have sent
Korea. My eldest uncle worries about my cousin, an exchange student in Toronto, who will likely have to return to Korea due to the depreciation of the won.

And I think about the collapse of the Sampoong Department Store in Seoul in August of 1995. One of the country’s most exclusive shops, the cotton-candy pink, nine-story building fell like a house of cards, burying hundreds of shoppers in rubble, because the rods used in its foundation were centimeters thinner than regulations allowed and sea salt used in the cement damaged the rods. Unchecked growth without a solid foundation.

It’s too bad no one paid enough attention to the warning signs. In fact, it’s a shame.

(Pacific News Service correspondent Katherine Kim is a Korean-American journalist who has lived and worked in South Korea.)

Take it away because the country wasn’t responsible enough, because the money couldn’t be managed, the leaders were too corrupt, the people too greedy.

donations through churches and youth groups to aid those stricken by the North Korean famine. More recently, Korean-Americans have sent millions of dollars to Korean banks, and mothers have donated their baby’s gold keepsake rings to the country’s gold supply.

Though these gestures may well be useless, the effort seems to quell our fears and guilt — guilt about excessive spending. Economists point to the government, corporations and banks — but fingers have also been pointed at consumers. Spending money on luxury items is a point of pride and sign of prosperity for Koreans — indeed, the fate of the country now seems to satisfy some who believe that justice is being served to the greedy. Unfortunately, many spent beyond their means, which is not unusual for a country whose nouveau riche were war-ravaged only a generation ago.

Korean Americans also have some guilt over being regarded as “traitors” to the motherland. Korean nationals feel that many overseas Koreans left after the war, or in times of hardship or political instability, and have returned only when the country was doing well.

In my family, four of my mother’s five brothers and sisters live in the United States. All have their own businesses, directly or indirectly affected by the Korean economy; the uncle who is a subcontractor for Samsung and Goldstar feels he must now move into the American market. My aunt who is a dry cleaner in Queens worries about Korean Americans cutting back on spending — a reflection of austerity in
recently, South Korea has been hard-pressed to be acclaimed the Land of the Morning Calm. Its economy grew phenomenally in the post-Korean War decades despite widespread corrupt business practices. South Korea finally stumbled on its corruption.

In this issue, Yisei talks with Ki-Ho Chang, a seasoned Korean diplomat. Ironically, Ambassador Chang left the service of the South Korean government—during it’s time of crisis—for a year’s sabbatical at Harvard, where he holds a prestigious fellowship to the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. He talks about the current economic crisis, relations with North Korea and his experiences at Harvard.

To begin, could you summarize what positions you’ve held and what you’re doing now at Harvard?

I spent about 25 years in the foreign ministry. I am here as a fellow to the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, previously known as the Center for International Affairs on Cambridge Street, which is in the Coolidge Building. I’ve been at Harvard since last August. Before that I was serving as ambassador to the World Trade Organization. Before that I spent one and a half years in Geneva as an ambassador. Before that I was working as the Director General for international trade. Before taking the job as Director General, I spent a year as a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry. I was also in Washington as an economic counselor for the Korean embassy.

What do you think is the greatest crisis that Korea is facing today?

Well, it’s an Asian financial crisis that is causing a lot of problems in our economy, one that is depreciating our currency to half of its previous value. That’s a big problem causing a shortage of cash flow to business circles. We need to reform the current structure of the financial sector as well as the chaebol economy.

Are there any other crises you can think of that might affect Korea more in the long term, maybe talks with North Korea or North Korean problems? There’s been a lot of news about Korea lately.

As far as this crisis is concerned, it’s totally economic matters. We expect that it may need two years to get our economy to get back to normal, but it needs a lot of actions to be taken

장기호 대사와의 인터뷰

이세: 지금까지의 정력과, 현재 하바드에서 하는 일에 대하여.
장: 나는 외무부에서 25년간 지냈다. 지금은 예전에 캠브릿지 가의 외교연구소로 알려진 웨더헤드 외교 센터의 연구원으로서 지난 8월부터 근무하고 있다. 이전에는 국제통상기구의 한국대표로서 근무했다. 그전에는 1년간 동안 주 제네바 대사관의 대사를 지냈으며, 그전에는 국채융자부의 장관과, 외무부 대변인, 주 워싱턴 대사관의 경제자문을 역임했다.

이세: 지금 한국이 직면하고 있는 위기란?
장: 아시아의 경제위기가 우리경제에 커다란 부담을 주고 있다. 통화의 가치가 절반수준으로 떨어져, 기업의 자금유동에 악영향을 가하고 있다. 우리는 세계화 빠짐성의 경제구조를 개혁할 필요가 있다.

이세: 장기적으로 한국에 영향을 줄 수 있는 위기란 없는가. 예를 들어 북한과의 관계라든지...
장: 당장 우리가 직면하고 있는 위기기는 경제적인 것이다. 정부가 IMF가 제시한 개혁을 충실히 실행한다면 그것은 전체적으로 할 때, 우리경제가 제 카드에 오를 때까지만 2년은 절럽 것이다. 이는 경제적인 문제이다. 당장은 인도네시아를 비롯한 아시아 국가에 반영한 금융위기 이외에 우리경제에 큰 영향을 기울란 위기라는 없다.

이세: IMF가 우리 경제를 완전히 개조하기 위해 갖가지 사항을 우리에게 요구하는 것에 대해 국내의 감정은 여inerary.
장: IMF가 한국이 준수해야 할 엄격한 규정을 부과한다고 발표했을 적에 국내적으로 상당한 반발이 있다. 사람들은 IMF의 구제조치를 받아들이는 것이 국가적인 과목이라고 가장했다. 하지만 시간이 지나
under the government guidance policy to secure faithful implementation of the agreement with IMF.

I think purely an economic dimension. At the moment, I don’t see any other things that are affecting this economy other than the financial crisis which prevails in other Asian countries such as Indonesia.

What is the popular feeling in Korea about the IMF bringing in all sorts of economic implementations to radically transform the economy?

When the IMF started talking about very strict rules for the Korean economy to observe, there were strong sentiments. People say that it’s a humiliation, a national humiliation to get an IMF bailout, but now when everything has calmed down, they know that this is the only way that the Korean government should follow—securing faithful implementation. I think that this is a good opportunity to structure our economy on the occasion of the IMF deal. We need a more liberal economy, we need more foreign investment to come into the Korean market, and we need a more open market where transparency and free and fair competition can prevail. For that, it is very necessary for us to implement the IMF agreement. I think that this is a kind of blessing in disguise. If we succeed in securing the implementations, then our economy will be stronger, more robust, and healthier as the IMF predicted we should be.

People who know a lot of economics believe that the IMF plan is the right path to take. Yet, a lot of Korean culture is centered around pride. Do you see public sentiment swinging more towards accepting the IMF terms, especially the presence of foreign investors?

If there are a lot of obstacles and restrictions for which foreign investors are hesitant to coming to Korea, then that will be the collapse of the Korean economy. I took a course at the [Harvard] Kennedy School of Government]...to get a more comprehensive perspective on the role of foreign investment. What I learned was that historically, Korea has had the least foreign investment. There is only 2% in the share of foreign investment. But if you see such countries as China and Malaysia, their figures are about 10% and 14%, sometimes 30%. But Korea is different. We must further open our market for foreign investors. For this, as President Kim Dae Jung emphasized, democratic development and economic development should be pursued hand in hand. In running our economy there should be a certain principles such as transparency, open, fair, and free competition. That rule should prevail in the running of a national economy, especially in the area of the allocation of resources. For that purpose, we need more stringent rule and principles. The IMF plan is the right course of action to take. There is an old oriental saying, ‘Bitter medicine is better for health than sweet medicine.’ So our government chose the bitter medicine.

You have said that the government has accepted its bitter medicine. A lot of economists and politicians have said the

“...‘Bitter medicine is better for health than sweet medicine.’ So our government chose the bitter medicine.”

지라도 우리문화는 자존심을 중시한다. 국내갑장이 외국투자자들의 진출을 비롯한 개혁에 찬성할 것인가.

장: 만약 우리의 경제에 투자를 저해하는 규제와 장벽을 제거하지 못하면 우리의 경제는 끝이이다. 하바드의 캐네디 스쿨에서 강의를 듣고 나온 외국인투자의 중요성을 깨달았다. 한국의 외국인투자는 2%미만이며, 이는 역사적으로 개도국중에서도 가장 낮은 수준이다. 반면 중국이나 말레이시아 등의 개도국에서는 국민총생산의 10% 내지 14%, 때로는 30%가 외국인투자다. 한국은 외국투자에게 시장을 개방해야 한다. 김대중 대통령이 강조해도 이를 위해서는 민주화와 경제발전을 동시에 추진할 필요가 있다. 경제를 관리하는 데 있어서는 투명성, 개방성, 공정성, 자유경쟁 등의 원칙이 있어야 한다. IMF가 제시한 개혁은 이를 위해 안정맞춤이다. 동양에는 좋은 약은 성에 쏟는 속담이 있다. 그러므로 우리 경제는에 속 약을 선택했다.
greatest obstacle in this IMF policy will be unemployment. Korea has a history of large strikes, even in the recent years. Do you foresee much unrest by laborers?

That’s a very difficult question to answer right now, but we can see something in the recent discussion on IMF treatment. Some said it was too strong for the Korean economy, and there should be renegotiation. But as I said before, we accept the deal as it is. The only way for the Korean economy to survive is to secure the full and faithful implementation of the IMF deal. One thing recommended by the IMF concerned the lay-off policy for laborers. I can say that so far, we have been pretty successful under the good leadership of president Kim Dae Jung. He is very pro-labor. The labor side supported him very much during the elections. That can become a strength of the president. He was successful in getting laborers on good terms with the management in terms of conditions. So he coordinated and compromised for both the management and laborer side and brought about a legislative bill that was passed through the national assembly. Thus far, I think a good deal was produced. At the moment, we don’t see a drastic or urgent conflict between the labor and management side.

In light of your views on democracy and economics, do you think that Communist countries such as China and North Korean can succeed economically?

이세: 민주화가 경제발전에 필수불가결하다면, 북한과 중국과 같은 공산주의 국가들의 경제적으로 성공할
Well, China is on the rise economically, politically, and militarily, but I am very cautious to mention whether there will be certain limitations economically for China to grow toward a more vast and mature stage. There is a certain point beyond which the economy cannot jump unless they maintain democratic elements of a market economy, such as transparency, fair, open, and free economy. When we had authoritarian rule, when we had former president Park Chung Hee, there was a lot of talk about his accomplishments of making our economy robust. As far as democracy is concerned, democracy was nothing under his rule and dissidents were suppressed. At that time, authoritarian rule maintained a forced priority policy on economy rather than democracy. We found that there was a very intimate relationship between power, government, and business. Everything was non-transparent in running the economy. So that drove the government to corruption. And the government became inefficient. The government was overconfident in its ability. They were only thinking about their past days of government intervention policy that was once so successful under the simple economy. These days in a very complex economy there must be a certain limitation of government intervention policy. There should be a wise policy; it should be more globalized. But if things are not running in a transparent and fair manner, the system will not survive for very long.

Is South Korea doing anything about the North Korean food crisis?

Yes, we supported North Korea through government and private channels. We granted a huge amount of grains last year. That position will remain unchanged.

Do you see South Korea using North Korea’s vulnerable position as leverage in any way?

It’s not the policy of the Korean government to use North Korea’s weak points as political leverage to make North Korea move. At the moment, we see the Four-Party talks as the best instrument to bring the North to the dialogue table. If North Korea faithfully comes to the Four-Party talks and makes progress, at the talks, we can discuss a lot of issues: economic cooperation, enlargement of aid, and other important issues, such as the U.S.-North Korea contact. We want North Korea to understand that the Four-Party talks are a very important instrument. Last March we held the second round of the Four-Party talks in Geneva. We have yet to produce tangible results, but at the moment, we feel the meeting itself is progress.

Can you comment on your experiences at Harvard?

Well, I think America is the center of the world… since I moved to Boston, to Harvard, I feel very strongly that Harvard is the center of world knowledge and intelligence and wisdom. I am enjoying my Harvard life very much. Attending seminars, taking good classes, and giving presentations on issues of interest to the students here is a superb thing that I will not forget in the future.
A lot of Korean Americans know how Turbo and DJ Dee are. We can eat kimchi and say “an-nyong.” We were taught to always excel, and now aspire toward fame and fortune in the worlds of business, medicine or corporate law.

But these are not what make Korean, or Korean American, culture.

Understanding one’s community begins with understanding one’s culture. Korean and Korean American culture are not made up of nightclubs and karaoke, Calvin Klein and Armani Exchange, or American-imitation rap. To understand Korean and Korean American culture, we must learn about the experiences of our people — both the struggles and resistance to oppression that shaped their histories, and the issues they face today.

Our generation is devoid of real culture. Not only is the pop culture of the nineties shamefully empty and misguided, but so is even our own “cultural” education and identity as Korean Americans. Too often our knowledge of Korean history is limited to the Eurocentric view of the Korean War we are taught in high school, and our connection to Korean culture consists of little more than eating kalbi and listening to Korean techno. This is why our generation of Korean Americans lacks a strong unified community that can organize and work together for a common purpose.

What we need is to re-educate Korean Americans about the history and culture of Korea. The fact that Korea exists today as an independent nation attests to the strength and resilience of the Korean people against domination and oppression by foreign powers. Our ancestors were able to keep Korean culture alive, and despite repeated invasions from outside forces which threatened to annihilate Korea’s nationhood. It is a shame that Korean culture, after surviving so many vicious attempts to destroy it, is slowly dying because our generation is unable to nurture it. We are killing our culture through ignorant neglect, even without the invasion of foreign imperialistic forces.

Why do we need to learn about our history? Why do we need to redefine our identity as Korean Americans? If we are to have a substantive understanding of what it means to be a Korean American, we must learn to see Korean culture in all its fullness, understanding both the pride and the “han” of the Korean people. “Han” — a term which has no direct English translation — is a feeling of frustrated hope or collapsed pain, a term which describes the painful struggles of our people throughout the centuries against victimization, invasion and oppression. Through understanding “han,” we will realize the necessity of demanding equality and justice not only for ourselves, but for all people. Many times throughout Korea’s history our ancestors fought and died in order to liberate the Korean people from their oppression. They did not die for us to passively and ignorantly accept the oppression we see and experience here in America. Knowing what our ancestors went through — and what our people go through today — will help us understand and develop a sensitivity toward the experiences of other ethnic minorities in America, and toward the sufferings of all oppressed peoples. With this knowledge, we can begin to build coalitions with others who are fighting for social change.

The real danger with Korean Americans at elite universities is that they tend to become part of the oppressor class. In Rules for Radicals, Saul Alinsky writes that there are three classes of people: the “haves,” the “have-nots,” and the “have-a-little-want-mores.” Most Korean Americans at Stanford prefer to align with the “haves” or the “have-a-little-want-mores,” than with the “have-nots.” We want to become, or at least work for, the movers and shakers of society — to be in positions of power, exploiting the powerless. If Korean Americans truly understand the “han” and oppression of their ancestors and of their people today we would be reluctant to add to the oppression of other people. But in our ignorance, our quest for power and success blinds us to the injustices around us.

Social change, politics and morality are all intimately related. Too often, we fail to make these connections, and instead blithely accept the subordination of politics to the rule of power. But politics is not about power; it is about morality.

The “Culture Movement” in Korea began around the early eighties, after decades of cultural stagnation due to the
tremendous sufferings experiences by the Korean people during this century. Korean folk culture – along with its nationhood, language and identity – was nearly destroyed in the early twentieth century due to Japanese colonization, then division and domination by Western powers. In 1910, Japan annexed the entire Korean peninsula as part of its expansionist plan into Asia. The Japanese attempted to erase all evidence of Korean culture, history and identity – they forced Koreans to take Japanese names, speak Japanese, proclaim allegiance to the Japanese Emperor, and study only “permitted” (meaning inaccurate) versions of Korean and Japanese history. Any rebellion against the Japanese order was brutally suppressed and punished. Japan’s imperialism was, in

Why do we need to learn about our history? Why do we need to redefine our identity as Korean Americans?

Drumming is great. But in and of itself, it is only drumming. Folk music comes to life when it is an expression of a people’s experiences, of their trials as well as their triumphs. As second-generation Korean Americans, we may not have directly experienced the same oppression and sufferings of our ancestors, but our people continue to suffer injustice and difficulty here in America. Whether from foreign imperialism and civil war or racial discrimination and economic hardship, foreign imperialism and civil war or racial discrimination and economic hardship, oppression is oppression, and human suffering is human suffering. Our music is meaningful only when it comes from a recognition and understanding of these sufferings, and a desire to change them. Cultural activism is about bringing Korean culture into the mainstream, and from it, creating a new Korean American culture. It’s not just about music and art; it’s about creating a people who understand their heritage and are aware of how that heritage is connected to the issues of today.

There is nothing wrong with listening to Turbo and R.E.F., wearing Calvin Klein and Banana Republic, and going to karaoke. But when that becomes the essence – or even the dominant part – of our identity as Korean Americans at Stanford, and at privileged institutions all across the United States, this needs to be challenged. It is time for us to break out of our self-absorbed unawareness, and seek to give something to our community rather than expect only to reap the rewards of our personal ambitions. We need to create a culture of resistance against the ignorant extravagance of today’s generation, and against the oppression of people by those in power. We need to be challenged not only to be ambitious doctors, lawyers, engineers and professors, but also ambitious Korean Americans who are aware of our role – and want to make a difference – in our community.

-Min-hee Cho, Jhin Han, Jeanhee Hong, Jennie Kim, and Kwongune Seung of Stanford University contributed to this article.

Spring 1998 27
A man walks down the sidewalk, and you drive by him. You see just a shapeless, ill-defined figure. Before you could see his face you were a block away. What you didn’t see when you were rushing to wherever you needed to go was that this man had already been there. You didn’t see his slightly caved-in back and thick knuckles, you didn’t see how his shoulder blades jutted out of his sweater as he struggled under a load of two grocery bags. I speak of this man neither to make you pity the elderly, nor to make you feel guilty. And my goal is not to turn you against this man’s family, because I also have let my grandfather walk alone.

When my grandfather fell sick with pneumonia, I didn’t visit him until a few days after he had been admitted into the hospital. When I entered the room I saw him. He seemed to disappear into the bed, as if he had sunk into deep peach sand. The illness had caused him to shed pounds like layers of clothing. He reached out his hand, and I sat on the bed. I asked how he was feeling, and he answered with a wrenching cough. As if I had no ears, he said he was fine—now that I was there.

The importance of respecting our elders is a piece
of our heritage which many Korean Americans and Asian Americans in general have come to forget. In doing so we forget the possible enriching experience of learning from them and supporting them. We should become a part of their lives.

Excuses are easy to fashion. “I am too busy to call. I don’t have enough money. I just can’t identify with old people.” These are hollow words. When have our parents or grandparents ever had enough time for themselves? Yet they could always find time to be with us. When has money ever been justly equated with love and patience? Never, and when it does, maybe parents will be replaced by ATMs. It may be necessary to let a great uncle live alone or put grandmother in a nursing home. And I do not condemn these actions or these vital institutions. It is only when we fool ourselves into believing these are substitutes for a grandson’s laughter or niece’s hand to hold that we make a mistake.

“Neglect” is an awful word; it has the connotation that our elders are pets which we accidentally forgot to feed or bushes we just didn’t get around to pruning. But nevertheless, we commit this crime of neglect against our own loved ones. Of the aging American population, many are still active in community life, but there are many who, although capable of participa-

by Lexer Quamie ’00
Korean Crisis

tion, live in isolation. There are no phone calls, no letters, no visitations. And even more deplorable is the situation for those elderly who are physically unable to leave their homes. Life for them is a prison which demoralizes their spirits and bodies. There is very little separating these people from our loved ones. Can you imagine yourself forty or fifty years from now surviving without feeling the love of your family and friends? It is therefore not surprising that almost one-half of the suicide population is made up by the elderly.

A high school classmate of mine once told a story about his grandmother. They had gone shopping and his grandmother had picked out a pair of pants but instead of retreating to the dressing room, she began to try them on in front of all the other shoppers. He said, My grandmother makes it so hard for me to respect her. Respect should stem from knowing that your grandmother baby-sat you while your parents went out to dinner. It should come from having seen tears in her eyes when you graduated. And you should maintain your respect for her as she tries on pants just for being your grandmother, even as you help her understand the mistake she has made.

It is never easy to understand or deal with the eccentricities of our elderly; yet they have so much to offer.

The elderly volunteer as mentors to rehabilitating juvenile criminals. They care for children having children, serving not only as mothers and fathers but grandmothers and grandfathers. Our elders are assets to the community. When they have and are contributing so much, why do we lag in doing the same for them?

Most elderly people are frustrated at having to live in their aging bodies and minds, to be a burden on those around them. The elderly would much rather have their family members and loved ones make a polite departure instead of remaining, as old age sets in. Dare to be rude. When your mother or uncle feels ashamed for being a burden on you and pushes you away, remind them how many long nights they spent helping you with your homework or how forgiving they were when you put a dent in their car. Life isn’t a time to repeat, but it is a time to be grateful and to love unconditionally.

Our elders don’t want us waiting to see when they are going to die, and they don’t want us waiting until they’re dead before we realize how much we missed by not taking a walk with them. It is easy for us to live in the present; we have only a little behind us, and the future stretches long before us. But for our elders, much time has passed and each moment is precious. There shouldn’t be any pity or guilt, neither for ourselves nor the elderly. Just love and respect for the people who deserve it the most. The people who gave us life and who will die to make room for our children. Those who let us go and find our own way were, in doing so, often left behind. Respect and love are in tokens as small and practical as going with your grandfather to the grocery store. Even if he doesn’t need the help, I’m sure he will appreciate the company on the long walk home.

그렇지 않은 범죄와 떨어져 젤의 약간의 범죄를 받는 것과 출사 하다고 말한 적이 있다. 우리 할아버지들이 할아버지들, 삶 손님들이 다른 친척들은 도대로 무언가를 지적해 줄 우리에게 그려우며 무언가에 대한 말이, 엉덩이, 이것은 호수가 되어 드러난 남에게 범죄당하는 것에 익숙해지기 때문에.

전체 자유자치의 제한 가이드가 노인이다. 우리는 무엇이 노인들을 그룹화한 퇴거지로 묘기고 있는 immobilize에서 그들은 우리에게 혹시 그들이 너무도 심해 싶을 줄 알았던 것들을 음중에요한 것이라 한다. 교통과 전기시설의 규율감이 한 번 잊은 바니의 이기적한 한 적이 있다. 그럼 쇼핑을 하면, 그곳 바지의 탐색이 없는 가십을 알고 사람들은 앞에서 갈아입기 시작했는가 했다. 그리고 그 길은 어떤 상황에서 힘들게 가지고 있던 그룹 인생은 그렇게 무언가의 내게 나왔던 적에 친해진 것이었다. 그러니 만, 진정한 존경은 무언가의 지식과 같은 것을 지킬 수 있는 스님의 지식과 보완적인 취향을 교육한다. 그리고 나를 보살핌 때, 절터의 논을 비효율성을 지킬 때, 불량성과 지식적 성장의 부족하다고 한다. 태성이 그녀가 자신의 반영이 성공적인 사례 이야기로 그녀를 존경해야 한다.

나이든 이들의 과거는 우리에게 그들의 아들 리가 범죄를 했다는 것. 노인들은 우리에게 너무 많은 도움을 주었다. 그들은 자원봉사자로서 미션 봉사자들의 재해에 기여하며, 미션 필수부의 정중한 도움과 수혜를 통해, 그들은 지역 사회의 발전에도 보탬이 됐다. 그들은 우리 삶에 있는 역할을 폐기할 수 있는 삶의 지식과 보완적 도움이다. 그들은 지역사회에 있어 커다란 자원이다. 그들은 우리에게 이렇게 많은 도움을 주는데, 우리는 그 도움으로 무엇을 하고 있는가?

바바라 호접리는 대다수의 노인들은 할아버지의 욕심에 납득하고, 마치 자녀가 끝내도 베어나지 않으려는 순수한 정신적의도로 끝내도 받아들여요한 것도 있다. 그들은 집에 불안할 필요가 있다. 만약 당신의 어미나 아버지가 당신에게 폐가 될 것을 두려워 할 때, 그들은 당신이 이렇게 할당받기 싫다는 것을 말하기 전에, 당신을 헐벗는 시간이 아니라 할지라도, 감사하고 무조건적으로 사랑해할 시간이였다는 뜻이 없다.

데인 킹 역시 삶은 삶은 사람에게 거칠한 것이라고 한다. 높은 삶은 단지 위에 있는 것이 아니라, 헐벗는 것은 아니다. 그는 정체, 호흡의 값만 가지는 것이 해당이 되는 것이 아니다. 높은 삶은 아버지의 그들이 대기를 기다리기 원치 않음으로, 혹은 해야 우리가 그들과 산책이라고 할 빌엔 했으며 하루하루는 돌아갈 수 없는 날들을 향하느라 하지 않는다고 했다. 숙모에게 정화하는 것들은 해당해, 후에 잊지 못할 일이 발생할 때, 그들이 완만한 해양을 성장시키는 삶은 것을 잊을 시간이 아니라 할지라도, 감사하고 무조건적으로 사랑해할 시간이였다는 뜻이 없다.

로그딩치 말다. 노인들 때문에 폐지된 것을 느끼지 말다. 다만 사람과 존경을 넘어서 남당한 가치가 있는 사람들을 사랑하고 존경하자. 우리에게 삶을 주었으며, 우리 자신들의 삶을 돌발적으로 나가시며, 우리는 우리의 삶을 가지고 해저대니까. 자신들은 우리가 폐가 될 것이라고, 존경과 사랑의 표시는 항상까지 원치 않는 사례를 가진 것과 같은 삶은 일체에 나타난다. 할아버지가 집을 나온다면 우리 모두가 쉬운 도움이 필요하다는 점에 대해, 그들은 집에 가는 동안에 갈릴 사람이 있는 것을 감사할 것이다.
fence

We all know what separates North from South
Brother from Brother
Sister from Sister
Right?
It’s
Communism
Capitalism
Guns, Artillery, Armies, Bombs
Right?
It’s Propaganda
Ideology
Corrupt Leaders, Hate, Suspicion
Right?
Or is it just a Chain Link Fence
Stretching for Miles
Barbed Wire to keep out even Climbers
Maybe?
But Chain Link Fences rust
Even the Berlin Wall
Made of Stone
Much stronger than Chain Link
Was torn down by the People
Eventually
How long will It be
Until Ideology rusts
Suspicion is torn down
And Pieces of the Chain Link Fence
Become Keepsakes and Souvenirs
For Those lucky enough to snag a Link
When the Fence finally falls?

Temporal Crossroads

Women of the palace
Women of the courts
Clad in brightly colored hanboks
Huddled in the middle of the palace square

Outside the gates, where once
Only grass and trees grew
Buildings and towers have sprouted
Where once
Only mountains touched the sky
Offices now touch the clouds

What is this place? What have we become?
Ask the palacewomen
As tourists
Who wear dark suits and baseball caps
Rush by
Stopping to gaze at the wonders of an ancient civilization
Preserved within a corner of its modern descendant

Poetry by
Abbie Baker ’98
A mood comes haughtily
its arrogance caustic as ginger.
Behold the masquerade
the jabbering clowns
lying fools who
feign the laughs and the
painted smile from lobe to
lobe.

A gun through my head
or you instead
Within the matter, in my mind
Wandering the thickness and tight
Entanglement.
The sight is a mess,
but you remain lucid.

clouded, blinded by colored confetti
whirling in a gentle
lilt toward earth
cradled by the blue-gray wind
followed by a cold flame.

Burnt feelings smell dark and wet
blackened by a
lotless soul.
A search for softness,
the velveteen touch of pure air
clean and real with candor.

The snows before were yellow-rusted
Give white, light smoothness
to the heart which is callous.
Hello to the glaze of new skin's
pink
ravenss.
The masquerade fades away
A penetration of incandescent boldness
comes with the flight of Orioles.

BY MICHELLE RHEE ’01
Mesmerized by a Gyopo Junkie

Korea, your days and nights are over
but you still live on in my mind.
Your smile, the peculiar way you danced,
feet unmoving, upper body oscillating forwards and backwards.
I even liked the way you walked.

I remember the first moment your image
melted itself within me.
At Kangnam, exit 5, to meet my friend Sang Yup.
You, looking to the side, walked towards me.
You wore your beige coat and multi-colored scarf.
I could not help but fall into you.
In the rock café, I saw you dance.
In the norebang, I heard you sing.
On the street, I saw you spit like an ajashee.
I even liked that.

Then suddenly it was my last night,
You wore Army P.T. sweat pants, dark blue shirt,
ruffled yet loose,
Erased mascara, funny slip-slide exercises, the tinkle of crystal, amputated
resutured recliner, 500 won chipped wooden table.
What did the soldier think?
So I unlocked and opened my safe,
leaving myself strangely nervous and naked.
You just said, “thank you.”

Nevertheless, within the swims of inebriation,
I found that treasure chest locking-up
mysterious ever-changing emotion.
Your lips, they were so tentative, teasing, and plush.
You said, “I thought of you.” Yet, you also said, “maybe it’s better this way.”
You hurt me that night by giving me so much joy.

So now when I pick up a bottle
and drink till my liver explodes
and my kidneys whimper,
I can’t help but toast to
multi-colored scarves,
slip-slide exercises,
and Seoul, South Korea.
Papermoon Diner

I got in a fight. I was feeling pretty fed-up.
needed to get away, to dive out of uncomfortable familiarity.
But you made it alright, tolerable, soon enjoyable.
First we went to a bar, but they weren't serving.
So we walked across campus, past a park, down silent streets.
There was a tinge of awkwardness nipping in the air.
We passed people, past a party, you said hi.
I really didn't care if I heard a reply
'cause who they were I didn't know.
We went to the diner.
To the Papermoon Diner.
Bold red, green, blue, yellow,
each face painted its individual rainbow color,
with an odd feeling of child's play
stealing from the twine that intertwined
through the structures, the foundations of the ceiling.
I looked about, around, lost in strange mysticism.
Toys and tossed out adolescence decorating the room
but not all this did I see till sitting down
feeling awkward looking straight into your eyes,
I averred my eyes to the decoration of this diner,
the Papermoon Diner.
We talked about your insatiable appetite,
you spoke playfully, your words amusing,
and soon you got your food, I got my own, and we ate.
But really I did not.
Not because my jaw hurt, bruised,
slightly dislocated from last night's bout
but because I felt that I just needed to talk,
to let go, to let the latchkey unlock,
to let the joints swing and open the gate,
to let the liquid flow, touch and wet the chalky ground on the other side.
So I told you everything, maybe it was too much,
too much emotion, too much uninhibited troubles on a platter.
But you took it and digested it, responded the way I wanted you to
without knowing it. I remember suddenly looking in your eyes
realizing what I had just said, feeling meek, vulnerable,
a child getting on the school bus on his first day of school.
You said nothing, only gave the look on your face.
It was enough, told me you were moved,
pitied me? Sympathized? Not the usual wants of a boy for a girl.
But there we sat, soaking in faint music, foggy atmosphere,
two people, emotionally injected,
soon to finish what started
that pacific Friday night in the
Papermoon Diner.

By Jay Mok
'99
"Would you like some more tea, Mr. Suh?" I asked in my choppy Korean accent.

"Yes, please," responded a man seated at the back corner of the booth. He was of average height and stocky build, his figure accentuated by a long black overcoat. His face bore the menacing scowl of a small boy who’s just bit his tongue, while his short-cropped spiky hair managed to defy both wind and gravity. He winked and smiled at me. I flashed a soft and embarrassed smile in return, showing all of my artificially whitened teeth in between my nude-glossed lips. The international students, or yuhaksaeong, who frequented this restaurant found nothing more seductive than a waitress who could perform her duties with beautiful elegance and a self-abasing modesty that seemed to say, “Serving you gives me real pleasure.” An ability to play the part well was crucial for success in Korean restaurants like this. I’d spent hours in front of the mirror practicing my arsenal of weapons - the subtlest hint of a smile, an anxious flutter of the eyelashes, and an embarrassed and catching look of surprise and pleasure reserved for the jokes that patrons would tell me for their amusement. I learned to field the constant passes made by the patrons with grace and charm. In recognition of my art and skill, I was usually rewarded with handsome gratuities.

Eugene Suh sat there chatting away in Seoul-accented Korean with the other fashionably-dressed yuhaksaeong seated at his table, a couple of tall, lanky gangster-looking types and a waif whom I didn’t know. Smirking or scowling in her stupid pride, she was dressed in tall black boots and a grossly undersize leather shirt; her malignant face seemed to mock, “You have to work for your money?” A dozen tiny plates of half-eaten banchan littered their table, a few charred pieces of onion languishing away in the corner of a gas-powered grill already turning cold.

Eugene turned his attention to me once again, asking with a sympathetic pitch of concern, “Jenny, have you been doing okay since you left school?”

“Yes,” I smiled, trying to avoid his unsteady gaze.

“Hey, have a drink. Sit down and talk awhile. We’ve got to catch up on old times.”

“I really can’t. I have to go serve other tables.”

“Come on, dear. There’s not that many people left in the restaurant, and they’re all drunk. Like your manager will notice, anyway. Hey - I’ll give you a larger tip than all the other tables combined.”

As a rule, I never betrayed my genuine emotions; I allowed the carefully composed outline of a smile to form on my lips. “Would you!”

“If tonight’s not convenient for you, how about we go out to dinner later in the week, maybe Friday?”

“I’m sorry, Eugene, but I’m actually busy that night.”

“That’s a shame. It wouldn’t be because of Tom, would it?”

“It might. It might even be our one-year anniversary since we met.”

“Baaaah,” he muttered. “You don’t know what you’re doing. I’m a rich, taller-than-average, reasonably good-looking Korean guy who’s going to be a doctor. Tom’s nothing but a piece of white trash who’s going to move in with his parents after he graduates and leech their resources until they either die or kick him out of the house. What could you possibly see in him? Hey – you know my phone number. Call me up sometime, and we’ll do something fun, okay? You promise...”

He was lying. He was filthy rich, but no one could ever mistake him for "reasonably good-looking."

I flushed red, but answered, “I won’t disappoint you.” Eugene had always been jealous of Tom. I enjoyed nothing better than putting my arms around Tom’s strong neck and placing my hands on top of his broad chest while Eugene and his Korean guy friends stared in envy, muttering something amongst themselves about miscegenation. Most of the Korean guys at school turned away or simply ignored Tom whenever they saw us together. They thought of Tom as a nobody, and they saw nothing at all reprehensible in asking me out on dates, to parties, to restaurants, while Tom was standing right next to me.
Eugene and his friends returned to their gay antics, laughing and drunkenly groping their trophy girl who smiled stupidly in return. An hour later, they left after leaving a generous tip. We closed for the night, and I counted my day’s receipts: sixty-two dollars and twenty cents in tips. Not a great day, especially since the manager was too miserly to pay hourly wages. Whenever some customers left what she considered to be an unreasonably small tip, she would approach them and flash an apologetic smile, pleading, “You know we don’t pay our waitresses anything. They live only off of your tips.” Usually this provoked sufficient shame such that they would discard whatever bills were left in their wallet. And this is how she tried to help us out, because she hoarded all of her money to pay the “heavenly expense” of sending her children through Princeton and Yale. She never stopped talking about her two wonderful sons, for whom she had scrounged up every last penny she had to pay for their tuition. She would wistfully recall the story of Han Seok-Bong, an ancient Korean scholar whose mother had toiled every night of her whole miserable life making rice cakes by candlelight so that she could send her child to be educated at a Buddhist monastery. Such self-sacrificing mothers were the bane of second-generation Korean-Americans. I felt sorry for her two sons - I knew that they’d already had their share of worldly successes, having made it to two of the most prestigious universities in the nation, but I could guess that they lived only to please their mother. I myself had completely failed to please my own.

Four months ago, my mother had stepped into my bedroom with an anguished look on her face. She was incredibly tiny, standing only five feet tall, while I was a giant by comparison at 5'5". She stood in the threshold, wearing a shirt I had given her the last time I had come home for Christmas Break, weeping, holding an opened envelope and letter in her quivering hands. My God, I thought, would Tom really have been careless enough to write me a letter at my home address?

“Who’s Tom Hudson?” she finally asked without looking at me. As if she hadn’t already guessed everything from the letter. Poor Mother! I never wanted to...

...nothing more seductive than a waitress who could perform her duties with beautiful elegance and a self-abasing modesty that seemed to say, “Serving you gives me real pleasure.”

disappoint you. I knew how much you hoped I’d find a nice Korean boy and marry him. That was the real reason you sent me to the University, wasn’t it? That I might meet a future doctor who would take care to treat his in-laws with the respect that only a Korean would understand was crucial for her happiness. She firmly believed that if I took an American guy, no matter how hard he tried to ingratiating himself by learning to use chopsticks, by praising my mother’s cooking, by taking Korean language courses, he would always be a foreigner in our family. “Give Korean guys a chance,” she had advised me when I was still in high school. “They may not always know what to say, and they may be shyer and not as bold as Americans, but they are just as sincere, and they can love you well.”

Tom’s carelessness had been disastrous. I swore I could kill him that moment, and not that I loved him any less, but what had he hoped to accomplish by writing, “Even though I’m now at home, far away from you, I take care to use only my half of the bed and not to wrap myself in the blankets.” What was the sense? He didn’t bother to think about what words could do, how they could so utterly crush a poor mother’s dreams for her daughter’s future, her dreams of someday taking care of little Korean grandchildren running around the playground yelling, “Hal-mee-ni! Grand-
mother!” the way I had done when my brother and I were little children and grandmother was still alive. But now we were grown-up, no longer a fountain of potential and possibilities, and my brother had left for England to study on his fellowship, accompanied with his Korean wife, a sweet-faced Wellesley girl he had met through a Korean church retreat. I didn’t know how he could stand her. She was polite, she was sweet; she knew when to smile, when to nod, and when to listen attentively; she could speak on the finesse of a Van Gogh, play the piano, sing Korean pop music, and even cook Korean food; and yet, she was somehow exactly like every other Korean girl at that institution in every respect, a properly-cultivated girl with a mass-produced soul.

I couldn’t ignore the fact that she made him happy, though. He had always wanted a Korean wife. “Jenny, I don’t want to force you to date Korean or anything, but you don’t know how much you’re missing out by dating an American. You feel a special, almost mystical connection when you can speak in your parents’ language together, when you can talk about going to Korean school as a kid and the miserable won exchange rate and be perfectly comfortable with it all. Deep inside of you when you’re born, God instills in your mind an image of how people should look. This may sound racist to you, but I think it’s somehow inborn and perfectly natural that a Korean should seem closer to this image than any American girl could possibly hope to be.” If only he had met Tom, what would he have said? Tom and I shared so much in common — we had both memorized the opening lines of Eliot’s “Prufrock”; we thought the greatest Beatles song ever was “Yesterday”; we shared an obsession with Kieslowski’s trilogy; but outside of these superficial things, we both looked at the world in the same way, through the same set of tinted glasses, and what could be more important? My attraction for him was more real than anything I’d ever felt for any man, Korean or other.

“Why can’t you be like your brother,” my mother had shouted in tears. And crying that she was only doing what she thought best for me, she told me that she would stop paying for my tuition and expenses until her lost daughter had “come to her senses.” I disappointed her greatly when I told her I would continue to love Tom, that I couldn’t help loving Tom for he was, for what he meant to me and for what I meant to him. I couldn’t afford to continue attending the University, of course, so I took a leave of absence and found a job. Tom tried to help me out as much as he could, but he was not so well-off himself, having to hold a part-time job as part of his aid package. My growing poverty was interrupted by only a few moments of brightness, like one evening about a month into the second semester when he announced gleefully, “Ha – I’ve finally finished paying for all my books! All six-hundred dollars worth! Let’s go out to dinner at a nice place...” And so we celebrated — a modest celebration — though it did little to relieve the growing specter of poverty which advanced further and further into my thoughts as I lay myself to sleep each night. There was no hope that my parents would relent and send me some money. They refused even to talk to me or answer my phone calls, and so my brother became my only connection with my family. He would call from England every week just to make sure I was doing okay — thankfully, he wouldn’t try to preach to me on how I was breaking apart the family, on how I was destroying our parents’ hopes and dreams for us. No, I respected him for his tactful inquiries into my health, the condition of my finances, whether I needed any help, how I was eating, whether I was losing weight... but he never asked about Tom. Not even once. It was as if we had a silent agreement not to talk about the subject which, nevertheless, was able to cast a gloomy pall upon our conversation. And I, in return, would ask politely about the health of my parents, to make sure that they were okay, and would beg him to tell them that no matter what happened to me in the future, I would continue to love them and forgive them forever. It was a little

...and you’re so beautiful — so keenly intelligent — so... like everything I’ve been taught to love and admire in a woman.
melodramatic, maybe, but I always became overly emotional when I was talking to my brother.

To tell the truth, I was doing rather badly. Waiting didn't bring in much money, and ever since the financial crisis hit Korea, international students had become much stinger with their tips. Eugene's father was the vice-president of a company in Korea, so he could afford to continue going out every week. That's why he could always find a trashy girl to take out for the night; because probably she couldn't afford to go out by herself, and so she took advantage of his need to find female companionship—a fellow soul—a receptacle for all his emotional stirrings which he needed so painfully to express—at any cost. Eugene himself was thoroughly spoiled. He thought money could fix all problems, no matter how unconscionable and tactless it might be. His father had used to channel a significant portion of his earnings to provide for his "other family," a mistress and two sons whom he had managed to hide from Eugene until he was a sophomore in college. When Eugene found out, he had gone berserk, and he'd never treated women the same way since, having begun to regard them as commodities to be bought and traded on the open market. That's why I couldn't really hold it against him when he offered to give me a large tip if I drank with him. I'd remind myself, Eugene's just being Eugene, and try to bear it with a smile.

"Yes, Eugene's just the person to help me out," I thought, as I folded the dollar bills neatly into my purse and walked home from the restaurant that night. He's rude, obtuse, and he'll be devastatingly flattered if I call him and ask him for help—if only I put it in the right way! Yet it was so crucial—everything depended on it, because the landlady was getting tired of my supplications, my constant excuses, which I shamefacedly offered that one day my parents would pay her back for everything she was owed. Oh how I would have liked to run away and start a new life—if only Tom hadn't still needed to attend the University; if only he didn't spend all his spare time in the library and work the late shift as a bartender to cover his expenses; if only he didn't dream of one day becoming a photojournalist for National Geographic; if only I didn't love him.

A week later, I found myself looking through my Rolodex for Eugene's phone number. I invited him to invite me somewhere with him, explaining, "Eugene, I...don't think a white man can properly fulfill my desires. I wanted to give you a chance."

Excited, he immediately offered to take me to Cape Cod the next day. Throughout the long car ride in his silver BMW convertible, I paid the most exquisite attention to him, telling him stories I'd picked up as a waitress from other guests and joking around in a most pleasant and charming manner. When we finally arrived at the long, windswept beach, I brought out a camera and asked some tourists who were walking by, "Could you please take a picture of me and my man?"

Eugene almost died of happiness at that moment. We spent the afternoon frolicking on the beach, collecting seashells and looking out over the ocean. I expended nearly two rolls of film on photos of Eugene, myself, and us together. When it became dark, he paid for a highly expensive and sumptuous dinner of clams and lobsters, his spirits boosted by my sudden affection for him. He swore to me with fervent passion, "Jenny, I know what you think of what I've done in the past, but I promise I've totally changed. You're so much better than any woman I've met before."

"Oh really! How am I better?"

"You've made me feel so much better about myself... oh that came out wrong, (I didn't mean to imply I'm using you...I've changed, really I have!) You've given me a chance, which means I can give myself a chance. It's so cliché, it's so unbelievable, yet it remains true for myself—a relative truth—that without you, I could not look at myself in the same way. And you're so beautiful—so keenly intelligent—so... like everything I've been taught to love and admire in a woman."

"Of course, of course," I said. And I steered the conversation to other directions while Eugene drove us back home in a state of bliss.*

Two weeks have since passed. Eugene has tried to call me five times a day since we took our excursion, but I never answer his phone calls. He leaves pathetic messages on my machine, complaining that I somehow destroyed him, reduced him to a miserable speck of the man he once was. Why should I respond? What incentive have I? I've tormented him enough as it is, and any response would only make it worse. The photos came out beautifully, and my parents were pleased to receive evidence that I had taken up a Korean man. Yesterday, my mother called and said, "Jenny, I'm speechless! You've found a nice Korean man—so tall, so handsome...you must be so happy! I'm glad you've finally given Korean men a chance. We're sending you money today—I hope you've been okay! Your brother told us that you had to take a leave of absence from the University! Why ever did you do that? You could have asked us for help, you know. Well, we put your photos up on the living room wall, next to the picture of your brother and his wife. A day never goes by without us looking at your picture and thanking God that everything has come out all right in the end."

I agreed, "Yes mother, I'm glad, too, I'm very glad," while Tom silently massaged the stress-knots in my back.
Snapshots
of
Jennifer
by Joseph Chong '98

This story is dedicated to the following members of the class of '98: Paul Hahn, Eric Ro, Jae Choi, Albert Lee and Andy Rhee. Thanks for four years of friendship.

I was working at the one-hour MotoPhoto store in Harvard Square when I met Jennifer, that was the first time. I had just finished processing a roll of thirty-six photos and was filing them in alphabetical order exactly as my manager, Jim Kim, a short Korean man about 40 years old, had instructed me. Jim took his job way too seriously, and had been getting on my case about doing some enlargements for the next week. "You must do work quick, quick!" he said, smiling broadly and pointing his index finger at me, as he did no matter what it was he was saying. He then pushed his thick, gold-rimmed glasses higher with the same index finger. For Jim, photo developing was the sole purpose of life; he did it with a passion, having won a series of company awards during his six years as manager. He lived by himself and had no other interests outside of MotoPhoto. On top of Jim's nagging—and that's what it was, nagging—it was getting late in the day, and the smell of chemicals from the developing solutions and photo paper was making me feel nauseous. I noticed, when in she rushed to develop a roll.

It was her vibrant hair, which bounced in tandem with every step she took, that first caught my attention. She had long, curly, reddish-brown hair, which had occasional natural highlights mixed in within the tangled mass. Her hair reminded me of Julia Roberts' hair in "Pretty Woman," one of my favorite movies. But Jennifer's hair was even nicer than Julia Roberts', and I'm sure that it was the first thing that anyone ever noticed about her when they looked at her.

"Hi," she said. It was a short and rushed "hi" and she began her next sentence almost before she had finished saying it. "I need these developed as soon as possible. They're pictures of Maine from a camping trip that I took with other freshmen and I'll be meeting them tonight," she said in one breath. I didn't really hear her because I was so caught up looking at her big hair, so I just smiled and made her repeat what she had said—slowly. Since it was a Monday, we were all back up from the weekend orders coming in. I thought for a second to myself that there was no way that I was going to get these pictures into the machine before tomorrow morning.

But the answer that came out of my mouth was a casual, "No prob. I'll have them for you in an hour. Would you like to sign up for Club Moto Membership?" She asked what it was, and I began my spiel about how she could pay a small fee in order to become a preferred customer of the store. As I went on about the benefits for doing so, Club Moto discounts, and convenient locations outside of Harvard Square, I examined her face. I noticed she had big hazel eyes, thin lips, and a few freckles on each cheek. I looked at each of her features and concluded that her face was probably the friendliest face I had ever seen.

"Sign me up!" she said cheerfully as if to confirm my thoughts. I took down her personal information, including her full name, Jennifer Ann Stewart, and her dormitory address at Harvard. As I typed this information into the store computer, I noticed she smelled nice—like peaches. It was a perfume that I had not smelled before.

I typed in her date of birth, then I asked for her phone number.

"And your digits?" For a moment, I felt proud of myself for my wit.

"Digits?" she asked with a quizzical look on her face, and immediately my cheeks felt hot with embarrassment. I thought to myself: Good going Roger—real smooth.

"Your phone number please," I said in the most professional manner that I could, mentally kicking myself for being such a smartass.
After Jennifer dropped off her film that first evening, when Jim was at the window display rearranging the decorated wooden frames on shelf four, I slipped her roll of film into the current lineup for the photo machine so that the photos would be done in one hour, as promised. I made sure to be the one developing her negatives and photos, and I waited impatiently for the photos to pop out. As I was checking them over for imperfections, I looked through each of them, carefully.

They were fun pictures, of Jennifer in front of a tent, cooking marshmallows over a fire, and in a blue and white striped bikini in front of a lake. Jennifer, it seemed, was always happy, always laughing or smiling—she had straight white teeth, and a perfect smile that seemed almost familiar. After an hour, I made sure that I was the one working the counter, and she came back as expected to pick up her developed photos. She paid for the roll, and then took out the pictures from the envelope to look at them while still in the store, as people often do here at MotoPhoto. For a while, as she was flipping through her pictures one by one, beaming, I think she was so engrossed in the photos that she forgot where she was. She bumped into a tall guy in a leather jacket and a black Depeche Mode shirt who was on his way in, and apologized. On her way out, she yelled, “Thanks Roger!” Even though it was MotoPhoto’s policy for all employees to have name tags, in my six months there, she was the first one who had called me by my name.

The photo developing machine, which resembles a huge, gray photocopyer, is a weird device. I stick in some photo paper and developing solutions and put in the undeveloped negatives, which are essentially pieces of black plastic, from the cameras of a hundred different people that I’ll never know. In about half an hour, the machine spits out photos, often intimate and revealing, of these people; I guess that’s what we mean by speedy development. Often I wonder just what goes on inside of that machine in order for these images of weddings, proms, birthdays, vacations, and holidays that come out. It’s amazing how this machine can churn out pictures that capture such precise moments in time.

Our machine has this big sticker on it that says, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” When you think about it, it’s true. At one glance, a picture contains so much. You look at someone in a picture and instantaneously know exactly what she looks like. You can see what her friends are like, what clothes she wears, if her smile is genuine, and what kinds of guys she dates. My job at MotoPhoto, it’s not so bad because I get to have an inside look at all of the pictures that the machine spits out and see all kinds of different people and places. I get to work the developing machine and create images of people who have had every kind of interaction with each other. In goes the undeveloped film, and out comes friendships and places and worlds of all of our customers.

A lot of people come in and out of our store, and I forget about them soon after they leave because usually, they’re just transactions with people that I have no interest in. I don’t know why, but when I saw Jennifer that first time, I sensed that I had a connection with her, an instant interest.

It’s funny working at MotoPhoto, because with snapshots, you don’t always get what you expect. Once I was developing a roll in that machine, and out came half a dozen photos of a couple that had taken naked shots of themselves. There I was, routinely checking for blemishes in a set of pictures of some sort of backpacking trip that this couple had taken in the woods. They looked like they were having fun, I remember thinking to myself, as I saw them in their hiking gear, and then when I flipped to the next set, barn, tits and pubic hair. I felt the obscene shock that only nakedness can give you, and I looked through anyways, disgusted. The guy was as hairy as an ape and the girl’s body looked like a pear—skinny on top and fat below the waist. I mean, don’t get me wrong, some people look great with no clothes on, and it’s one thing to take nude pictures of yourself if you are a babe, but these people fell sadly short of that category. I showed them to Jim and he frowned for a second, shrugged, and continued filing photos. I kept wishing to myself that they had gotten these pictures developed across the street at the CVS drugstore so that some other guy could have dealt with them.

When the lady came in to pick the set up, I slapped an extra service charge on them just to screw with her. I felt nauseous just being in her presence. She looked at her receipt.

“Excuse me,” she said, “I think there may have been an extra charge on here.” I was thinking: trust me lady, it should be a lot more.

“Can you see the pictures, Ma’am, just to make sure?” I smiled my helpful employee smile; she winced.

“Oh,” she said, and paused. “No, I see what it was. Have a nice day.” And she was gone.

When I look at snapshots, I’m amazed at the different kinds of smiles that people have. Usually, people are smiling when they take pictures, but not all of them are natural smiles. When people are really happy at the time the snapshot is taken, you can see the sparkle in their eyes. They look like they have just laughed or are just about to laugh.
Canned or forced smiles are always obvious because you can see that the people are not happy by the dead look in their eyes.

That's the way my mom smiles—that is, when she smiles at all. My mom always has this tired look on her face, maybe because she works too many hours. In fact, she's worked too many hours for as long as I can remember—ever since my kid sister Samantha died—and she's always getting promoted at the company where she works. She looks so together when you see her from the outside, with her smart, well-tailored business suits and expensive jewelry. But she always has this cold, worn-out look to her face, and when she takes off her makeup after work, her face looks ghostly pale and dark bags hang beneath her eyes.

"Hi mom," I said as I walked in from work. She had just gotten home herself. "You're in early today."

"Hi honey. How did work go today?" I thought, for a brief moment, of telling her about Jennifer but then I realized how it would sound.

"Fine mom," I said as I rushed up the stairs to my room. I knew she was just asking me about work out of habit, so I didn't bother to elaborate. She didn't approve of my job developing photos. "What kind of future does it have, Roger? A hardworking, good-looking guy in the prime of your life. Why not focus more on college and your studies so that you can..."

"So I can what, Mom? Get a real job?" I would say. That's how it would begin. I didn't want to deal with it tonight. My mother had come from a well-educated and ambitious family, where everyone had gone to college and were sending their kids to Swarthmore or Princeton. She thought non-professional jobs were for the dregs of society. Often, she would say something like, "Roger, if you want to be successful you can't spend so much of your time on this job that will leave you with no marketable skills later."

"Fine mom. That's just fine. Talk to me like I'm one of your business clients. That's going to work." I had a feeling that this was the way it would always be with my mom.

I went up to my room, and took out a picture of Jennifer that I had made for myself. When Jim wasn't looking I had duplicated one of the photos. I picked this one because it was a close-up of just Jennifer, with nobody else in the background, and it showed all of the details of her face, and her long curly hair. I stared at the image for a long time that night, and thought of how friendly she had been that evening, on top of being smart and pretty.

From time to time, Jennifer dropped off her pictures at our MotoPhoto, and I got to know her better and better during her freshman year. Whenever she came in and dropped off her pictures, I felt like all that was important after that point in time was when she would be back to pick them up, and all of the other things that happened during those few hours or days were just empty filler. I didn't really care much about anything else except seeing her again and getting a brief word of conversation in with her, even if it was just small talk.

One time, she came in when I was the only one working. It was Sunday, Jim's one day off, which he usually spent relaxing at his apartment—his idea of relaxation being to sit at home and read photography magazines all day. I knew because every Monday I would hear all about the new zoom lenses and advantix photo technology. I didn't understand how Jim could be so into just one thing, photos, and not have any life outside, but by then I had gotten used to the idea.

Jennifer rushed in that day, her face flushed from the cold, to pick up pictures that had been taken at a formal college dance. Her hair was tied up in a simple pony tail.

"Hey Roger," she said. I felt grateful that she spoke to me so casually. "Hey Jennifer. Here to pick up some pictures?" A dumb question, I admit, considering I worked at MotoPhoto.

"Yeah," I gave her the set of pictures. She opened them up and looked through them but she seemed uninterested. "I went to a formal with some people," she said. "Pretty boring. Bunch of arrogant guys in tuxes." She showed me a picture with her and some dressed up people. I looked at it, pretending to see it for the first time.

"Doesn't seem that bad, but maybe a little..."

"A little too formal?" she said, and we shared a little laugh. She wrinkled her nose to express dissatisfaction as
she looked down at the picture. "There's only so much fun you're allowed to have when you're with a bunch of girls in uncomfortable dresses and guys in suits. I'd much rather just do something that's more casual, more kick back, like sit with friend at the café a few blocks over and drink coffee." She was describing a nearby coffee shop in the square, where you could sit and just people-watch as students, couples, and businessmen walked by. She took out her wallet to pay for the pictures. "The guy I was with was such a bore too. Not a fun guy like yourself, Roger." She winked. I looked down at the picture, and at her, in a long black dress with no sleeves. Her hair, which was done up to look very fancy, like a movie star's, cascaded down on her bare white shoulders.

"At least you look great," I said, and I looked at her, a little stunned at my own ordinariness. I was looking at her hair and her casual dress, jeans and a white button-down shirt, and a navy jacket. She still looked great, I thought. She looked up at me, and for a second, I felt I had maybe said the wrong thing.

"Thanks" was all she said, pleased. Jennifer smiled her perfect smile. She paid me for the photos, and as I handed her the change, I felt the warmth of her extended hand, and then my finger brushed very slightly against her palm. I watched her leave and she turned and looked back into the store, maybe at me, as she walked away.

Late that night, I stayed up thinking about Jennifer. I wondered what it would be like to really talk Jennifer, to just sit down and talk, on and on into the night. She would be witty and so cheerful. She would tell jokes. Maybe she would pour out all of her worries to me, and they would be such innocent worries. I'd comfort her, and we would get to know each other. I imagined that whatever we talked about, we'd surprise each other because of our natural affinity and agreement. I stared at her beauty, frozen in the photo, and then drifted off to sleep.

I started dating Janet in April, about eight months after I met Jennifer. I met Janet in my history night class at the community college and asked her out the first night that I saw her. I noticed that Janet, too, had curly brown hair, but it was not buoyant or very shiny—not really like Jennifer's at all, but I still liked to look at it, later to run my fingers through it. Janet was a pretty nice girl, just clingy. After our fifth or sixth date, we were having coffee shakes after a movie, and she asked,

"What kind of person are you thinking about marrying? I mean, what would your ideal mate be like?" She was trying to make it seem like she was playing this game of getting to know me by asking this "innocuous" question, but she wasn't fooling anyone. She wanted to know if we had any future.

I took a sip of my cold coffee and answered her, "Well, she's gotta have graduated from Harvard, for one thing, cuz education's real important."

"Roger, you smartass, I'm serious." "So am I," said with a straight face.

"Oh forget it," she said. I was about to take her advice, and then I felt myself soften.

"Okay, Janet. Alright. Physically, my ideal mate has gotta be a brunette, and have long curly hair. She's gotta be pretty, with a cute smile and an athletic body. She has to have a friendly personality, and to be genuinely nice and considerate." Janet's face was beaming.

"You're so silly. You're such a sweetheart," she said and smiled. I smiled back at her for a second, and looked away.

"You're my ideal mate too, my handsome Roger," she said, slurping her shake.

The truth was that Janet filled a void in my life like all of the girls that I'd dated recently. My problem was that I thought that, when you meet someone that you love, your interactions with that person will confirm the fact that this single person was the one you had been waiting for your entire life, without even knowing how perfect she was. With these girls though it wasn't like that. We spent time together, had sex, and made small talk. I was never really interested in them, or wanted to get to know anyone because they were all so frivolous, petty, or bland. On top of that, the sex was pretty unmagnificent.

In fact, I had always looked down on casual sex because once, I had woken up after my parents' divorce, and there was this skinny guy with a mustache in our kitchen drinking a cup of our coffee. My mom came down in her white robe, and she paused for a second when she saw me. She had obviously brought him home and screwed him the night before.

"Good morning, Roger," she said.

"Hey Mom." Later I found out the guy was a vice president at her company.

Only a year later, though, I started bringing girls home and casually screwing them, girls like Janet.

What I liked about Jennifer was that she smiled at me as she handed over her roll, and I was always stunned by how vibrant her presence was. It was like there was this little light that was constantly around her face. I would let her know that her pictures would be done in an hour, even when we were really busy, and was always disappointed when she didn't come to pick them up in an hour. Once she came in with a bunch of pictures with other college students who had spent a day at an apple orchard.

That night, I dreamed that I was at that orchard with Jennifer, but none of the other college students were there. We ran around in the orchard, laughing, picking apples, and feeding them to each other. We held hands, but never kissed or even hugged.

The weird thing was, my sister was there, climbing high up one of the trees, and when I saw her I shouted her.
name. Jennifer disappeared, and I was just shouting at Samantha, but she couldn’t hear me. “Samantha, be careful, okay?” I yelled, frantically. I woke up in a cold sweat.

Samantha had died in a freak accident, the sort of thing that you watch on the 11 o’clock news. She was really young, around seven or eight, and I was seventeen at the time. Both my parents loved her because she was cute, and more importantly, she was smart and talented, and also because she was probably saving their marriage. It seemed like they would ever talk about was how she was doing in school, or whether they should send her to public elementary school or an academy, or how she had scored the winning goal in her last soccer game. When they spoke to their friends, it was always, “Our angel Samantha this, our darling Samantha that.” I think that my parents and I, we all loved Samantha more than we loved each other, or ourselves.

“You look at someone in a picture and instantaneously know exactly what she looks like. You can see what her friends are like, what clothes she wears, if her smile is genuine, and what kinds of guys she dates.”

She called my parents Mommy, and Daddy, and at some point it became standard for my parents to address each other as Mommy and Daddy. Like sometimes, my mom would say, “Daddy, can you pick up some milk from the store,” even when Samantha wasn’t around. It was like their identities were tied up in the little kid.

I don’t really feel like I knew Samantha as well as a brother should have, because my parents were always so busy shuttling her off to violin lessons or to sports practices or other functions, and because she was so much younger than me. Even now—it’s been several years—I have to look at our family portrait to remember exactly what she looked like. But still, I knew I loved her because she was the most innocent little kid in the world. It killed me how she kept her room so neat, and how she kept her crayon collection in a little Mickey Mouse pencil box that my dad had gotten for her in California. Another thing about Samantha was that she needed me.

Sometimes, when our parents were yelling at each other downstairs, I would hear her soft knock on my door, and she would come into my room and just sit on my bed, silent. She would be crying, or maybe I should say weeping, because she never made much noise, just a sniffle here and there. She just sat there, tears streaming down her face. I’d get up, take her hand, and say to her,

“Hey Sam, things will be okay. You know things always get better.” It didn’t take that much to make her feel a little better, I think it was just the fact that I was there. She would fall asleep on my bed, and I would tuck her soft, brown hair behind her delicate ears and listen to her steady, soft breathing in the silence after my parents’
they ever did. It was as simple as that. I think they argued just because they always got on each other’s nerves. Even when I was a kid, an only child before Samantha was born, I remember that they were both so caught up with their jobs that they didn’t spend a whole lot of time with each other. My father did research at Boston University’s chemistry department, and my mother had a management position at her company. I think they slowly just drifted apart. They fought about stupid things like when to vacation, and they always used terms of endearment when they were pissed at each other. I remember one time they were fighting on Thanksgiving. My mom was in the kitchen preparing the turkey, and she was waving a measuring cup in the air and yelling at my dad.

“Look DEAR, I can’t just vacation any time I want.” She was pointing the tip of the cup at my dad’s chest. “You know I’ve been working on this business development project for 2 months, and I certainly can’t just pick up and go on vacation just because it happens to be Christmas.”

“Fine, PRINCESS, the whole world revolves around your schedule. Maybe that’s why we haven’t gone on a vacation as a family in two GODDAMN years.

“Oh that’s not fair.” My dad wasn’t listening.

“You know, the kids only have school vacations at certain times during the year.” He was raising his eyebrows at her, mockingly. “You DO remember that we have kids, don’t you, SWEETHEART?”

“Oh, this from the SUPERDAD that can’t seem to find time for Samantha’s soccer games!” And they would go on, talking about all of those times that one of them had let the other down in the past ten years as if dragging them into the present was going to make anything better.

Samantha died a few days after her eighth birthday. It happened like this: she was leaning on the balcony of our third-story apartment, feeding bread to the pigeons, and the wall of the balcony collapsed. She fell down into the parking lot. The weird thing was, she survived somehow, at least for a little while, and it was my mom who found her as she was driving home from work. She got out of the car, ran over, then just collapsed because of the shock, and became immediately hysterical, crying and yelling until my father ran out to the balcony, only to look down and see what had happened through the hole in the balcony wall.

It’s an unsettling feeling watching your parents break down. “You careless, irresponsible son-of-a-bitch!” was all my mother could hysterically shout at my father, who had been watching Samantha at the time of her accident, over and over again—for days, weeks. He had been in his study, peering out once in a while to look at her. In truth, it was nobody’s fault because Samantha was generally okay to leave by herself. Samantha died at Mass General, two days after her fall. I remember my mom kept a paper hat from Samantha’s birthday party on her dresser for weeks afterwards.

What can a family do after something like that happens? In a few months, my parents filed for divorce.

The terrible thing about it was that it was just so sudden. One day I thought I’d always have a kid sister, and the next day she was no longer there. My main regret was not spending enough time with Samantha. Considering how much my parents spoiled her, she was so unspoiled, so innocent. I don’t really remember the times that I was annoyed with her for spilling something or making a mess because she didn’t often do them, and because she was just a kid and was allowed to mess up once in a while. I do remember that I enjoyed those times that I had with her, watching “Beauty and the Beast” or “Cinderella” with her, or listening to her play her violin...

When I’m at MotoPhoto, one chore I refuse to do is dust the photo frames, no matter how much Jim insists. Sometimes, those frames have pictures of families in them, bright, colorful, grinning families, and when I look at them too long my eyes burn with sadness, and anger.

I’d been going out with Janet for four months when she had first told me that she loved me. They were words that I didn’t want to hear. At that point in our relationship, I would go home after an unsatisfying date with her and wonder to myself why I was with this person. Those nights, I would sit awake, and think random thoughts about my mother and Samantha, and I would look at pictures of Jennifer, to fill the emptiness that I felt.

When Janet said those dreadful three words, we were at my house, on a Saturday afternoon, and we had just finished having sex. I knew that she wanted me to say that I loved her too but I didn’t feel like bullshitting her. I reached out my hand and ran it through her hair, with my eyes closed. “Shh...” I said. Janet started to cry.

When Janet and I had sex, I liked to do it in the dark, or if it was during the daytime I closed my eyes. I put one hand on the back of her head as we did it. Once, when I was about to finish, I yelled Jennifer’s name. Janet didn’t
seem to notice at the time, and I felt a wave of relief come over me. Later, lying there, she had her back turned towards me. “Who the fuck is Jennifer” she asked. “Some past fucking girlfriend that you didn’t tell me about?” Her voice cracked as she yelled at me, and she turned towards me. I thought to myself shit.

“You ever watch that TV show, “Friends” on NBC? I knew she did because we had watched it together once.

“Don’t change the subject you fucking prick.”

“Janet—listen. There’s an actress on that show. Her name is Jennifer Anniston. I’m a guy. Sometimes, when we’re doing it, I think about that show. It’s a fantasizing thing. That’s all.”

“What?”

“Sometimes I fantasize, about this actress. She’s really pretty.” Janet shook her head, incredulously.


“Okay Roger,” she said, slowly. “Next time we do it, I’m going to yell, give it to me Brad Pitt! We’ll see how you feel about that.” We laughed, although I was still feeling a bit nervous.

“Let’s get some ice cream.” I suggested. And we went downstairs. Two weeks later, I broke up with Janet because I just couldn’t deal with her anymore.

January 14, Samantha’s birthday, was a Friday this year. I was eating cereal in the kitchen when my mom came in, and her eyes were swollen because she had probably been up all night crying. She sat down next to me and told me that she wasn’t going in to work that day. “You deserve a day off,” I told her. I couldn’t remember the last weekday she had taken off.

“I wish that this day was stricken from the calendar, that we could just go from the 13th to the 15 of January, and forget about today.” It was just one of those moments when I didn’t know what to say. I asked her if she wanted me to stay with her, but she said no, she wanted to be alone.

Eventually, I got up and left for work, but I when I got there I was sad thinking about Samantha and the state that my mom was in. Throughout the day, I felt like I was just going through the motions of being at work, but not entirely there.

I don’t know what had gotten into Jim that afternoon, but he was developing photos of a group of Asian people—they must have been Korean—and he saw a particular picture. “Oh,” he said, and I looked over. His eyebrows were raised, and he looked surprised. Right away, I noticed something was wrong.

“Why don’t you take a break and grab something to drink?” I suggested, looking over at the picture he had in his hand.

“That, in picture,” said Jim. He was sweating a little bit. I had never seen him so worked up. “My wife!” He exclaimed, all of the sudden. “She my ex-wife.” I looked down at the picture, and he was pointing to a thin lady with a pale green dress on. Jim looked disturbed. “She leave many years ago.” I had always viewed Jim as a robot; he wasn’t supposed to have a wife, or an ex-wife, or even a personal life. I looked over at him, and he looked smaller than usual, hunched over that picture. He looked like he was in so much pain. I sighed, helplessly.

It was too much. Suddenly, I knew that I couldn’t be in there any longer, so I removed my name tag, took my jacket off of the coat hook, and walked out. Poor Jim, he didn’t even try to stop me.

It was just getting dark when I walked out into Harvard Square. I thought of going home, but my apart-
to a couple of homeless guys playing chess, to watch people pass by in business suits and preppy college clothes. Of course, I thought about Samantha, and that thought made me feel deeply sad.

Then I felt a tap on my shoulder, and I looked up. Jennifer stood above me, holding a bagel and a cup of tea. From that moment on, I felt like I was watching myself in a movie, in slow motion.

"Hi Roger," she said. "Mind if I sit down?" I didn't know what to do, so I answered.

"Yeah," I said, with a start. "I mean, no, have a seat." My blood was pumping through my temples with deep, thudding beats. "What are you doing here?" I asked.

"I'm on my way home. I stop here often, with friends or just alone, to catch a breather or a bite to eat." I remembered that I knew this already, and maybe that's why I'd come to Au Bon Pain to begin with. Maybe I thought she would be here. But the reality of Jennifer in front of me was such a shock—I was exhilarated. "How about you?" I asked. "Did you just get off of work?"

"Yeah."

"How come you aren't out on a Friday night with your friends, or girlfriend?" she asked, taking a bite out of her bagel. She had gotten cream cheese on the corner of her mouth, and I told her. She wiped it off.

"I broke up with my girlfriend a while ago."

"Sorry to hear it, Roger." She looked genuinely sorry. "Me, I'm single too, but it's not all that bad," she reassured me. I felt a tense excitement right when she told me that she was not attached, and I wondered if she felt the same way about me. I sipped the last of my coffee, and as I swallowed it, I was thinking that I should have saved it in the bottom of my cup, because now all I had was this empty paper cup.

"Hey, let's grab a beer," she suggested. I blinked. Jennifer drinking alcohol—it was a strange thought, not something I had pictured. I felt something inside of me sink a little, but I agreed anyway. So just like that, we decided to go to a nearby bar.

On the way there, she slid her hand into mine as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Many times, I'd thought before about how it might feel, and the actual experience was different. For some reason, when I had imagined it, the sun was always out, but now it was beginning to get quite dark. I felt a breeze through my open jacket and freed up my hands to zip it up.

We arrived at the bar, and I was worried that she was under age, but she turned out to have a fake ID, and she knew the bartender, Tom, by name. He gave her a familiar smile and welcomed her, calling her "Jenny." After we ordered, when we clinked our glasses of Bud and took the first sips of beer, that's when I realized that all of this was really happening.

"I haven't drank in a long time," I told her, trying to start a conversation. "I've never been a big drinker, only at some high school parties that seemed distant now.

"Really?" she said. "I got pretty tipsy last weekend. A friend of mine had this keg of Heineken and we partied in his room." I think she could tell I was feeling uncomfortable, maybe I was making a face or something. "Hey Roger, it's okay, I don't bite." She smiled, and it was the same smile as in all of her pictures. Here I was, sitting with her, and she was smiling at me, and for just a moment it made the strangeness of the night go away. I took a large gulp of Bud.

We finished our beer and ordered another, and after that one, I felt confident enough to put my hand on her chair, but I didn't touch her. I thought to myself that this was the moment I had been waiting for, my chance to talk to Jennifer. But it was weird—I stared at the bottles of hard liquor on the bar, noticing their shades of amber, red, and green, and I was speechless.

"Let's go for a walk after this," she suggested. I agreed.

"Because it's a nice night," she added. "Roger?"

"Uh huh?"

"I'm glad you're here." I forced a smile at her. I was feeling a little dizzy, from the alcohol and the events that night. "I needed someone to talk to tonight and it's nice to be with you."

"Is there something wrong?" I asked.

Spring 1998 47
“Well, you grew up in Boston, right?” I nodded. “So you’re used to this place. But for me, it’s been a big adjustment. I’m from New York—the City—and things here are different. Everything’s on a smaller scale. I thought college was this big fucking eye-opening experience, but sometimes it just seems like a bigger version of my prep school.” I considered the word, fucking. I’ve said the word a countless number of times myself, but coming out of Jennifer’s mouth it seemed especially harsh and ugly. Still dizzy, I tried to think of something sympathetic.

“It’ll be okay,” I said, lamely. “Ready for that walk?”

“Yeah,” she said, “Let’s go.” We paid the tab and walked outside, and around Harvard’s campus. Eventually, she invited me to her dorm and I nodded in agreement. We went to her room, and she had more alcohol there. “I’m going to have a screwdriver,” she said, mixing vodka and orange juice. “I’ll mix one for you too.” She handed me my drink. I took a look around, and I noticed there were dirty clothes strewn about the floor, and that the room was really messy, unlike any room in my house. “What do you think of the room?” she asked. I looked up on her wall, and there were some of the pictures of her that I had developed. Even though I had examined them all before, they seemed so oddly foreign in this dark, disheveled room.

“It’s nice,” I lied. I turned to look at her.

“Cheers,” she said. We drank, and then she poured me another screwdriver, and we both sat down on her bed. I don’t remember what we talked about, but I remember that when she talked, her breath smelled like alcohol. At a certain point, I wasn’t even listening to her because all I could concentrate on was the stink of vodka, and at that point I gave up on her.

After that, I teased her, asking if she was going to let a guest’s glass stay empty, and she got into it too, and we were pretty drunk after half an hour. Her face was suddenly close to mine, but by this time I had been expecting it. She pressed her lips against mine and we were kissing, deeply. After that, I ran my fingers through her thick hair and all around her body. Soon, she was taking her clothes off, and then my shirt. She breathed heavily, with excitement.

“Fuck me now Roger,” she said, panting. “Come on.” She was completely naked, lying on her bed. So I did, doing all of the things that I had done these past few years with other girls. It sounds really outrageous, but as we were doing it, I thought of watching TV, of Trivial Pursuit. I’d never imagined sex with Jennifer, but it didn’t feel any different than when I was doing Janet. Actually, it felt exactly the same, and it may just as well have been Janet under me. But in another way, it was a lot like my first time, because in my mind I kept repeating to myself, incredulously: so this is it.

Later, late at night, I laid with her in bed, and after she’d fallen asleep, I caressed her hair. Her hair, at least, was still beautiful, in the bluish moonlight. After a while, I was completely sober, and that was when I thought of the guy with the mustache that I had met in my kitchen that one morning. I decided not to wait for the people that Jennifer lived with to notice me, so I put my clothes on and walked into the dark streets, towards home.
Look, Little Brother...

by Thomas Sze Leong Yu '00

I'm gonna go see God today. You know how he lives up in the clouds of heaven where everything is misty and white. I've never seen God before, so I'm pretty excited to see what he looks like. My mother said he looks just like a white demon, but I've never seen one of those either. She said it was those people living in Tsimsha-chui, but we live in Tai Po, which is why you never see them. But she assured me that I'll be seeing a whole lot of them once we start flying, so you'll know then. I told her to alert me once some of them are around, so I can take a careful look.

You know, I've heard they got snow over there. Yeah, I've never seen any of that either. This land must be magical or something if everybody in Hong Kong is talking about going over there. I don't know if you know this, but over there it snows so much that it covers buildings and cars, so if you walk outside, you can jump around in these mattresses of beautiful snow. You can jump on it you see, just like clouds. Yup, just like clouds.

Wow, you see this? This thing can fly up to heaven and come back down in some land far away from where you started. Amazing, isn't it? Look at these big seats, ah, and there's a little table you can pull out to eat on. There's a little hole here for you to listen to music or whatever the movie is talking about. You need to buy a set of earphones and plug it into the hole to hear it, but I'll tell you a secret. Just pull up the armrest and stick your ear at the hole so you'll hear something. Hear it? Yeah, I can't understand it either, must be English or something.

Oh, look at that man sitting next to you! Wait, let me check...yep, mom said he's a white demon, alright. Man, does he look strange. He's pretty tall, isn't he? Look, the guy next to him is even taller. Damn, their noses are huge, hey, look at his hair. Yes, it's yellow!

See that? It even looks sort of red. Oh my God Amitabha dear Buddha looking lady down there? Wait a minute, I've heard about them. I don't think she's Chinese, you see that dress she has on? I think she's Japanese. Nope, never seen anything like it. I wonder what's this so-special place we're going to, everyone seems to be in a mad rush to get there.

I've heard mom call it Mei Kuo. It's a big country, but we still hafta crowd for awhile with Big Aunt before we get our own home. Mei Kuo. Beautiful country. Look, you see we are flying there now. We're going up, up, and above the clouds. Wow! Look at it, it's like cotton. You think we could ask mom to stop the plane so we can go outside and bounce
on the clouds? No, she said no. Well, you should expect to see God’s palace pretty soon, it has got to be around these clouds somewhere. It’s probably right next door to the temple where the Jade Emperor of Heaven lives. But Jade Emperor only lives over China, so I guess we can only meet God. I was hoping we could go and sip some tea with him, too. So God, you think he’s got yellow hair, too? Maybe he’s like that man over there with the Santa Claus beard. I do hope God can speak Chinese, I don’t think I could ever learn English. I mean, look at the white demons talk, their mouths must be real tired now of speaking so much jibberish. If God really is one of them I don’t think I could ever talk to a guy like that. I don’t think Christ and crosses would ever work for a Chinese kid like me.

Nah, I don’t think we ever are going to see God’s palace. Well, it’s no use looking anymore because mom just said we’re going to land pretty soon. Oh, wanna bet I was looking for it just as hard as you were, I was praywishing I could see him real soon. Yeah, God can be a real bastard sometimes, big fucking bastard. Never there when you need him most. Hey, look out the window, see all the snowflakes? Yeah, they look like they really want to reach the ground, too. Every little one of them is going to float down and collect in the beautiful land below. See them all fly from this way and that? Mad rush I say, mad rush. Sometimes they look like they’re pushing and shoving, don’t they? But they all end up in the same place, like they got instinct or something, and form this beautiful even blanket. See you down there, little snowflake.

It took a damn long time to find our luggage, didn’t it? I can’t wait to go outside and see all the snow. It must be in an even layer by now, it’s gotta be, it’s been snowing for a long time. Oh man. Look at the snow. Ugliest thing I ever saw. All dirty and clumped together. Man, its not even soft, damn thing is hard as a rock. Look at that man just shoveling them to the side of the street where it gets all dirtied from the rainbow gasoline puddles. Nobody really cares, do they? It’s like that bum sitting on the sidewalk there, all huddled up because no one gives a damn. I’m beginning to hate this place, no God and no fields of snow. I’d bet the snowflake didn’t know either.

Thomas See Leong Yu, who emigrated with his family from Hong Kong in 1984, is a junior government concentrator. He currently lives on the Lower East side of Manhattan.

Siam Garden

“Well prepared, slightly exotic cuisine, loaded with unusual spicy taste…”

Boston Globe
October 9, 1986

Party room available.

LUNCH:
Mon.-Fri. 11:30-4:30 p.m.
Sat.-Sun. 12:00-4:30 p.m.

DINNER:
Sun.-Thurs. 4:30-10:00 p.m.
Fri.-Sat. 4:30-10:30 p.m.

45½ Mount Auburn Street
Cambridge 534-1718
fax 534-6919
The place I call home lies in the heart of Dixieland, staggeringly beautiful with its green pastures, rolling hills, and twisting and turning rivers. This vast land is segmented, however, not only by the tributaries of rivers but also by racial lines. Across the beautifully scenic land of the South, the spirit of the American past is darkened by the persistence of the stubbornly intractable problem of racism. As you take a country drive through Alabama, you witness signs of both substantial and part-illusory changes since the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil Rights Movement, but you cannot help but notice a Confederate flag proudly flapping above the white building where lawmakers reigned for decades in resistance to progressive change. The flag is a constant reminder that the state is still in a deep slumber, one that began in the days of the antislavery crusade, and never fails to provoke emotional reactions. The flag not only brings back faded voices and images of those who lived through the tragedy of the Civil War but also provokes a recollection of my personal experience growing up in this part of the United States. Over the years, I have realized that the beauty of the South radiates from the past, even with all of its tragedy and strife. There, in the past, lies the reason why the South is so dear and so inseparable from me.

I lived a typically simple, uneventful life, growing up in suburban Alabama. As a young boy, I would get together with the local kids and run about in the woods, playing army and other games. Except for an occasional tiff over some injudicious use of racial slurs that they probably picked up from elders, we played as congenially as the “Little Rascals” in the TV comedy we used to watch on the flickering screen. In my early teenage years, I do not think I once questioned being a Southern boy, groomed to be a “Southern gentleman.” I used to tell people who questioned my “Southernness,” “I’m as Southern as they get ’cept I ain’t white and I ain’t Baptist.” Even as a boy barely four feet tall, I held the door for the belles and elderly folks. I even catch myself still saying “miss” to address a young woman.

By middle school, my eyes began to open, and I realized that I was different. Sure, I could roll down my car windows and blast country music while cruising; I could wear one of those big belt buckles; I could line dance to perfection; and I could have the strongest drawl. But the truth is, to many living in the South, I am still a “foreigner,” a young man with darker skin and slanted eyes. I am an Asian American whose parents must have been fresh off the boat. As I walk down the street, I hear the occasional “chink” or imitation of some karate movie. I remember in high school when I walked into the hallway, where my fellow classmates were laughing. The minute I walked up and asked, “What’s up, ya’ll?”, they all hushed up, and one of them had the nerve to say to me, “Oh, we weren’t talking about you. We were talking about them damn niggers.” Instinctively, my face froze. I made every effort to maintain the same facial expression, but my eyes rolled and my jaws tightened. Whatever gave me away, they dispersed quickly to class. In this sense, a part of the South still does live in the past.

As I drive through the streets of my hometown where the Freedom Riders’ bus burned in the 1960’s, I still see cars and trucks with Confederate flag decals, representing the tragic past of racism, slavery, and oppression. Right near the suburbs where I live, lynchings of “niggers” had been carried out. Not far from my high school, an Asian senior was kidnapped at gunpoint from a Pizza Hut parking lot and was gunned down by two white boys because he was dating a white girl. A few towns over, there’s a middle school named after General Forrest, a Confederate officer and an organizer of the Ku Klux Klan who mercilessly executed any black soldiers he captured. Recently, in Randolph County, a high school principal told a student that she could not go to the prom with a white boy because she was a mistake, being of mixed descent, both black and white. The school was burned to the ground in retaliation. Such incidents as the one in Randolph County, featured in national news, spark whimsical assumptions that the South contin-
"I'm as Southern as they get 'cept I ain't white and I ain't Baptist."

ues the tradition symbolized by the Civil War—that the people of the South are all racist bigots and race relations are worse than those in any other region of the country.

These entrenched memories hewn from my past sometimes surface in odd, oblique ways. Many times, I question if these graphic evocations of sufferings would not move "home folks" to see racism for what it is. I also wonder what, in the deep recesses of their souls, provokes anger in the form of hatred erupting like an enormous geyser. Whether it is out of fear, fragile egos, or just plain prejudice, it has been always difficult to understand the rationalization for their racist actions.

Amidst the hatred, racism, and discrimination following the Civil War in its long aftermath, the urgent call of Martin Luther King, Jr. woke the nation to the harsh reality of race relations and touched the people's social conscience. I strongly feel a particular debt to the Civil Rights Movement, whose campaign on behalf of equality for blacks helped to expand rights and opportunities for all citizens, including me. It was in the South that this cry of freedom rang, and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s voice echoed.

Being drawn to the efforts of King by both fascina-

tion and admiration, I visited the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in downtown Atlanta a few years ago. At the memorial, there is a bronze bust of King. He seems to be in patient anticipation and ponderous reflection. Deeply cut lines define his profile. As light from a nearby window shines on his face, it seems to come to life. Staring at the profile for the first time, I was overcome with emotion as King's voice echoed through the halls of the memorial's museum:

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with words of interposition and nullification, that one day, right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today! (King 105)

At the same time, the images I had just seen along the museum's walls and in my history books from school came to mind: riot dogs attacking peaceful protestors huddled together, helpless against the firefighters' water hoses; the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church after the bombing in 1963; a cross standing in the night, engulfed in hateful flames—merely a few of the many images that captured the struggle of blacks during the Civil Rights Movement.

When I look back upon the South's past, I see a clash of two traditions: one of hate, another of hope. No one can deny that the former Confederate states have a history that some wish to forget and leave behind. But, as I was told when just a child, "you can forgive, but you can't forget." To forget the tragic past of slavery and dehumanization of an entire race would be to forget the struggles men and women have made to overcome such tragedies. To forget the past of racism and discrimination would be to forget the works of Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., and all of those who fought such wrongs. The King Memorial, though commemorating the accomplishments of King only a few decades ago, echoes the most profoundly significant experience in our national existence: the hell of the cross-roads of our being that took place over a century ago. It brings back memories of men lying contorted, horrid.
that provokes not only great admiration but also a sense of understanding. As a minority growing up in America, I identify with the plight of blacks in their quest for freedom, for an equal voice as a people. The South of today has recognized the power of King’s voice and the timeliness of his dream. Yet, it was in this very region of the country that cannons and rifles echoed just over a century ago, placing brother against brother, father against son, and countryman against countryman. It is freedom that we as Americans live for. It is freedom that makes us embrace the ideals and visions of this nation.

I love the South. My home is in Alabama because it has such a strong hold on me, but it is not some far distant paradise under the rainbow like the one Judy Garland sings about. I grew up in a place where the shouts for justice, the smell of burning black churches and schools, and the scenes of suffering of so many marginal lives have clustered together and become embedded in me. Such images somehow generate seemingly unexplainable emotion—what classical psychoanalysts call “enduring effects of childhood experience.” Simply, they are a part of me. Thus, I hold dear the images of the past, which have molded me and my personal view of my heritage. Perhaps, they also give me a sense of tolerance and sensitivity, living in a time where there are still struggles for greater social equality. In truth, I am part of the continuing struggle that began with the first cannon blasts at Fort Sumter. Most of all, I tell myself, as I look out across the green pastures where the armies of North and South once clashed; toward the rolling hills over which fleeing black slaves once sought freedom; at the twisting and turning rivers whose waters run freely; and at the state capitol on which the American flag proudly flies high above the Confederate flag: “you can forgive, but you can’t forget.”


Book Review: Helie Lee’s Still Life With Rice
reviewed by Abbie Baker ’98

(Lee, Helie. Still Life With Rice. New York: Scribner, 1996.) As a young girl growing up in southern California in the 1980s, Helie Lee did all she could to disguise her Korean heritage and distance herself from the country she left at the age of four. During her adolescent years, she lightened her hair and tanned her skin to mask her Korean face, and she immersed herself in typical American schoolgirl activities such as cheerleading and cutting class in order to be a “normal” teenage girl.” Even by the more mature age of twenty-five, Helie still felt greatly distanced from her strongest existing ties to Korea—her parents and maternal grandmother, whom she considered to be “too Korean” for her good. However, when an argument between Helie, her mother, and her grandmother over Helie’s failure to marry by the “rotten” age of twenty-five leads Helie to realize that her family’s emigration to America was the result of numerous heartwrenching sacrifices rather than a mere desire to “pursue the capitalistic dream,” she impulsively decides to return to Korea to rediscover her roots and better understand her family.

Helie’s travels take her to both South Korea and China, and from her visits with relatives in Korea and members of Korean communities in China, she picks up amazing bits and pieces about her grandmother’s life as a North Korean woman boldly trying to raise a family in dignity in the face of Japanese, and later, communist, oppression. Helie’s newfound awe and respect for her grandmother inspires her to listen to her grandmother’s story firsthand; Still Life With Rice is Helie’s retelling of this fascinating epic in the voice of her grandmother, Baek Hongyong.

Born in 1912 in Pyongyang, Korea, Hongyong was the oldest daughter of a yangban (upperclass) family in a society rooted in age-old tradition and holding fast to its strong sense of pride, particularly in response to the growing shadow of Japanese imperial rule. Helie’s first-person description of Hongyong’s young life reveals, on one hand, a gay childhood replete with fishing trips with Father, pampering by servants, and nary a want of food, clothing, or a warm ondol floor on which to sleep. However, a darker side of village life in prewar Korea also shows itself some of the tragedies and confusion of Hongyong’s childhood. For example, when Hongyong’s second sister is crippled by a fever, their mother leaves the fading girl to die in the family courtyard, because death is a more “merciful” alternative to begging in the streets as an outcast or burdening one’s family with one’s disability. Second Sister—or Crippled Sister, as she is known from that point on—does manage to survive, though, and Hongyong must then assume the hated role of Crippled Sister’s personal transportation.

Hongyong’s childhood is also filled with frustration toward her domestic education. Her mother vigorously gives her ironing, cooking, and sewing lessons, but Hongyong neither enjoys nor excels at these tasks, causing her mother to worry that no man will want to marry such a useless woman. As much as she is educated about household tasks, however, her understanding of her body and her sexuality is limited to whispers overheard during communal baths with
other village women. When she finally marries at the age of twenty-two, her naiveté is first replaced by an incredulous numbness, and then awe, for the mysteries of sex and partnership that are revealed to her. Her initial shyness gives way to a deep and profound love for her husband, understood through her desire to please him in her household tasks.

The overbearing presence of the imperial Japanese compels Hongyong, her husband, and their children to relocate to China so that they may freely be Korean. There, Hongyong creates an illegal opium-smuggling empire from which she draws great profit. After several years, she and husband return to Pyongyang just as the Japanese are driven out of Korea. However, victory over one oppressor turns into struggle under another, for the communist presence in the northern part of Korea becomes even more stifling than Japanese rule. Husband twice purchases vast tracts of land with their riches, only to have the land seized and redistributed both times by the communists. After moving back to Korea, Hongyong discovers happiness and peace in Christianity, only to have her faith challenged as well, for Christianity was forbidden by the communists.

The oppression of the communists as well as the dangers of war compels the family to separate and flee the northern part of Korea, leading up to Hongyong's greatest tragedy. More devastating than the weeks-long, cold, hungry, exhausting walk from Pyongyang to Seoul, more terrifying than dodging bombs and hoping that neither she nor any of her children would be caught in a blast, more frightening than having to cross fragments of a blown-up bridge over icy water with a baby strapped to her back, was Hongyong's loss of Yongwoon, her oldest son. Although Hongyong and her four youngest children were reunited with Husband in refugee camps in Pusan, Yongwoon never made it to South Korea, and for decades, Hongyong would mourn the loss of her son, wondering if he were dead or alive, healthy or ill, happy or miserable.

Eventually, Hongyong rebuilds her life through her charitable gifts of the art of chiryo, a healing practice characterized by slapping the patient's body to create bruises, purging him or her of "bad blood." Her severe depression from the loss of Yongwoon as well as the loss of her husband to dysentery is channeled positively into her renewed faith in Christianity and her desire to help others through chiryo, and Hongyong finally finds peace despite the horrifying tragedies that characterized her experience of the war in Korea.

Still Life With Rice helps fill two gaping holes in the repository of modern American literature. While American literature has become increasingly prevalent and popular with the advent of writers such as Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Gish Jen, Korean-Americans are notably missing from the throng. In addition, although numerous books detail the Korean War, one perspective is invariably absent among the stacks of political, military, and historical renditions: that of the Koreans who actually experienced the war firsthand. Viewing M*A*S*H is the closest most people will come to learning about the war in Korea, and even this show is clearly taken from the American point of view. Still Life With Rice is a welcome and timely addition to American literature.

The book is extremely well written and deeply moving. Although the first chapter, written in Helie's voice, comes across as somewhat immature and clichéd, Helie's writing blossoms when she speaks as her grandmother, writing with wisdom and insight far beyond her own years. The tone is frank, open, and sincere, and Helie's rich descriptions of the beauty of Korea's landscapes and their destruction throughout the war as well as of her grandmother's thoughts and experiences are sure to make readers feel as if they are frolicking in the village river, desperately seeking a way to cross a frozen river with four children in tow, or languishing in a dirty refugee camp with no will to live. While the narrative may have come from her grandmother, much of the insight into the details of and reflections on Hongyong's experiences comes from Helie's own expressiveness, perhaps cultivated from her newfound understanding of and pride in her heritage and her grandmother's remarkable strength and dignity in such dire circumstances. The fact that this story is true makes its prose especially poignant.

Still Life With Rice is a powerful narrative of one woman's experience as a Korean and as a survivor of war, and its most epic moment lies in Hongyong's discovery of the fate of her beloved Yongwoon, for this knowledge leaves Hongyong with even more consuming and terrifying questions than before. The reader, too, is left with a burning sense of curiosity, and perhaps more than a tinge of personal concern, about the conditions of Yongwoon's situation. Rumor has it that Helie Lee is in the process of writing another book detailing the recent, dramatic developments surrounding Yongwoon's fate. We can only look forward to its release and hope that Helie's writings encourage other Koreans and Korean-Americans, young and old, to let their voices be heard as well.

*Yisei magazine cohosted a reception and discussion with Helie Lee in 1996.
RESPONSE to a...

Stand in Awe of You:
You are beautiful beyond description,
Too marvelous for words,
Too wonderful for comprehension,
Like nothing ever seen or heard,
Who can grasp your infinite wisdom?
Who can fathom the depths of your love?

Ka-Hyeong Lee's "The Reflection of a Korean-Centric Christian" (Jiset, Winter 1998) intrigued me as it touched upon issues that I have been struggling with for quite some time. In her personal essay, she justifies her choice to utilize a specific discourse in articulating her faith. She chooses to express her Christian faith through the Korean language, which she feels "more at home" with. This choice is motivated by the fact that using another language (i.e. English) might have the effect of "stifling the honesty" of expressions about her religious experience. In turn, this has the direct result of feeling more comfortable to name the object of her worship as hanahnim rather than "God."

For me, Ka-Hyeong's struggle to find a language that can adequately express her religious experience is symptomatic of a larger theological issue. This has to do with the question of how we, as finite beings, can speak of something that is infinite. If we think mechanically about this issue, we run into the problem of the limitations of our communicative tools. For example, the English alphabet has twenty-six letters. These letters can be combined in numerous ways to make words that correspond to our semantical motives. But still, mathematically speaking, there are only a finite number of combinations and we are always grounded and limited by the original twenty-six letters. Likewise, han-gul contains twenty-four vowels and consonants. With these twenty-four, we make words and sentences, but again, the combinations are limited. This is not surprising, for it directly follows that as finite beings, our own creative enterprises will themselves be finite. With this in mind, the question becomes "How do we express divinity, which is infinite by definition, through such a finite and limited medium?"

The history of theology is plagued by this question and there have been numerous attempts at an adequate solution. On the one hand, apophatic theologians might argue that in the face of God, silence is the best response. All articulations would taint the infinite majesty of God and thus inevitably lead to an anthropomorphic understanding of Him. The other extreme position is held by those who have a bias towards biblical literalism. They might argue that God directly speaks through our languages, as in the case of the authorship of the Bible. In between these two positions is the more moderate, and I would argue, more humble position that although God will never be adequately expressed, our language is the best medium we have in dealing with matters of faith.

It is at this point that we arrive at Ka-Hyeong's question: "Which language should I use then?" Before going on to try to find a solution to this question, it must be noted that in light of understanding language as a "medium" to express the actual religious experience, we are making the assumption that experience precedes articulations. That is

By Paul Yunsik Chang
Harvard Divinity School '99
to say that we have an immediate experience of the divine and then proceed to articulate it the best we can. As mentioned above, the "best we can" is through our limited and finite languages. Language in this sense is one step removed from the actual religious experience, and as Ka-Hyeong's \textit{unni} points out, "The language of worship should be secondary." This understanding of language has both positive and negative implications.

Ka-Hyeong is right to recognize that "different sets of vocabulary exist for different languages, and these are a function of the culture itself as well as the circumstances under which the language was acquired by the individual." In this diverse world, there is no universal language of religion. The Old Testament was recorded in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. The leaders of the early church wrote in Latin and the reformation writers in German. In contemporary society, we choose the discourse which best fits our own religious experiences. In light of the great variety and options before us, I would not consider Ka-Hyeong's "dependence on the Korean language as a medium of worship [as] a weakness." It can be considered, rather, as an affirmation of our own heritage and culture in being able to experience something of the divine...\textit{Hanahnim} is actually God!

This constitutes what I hinted above, namely a positive implication of understanding language as a finite medium. Although there are numerous ways of articulating our experiences of the divine, each historically and culturally bound, we can find comfort that above the level of language we are all stumbling around a common experience. In this way, the most salient distinctions between Christians who are emerged in different cultures, as well as denominational differences, are marginalized in favor of the solidarity of believers.

On the other hand, the negative implications of this particular understanding of language really has to do with humility. In coming to understand my own limits and finiteness, I am humbled by the idea that all of my conceptions of God are lacking. Words do not adequately describe the immediate experience of the divine, and constant revisions in my own religious discourse is necessary. Although at times this feeling of linguistic impotence can be disheartening, it still does not lead into the kind of skeptical nihilism that Sigmund Freud advocated in \textit{The Future of an Illusion}. Yes, religious discourses may be our own subjective culturally bound articulations of our religious experiences, but that does not invalidate them or reduce them to merely our own projections. These immediate religious experiences, that we so inadequately describe, are grounded and finds justification only in faith.

Reading Ka-Hyeong's confessional essay made salient to me the cultural specificity of our theological utterances. In matters of communal worship, we should indeed find those communities that best speak to our own individual experience of the divine. But still, this should be accompanied with the knowledge and hope that the particular community we choose is not alienated from the larger family of God. Only in this way will we be honest to both our religious experiences and the limited mediums by which we try to articulate them.

\textbf{"I would argue the more humble idea that although God will never be adequately expressed, our language is the best medium we have in dealing with matters of faith."}
Thanks For Your Support...

Sponsor
Janson J. Kim and Seo-Young Kim

Patrons
Korean Consulate General
James A. Aylward and Kija Kim
Sun Ok Chong and Yong C. Chong
Dr. & Mrs. Yong Choo
Jae S. Kim
Jason Kim, Ph.D.
Dr. Joseph Kim
Larry Lee/Sangil & Mi-Ae Lee
Jay Mok, Jung Tae & Nam Hee Mok

Benefactors
Young Keun Cha
Jong-yol Choi
Joon Y. Chung
Ruth R. Chung
Jin Sung Chung
Kuk Nam Jo
S.J. Kim
Sei Ho Kim
Wonyoung Kim
Hae Sook Kwon

Chang H. Lee
Jang Lee
Jay Lee
Kevin Lee
Shang H. Lee and Heeja Lee
J.N. Park
Dr. & Mrs. Kyoo Hwan Rhee
Kyoo Sang Ro and Joanne Youngsoon Ro
Jong H. Yun
Writing Contest


Deadline: Submit your piece via mail or email by 3/1/99. Mail to Yisei c/o Contest '99, P.O. Box 380805, Cambridge, Ma 02238, or email to yisei@hcs.harvard.edu.

First Prize: $150
Second Prize: $100