

*Story of Jung-soon Kim--68 year old woman, 1st generation
(The following is from an interview with Ms. Kim in 1987 at the
Korea Church Women United office by CCHRA's women group visiting
Korea.)

Ms. Kim married early at 16 years of age to escape being taken by
the Japanese. Her actual age was 15. She followed her husband
to Japan and was childless for 10 years. She worked in coal mine
sorted coal from rocks, till her child was born. There was no
pay, only barely enough for her to eat, and none for the child.
This was the condition of forced laborers. They lived some
distance from Nagasaki, but relatives convinced them to move to
Nagasaki for improvement in living conditions.

Thus, they were residing in Nagasaki during the bombing. She had
just visited her relatives when the bomb fell. She lost
consciousness, and was in the hospital three months when her
husband found her, after he'd been made to leave the mine. She
was very ill, with injuries to her body, the loss of her eye.
She was unwilling to leave Japan without compensation for illness
and injury, to return to Korea. Her husband found the baby in a
military hospital. The baby was a year old, had large hole in
her side.

She was to attend school back in Korea, but had a headache all
the time, and light bothered her eyes. Her husband had cancer
from radiation. She had a second child, who had no bones. She
had a son, now 42 years old. Another daughter who is in poor
health, is now 29. She is unable to marry because of her health.
Her son is married, but is in poor health, suffering from
headaches.

She ate little so she could send her children to school. Her
children have poor health due to lack of food. She now supports
herself by selling vegetables. Her husband died 10 years ago.
Her first daughter became mentally disturbed, had brain damage
which resulted in loss of control of organs. Mother had to clean
up after her as well as take food up to the attic. She was
embarrassed because her daughter, in her mental state, would
scream for food. The mother often ate only flour mixed with
water; had not even rice. When the oldest daughter was school
age, she had no hair. Water was accumulating in her brain. She
earned money for the family because of her husband's cancer, had
to pay medical expenses, and care for children. She borrowed
money to exist; when creditors came to collect, she wanted to
drown herself, or run in front of a car, so her family could
receive compensation. She was unable to take her life in spite
of difficulties, because she didn't want to cause the driver of
the car to become a murderer, though she would have been happy to
die. She was compelled to pay back debts to alleviate feelings
of being a thief, taking without paying.

Her own injury, where her eye was lost, bled for years. She wore
a patch for years, but had surgery for implant of artificial eye.

Her son blames mother for lack of education beyond high school. She could only afford to send him through secondary education. He complains of being born in the wrong time.

In Japan, victims are classified in three categories: high, middle, and low priorities. She could only qualify for low priority, receiving little compensation; 26,500 yen or \$140 a month.

Her payments stopped when she returned to Korea. She was to receive monthly payments as long as she was receiving treatment. She was in Japan for 9 months last year. A portion of her allotment was to be for herself, but she saved every bit she could to repay debts.. She was able to save 300,000 won and paid debts, denying herself any 'extras.' She is still in debt and feels obligated to pay her own debts. Though she lives with her son who supports her financially, she continues to earn money herself. She has 1 million won to pay yet, so sells vegetables to earn money.

She struggles with the inequity of Japan's refusal to compensate greater, when Japan forced Koreans to move to Korea after the bombing. Japan is not open to negotiation with Korean government since the 1965 Japan-Korea agreement. The Japanese government consider it done and past. She wants to tell the story of her life because when her generation dies, there will be no one to tell the story.

The Story of Oh, Bok-sun (These stories are adapted from the Children of the Atom-Bomb, published by Church Women United, Korea, 1987)

She was born in 1938 at Hiroshima, Japan. During school, she was playing in the playground when a sudden stormy wind blew her down to the ground and her dress was completely torn away. When she regained her conscience, she found herself completely naked, and her head was bleeding badly. She heard someone yelling that the town was on fire, and she only remembered that her Japanese name was "Ayako." Her father was stricken to death on the road by the stormy wind, and she lost two brothers during the explosion. Her mother died right after returning to Korea with her five children when they settled at Masan city which was their parents' hometown. Her three older brothers joined the army during the Korean war, and she became the head of the household at the age of fourteen. She was responsible for her two younger brothers, aged ten and seven.

She started working at a textile factory at the age of seventeen and continued the job for over twenty years. She had been working for six years, when she found two round lumps on her throat which caused pain and developed into infection. The lumps turned out to be tuberculosis. On top of this problem, she had too much pain on her back to get to sleep and had to stop working for two months. By her neighbors' advice, she ate about 50 frogs to cure the infection in vain. Finally she went to see a foreign doctor at Yong-do island. The doctor diagnosed the symptom as a side effect of radiation from the atom-bomb explosion. This news was convincing and cleared her long lingering suspicion, but it did not accompany any solution.

In 1960 when she was twenty nine years old, her friend introduced her to Mr. So-sup Choi (age 37) who was a prisoner of the war. He proposed her for marriage, but she explained her ill health which would last throughout her life time. He comforted her by saying that he would help her to be cured and support her without any condition. She found herself at their wedding ceremony in a catholic chapel, where she stood with three bandages over her infected lumps, and she could not move her right arm because of the lump under her arm.

The next year, they had a premature baby born who died after a week. She continued with bloody flux and could not walk due to severe itching on her feet. She was completely immobilized and her health failing badly. Her husband gave her nursing and caring without any complaint, but she felt burdened by his sacrificial role. As soon as she could move around, she let for Seoul to get a job. Her husband followed her and gave her sufficient support and affection, but she could not continue her work at the textile factory any more. The infectious lump in her throat was so bad that she could not move her chin. Out of desperation, her husband spent hours praying at a nearby catholic church and tried to make living by selling old books.

He had met his uncle at the prison camp, but his uncle chose to return to north Korea, and he remained in south Korea. He was alone, away from his kin and needed consolation just as much. She was doubly sad for not being able to give her husband any consolation in her situation.

After their marriage, the catholic church congregation and the Mother Sister came to visit the couple and offered a medical treatment at the catholic hospital. Dr. Bong-eun Kim, a surgeon took charge of her problem and gave her an operation over three times without any charge. Since Dr. Kim was offering her a free medical treatment (which was against the hospital rule), after removing three lumps from her throat, he gave her three big towels to cover up the area and motioned her to walk away quietly. As she regained her health after such a long suffering, she was blessed with three children, two boys and a girl.

In the late summer of 1977, however, she had to face another disaster in her life: her husband was killed in a car accident while he was working in a brick factory. The factory paid her some money for compensation, but it was spent for his funeral and other related expenses. Now, she had to be responsible for her three children (ages of 10, 8, 6) all by herself, and she was overwhelmed by the unbearable sorrow and loneliness. Ever since, her voice turned husky and she has been having such a pain in her throat that she so often has to ease the pain by putting hot towel over her throat. Another side effect has developed in her: whenever she was attacked by her loneliness and longing for her husband, she would stop working and wander among crowded people and streets aimlessly. So often, she could not bring herself to remember her three children waiting for her comfort and care, and would forget to claim her wages also.

Her oldest child's teacher began to show concern for the family situation, and arranged the family to live in the Shin-rim dong Widow's Shelter which was a city-operated welfare organization to provide room, board and even educational expenses for those widows who had children under age twelve. While they were sheltered there for four years, she saved enough money from her noodle-vendor to occupy a rented house to move in.

Her daughter, Sung-hee who is a freshman in high school, described her mother's daily struggle as the following: "She gets up exactly ten after four every morning, and prepares our lunch boxes. She adds another lunch box for my brother who goes to the training school directly after his school. She leaves home around 6:30 a.m. so that she can reach her working place, a restaurant, after an hour. She earns around 180,000 won (about \$230) monthly. She is always lacking sleep, and often misses her bus stop while napping in the bus. Returning home late at night, she washes our clothes and checks whether we are all well. There is no other woman stronger than my mother."

To be the King of the Kingdom of the Fool

-The story of Han, Boo-sang -

I was in the first grade in elementary school. One day I ran home after school. The road to my home was on a slope that was narrow but clean. Upon reaching home, I remembered that in the morning a baby was about to be born. I was anxious to see a beautiful baby when I opened the door.

I could smell the cleanliness of the room, and I could see my mother lying with a baby next to her. Surprisingly, my mother's face was wet with tears, and I was quite concerned. When I looked at the baby, it was not what I had anticipated: he had a strange face with a big hole between his mouth and nose. I was afraid of the baby, and sat close to my mom.

My mother embraced me tightly and began to cry loudly. I could not stop crying for a while, then my mom said to me with a tearful voice, "Boo-sang, go get your grandmother."

I told my grand mother that mom had a baby and that he looked strange. She was quite concerned and followed me home by bus. When we went into the room and saw the baby, my mom began to cry again. My grandmother looked at the baby and told my mom, "Don't cry in front of children. We have gone through worse situation than this before." As she was comforting my mom, she had tears in her eyes also.

When my grandmother and father returned home that evening, they were worried about the cost of the operation for our baby.

"This is all my fault. My earning is so small and it is because I was hit by the explosion then," said my father who rarely expressed his feelings at home. He was too weak to work for full time, and my grandmother always assisted him doing his share of work.

"We have to take the baby to the hospital tomorrow," said my grand mother. I was happy to imagine that my baby brother would look normal after the operation. My grandmother and mother had gone to a hospital at Joong-ang dong and saw a doctor who told them that it would cost around 80,000 won (about \$100) for the operation. My grandmother had only 50,000 won in her savings from her hard work and appealed the doctor to accept the money for the time being and that she would pay the remainder later. The doctor, however, refused to do so.

I hated the doctor, and realized how powerful money could be. I made up my mind to become a doctor so that I could treat the poor people free of charge. I felt hostility toward people in the world and was very disappointed by our fate. Whenever I returned home, I looked at my baby brother's deformed face with pity and refused to go outside. It seemed even mysterious to

look in his throat throughout the hole in his mouth, and I would scream out of pity and say," Grandma, is there a way to sew up his lip with thread and needle? I ask this to you because it will take a long time before I become a doctor."

"Brother, look in my mouth. When I eat, the food must be sticking into the hole," Yoo-sang asked me. There I find a hole in his palate. He is now in the fifth grade,, and began to be conscious of his look. He has gone through surgery three times already. mending his hare-lip, gum and uvula at the Red-Cross Hospital. They anticipate another series of operation to mend his hole in the palate, and that would be so painful, poor little thing.

Now my decision for my future is clear-to become a specialist in medicine for the atom-bomb victims. This determination is almost a desperate outcry, watching each member of my family and their suffering. Going to the hospital without a penny and depending on the welfare of the donors and doctors is humiliating. All these realizations urge me to strive for becoming a special doctor for people like my family members.