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Korea: Secret Garden (1995)

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VIII. THE PLAN

Anticipating the landing in Korea, I began to review my notes, and went through my Korea folder. While putting the little deal together for John Kim's consultant, K. S. Lee, I had run across an organization called The Korea Society, which had offices in both New York and D.C. I first had learned of The Korea Society in Jakarta from a state department aide I met at the APEC meeting in November 1994. After some of its administrative staff learned about both my family and professional interests, I was placed on a variety of mailing lists; and the staff bent over backward to make me feel welcome.

There was even a suggestion I speak at New York University at a career day for Korean American/Korean students and join a panel of Korean and U.S. diplomats, and representatives from Sunkyung, Samsung, et al, to talk about "increasing economic & business opportunities in American and Korea." I begged off; way too much exposure. Besides, what did I know? I had joined as a way to establish communication links that might prove handy down the road—you never know.

Toward the middle of the year, after I learned more about the problems

our Qatar LNG marketing team was having dealing with Korea Gas Corporation, I realized joining The Korea Society had been on the button.

In Mobil, the immediate task was to replace the oil and gas reserves—and income—that would be lost when the Arun field in Indonesia began to deplete in 1997. E&P's frontier exploration strategy had failed; and the drive to create strategic alliances with new producing countries was slow. The initial optimism that greeted the fall of the Soviet Union had fallen off sharply as gangsters and old bureaucrats stifled reforms and hard currency deals. After all, this frustration was the root driver for the new chairman's SRP and corporate reengineering.

The brightest spot in E&P's (and Mobil's) future remained Qatar, the tiny emirate whose peninsula pointed into the Persian Gulf like a thumb from the Arabian Peninsula and which is home to the North Field, the largest natural gas field ever discovered. Shell, which had discovered the field two decades earlier, had been thrown out of the country for insolence. Shell was replaced by British Petroleum, which, by 1991, also had been forced to ankle. In the Middle East, one must be careful how one treats sheiks and emirs—if you want oil and gas, that is. Mobil prides itself on such acumen.

Qatar's North Field, reported to be as big as 1,000 trillion cubic feet, dwarfed Mobil's giant and profitable Arun field, whose own massive proportions were, in comparison, a paltry 15 trillion cubic feet. With Shell and BP out of the country, Humphrey, chief of Mobil's E&P, its LNG experience in Indonesia its greatest asset, had pulled a rabbit out the hat in 1992, inking a joint-venture deal with the Qatar General Petroleum Corporation to exploit the giant North Field.

The deal eventually called for the development of two separate LNG enterprises; Mobil taking 10 percent in one, called Qatargas, and 30 percent in the other, called Ras Laffan LNG Company. To make these projects go, however, you must have customers. And that's where Korea came in.

First some background: Mobil Oil Indonesia operates under a number of production sharing contracts, called PSCs, with Pertamina, the Indonesian state oil and gas enterprise. The largest PSC, of course, is in Aceh Province, in northernmost Sumatra, where Mobil discovered the Arun natural gas field in 1971. The Arun field of 15 trillion cubic feet was developed to produce LNG from the PT Arun plant, delivering LNG to Japanese customers in 1978.

In 1986, Pertamina signed a supply contract with Korea Gas Corporation. In the decade since, Korea Gas's purchases from Indonesia have increased to the level of 5.1 million tons of LNG per year. Korea Gas currently purchases a total of 7.0 million tons of LNG a year, most from Indonesia, with other sources from Brunei and Malaysia.

But the demand for more energy in Korea is huge. Korea Gas says it wants to buy more LNG, projecting annual LNG demands in Korea to grow

3 million tons in 1996, to 15 million tons by 2000, and 22 million tons by 2006. This is a staggering amount of LNG. To satisfy this demand, Korea Gas in 1993 had signed a Letter of Intent with Mobil and Qatar to purchase up to 2.4 million and perhaps as much as 5 million tons of LNG a year from the newly-formed Ras Laffan LNG joint venture in which Mobil owned 30 percent. If this deal can developed in time, E&P would be cementing a commercial deal that eventually would replace Arun easy, and more.

The 5 million ton threshold was important, because 2.4 million tons was equal to the output of one LNG processing “train,” or plant. And for a startup LNG processing plant, such as the one needed for Ras Laffan LNG Company, to make the joint venture economic would require two “trains.” So having Korea Gas take on all 5 million tons was critical for the project economics.

Now in 1995, the talks with Korea Gas to lock in the 2.4 million tons were slowing down. Even worse, competing LNG ventures elsewhere were tempting Korea Gas away from Mobil’s project in Qatar, and risking the chance that Korea Gas would purchase up to 5 million tons from the Mobil’s project in Qatar. E&P needed to replace Arun and do it by making sure the Qatari LNG projects had enough customers to make the Qatari projects as wet as possible as soon as possible. The drive for the E&P group trying to develop this project was to get the Korean deal nailed down, tight hard leak-proof and now.

Though E&P and its staff functions were the target of the new chairman’s SRP hit men, I figured helping cement a “company maker” business link with Korea should settle any question about whether a guy like me was worth keeping around. Like I said, that was the plan anyway.

IX. THE FORGOTTEN WAR

Headline writers call the war fought in Korea between 1950 and 1953 “The Forgotten War,” branding it as one would a product requiring market differentiation from other, better remembered, wars. Yet, if the wider community has trouble recalling the details, some have no trouble at all. For them, the events leading up to the so-called forgotten war, the war itself and the events that would cascade in its wake, created a memory that must be endured every single moment forever.

While I was beginning to piece together the Asia trip, my mother-in-law, Yung Ja (Lee) Murdock, called her sole surviving daughter, Sun Oak, Thursday afternoon, July 27, 1995. Living in Florida, Yung Ja had been spent a sleepless night, again, had been crying most of the day and was reaching out to her daughter living in Northern Virginia.

“What’s the matter,” Sun Oak asked.

“Today is Sun Soon’s birthday,” Yung Ja said, referring to Sun Oak’s sis-

ter, who had died at age 14. "Sun Soon-E would have been 50."

Yung Ja was unaware of any other anniversary. She did not know that very day was the 42nd anniversary of the Korean War Armistice, and on that day in Washington, D.C., President Clinton and South Korean President Kim Young Sam appeared together to dedicate the new Korean War Memorial. She did not know that etched into the polished wall of the newly dedicated Memorial was the legend: Freedom Is Not Free.

History will not remember her daughter, Sun Soon Kim, as one of those who paid the price of freedom. Her name is not listed among the war dead. Rather, Sun Soon will be remembered by a handful of loved ones in her family as a 14-year-old girl who died of, what, a broken heart, poverty, despair, ignorance, fear, shame, a family disgrace...?

Her mother, Yung Ja, had married an American and gone to America, promising to get established and send for her two daughters first thing. But the older daughter, Sun Soon, who long suffered from chronic ear infections, listened to schoolyard taunts that her ailment would prevent her from immigration. Believing she was unable to escape the shame of living in a town that knew her mother had married an American, and believing she could not escape to America herself, Sun Soon purchased poison from the local pharmacy. Days after her mother left, Sun Soon swallowed the poison and died in convulsions with Sun Oak and her family powerless to do anything but have this tragic horror burned into their memories forever.

My wife, Sun Oak Kim, was 12 when her sister died. Sun Oak's life changed forever. With her father missing since the war, her sister dead, her mother gone to America, Sun Oak relied on the grace of her grandparents and an uncle in a small town on the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula until she was able to come to America two years later, in 1963. We met in Boston in 1969. After a quarter-century of marriage, bi-cultural family gatherings in the U.S. and Hawaii, and a trip by our Lee and Micah to Korea and Japan, language lessons, cultural awareness, history discussions, countless meals of kimchi and other Korean food, the world of Korea has long been a daily reality in our home.

Two days after Yung Ja's call and the dedication of the war memorial, Sun Oak and I took our children, Lee and Micah, to Washington to pay respects. It was more than 90 degrees that dry Saturday afternoon; the grass and dirt of the Mall kicked dust up easily. We found the Korean War Memorial located on a 2.2-acre site in the northeast corner of the Mall in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial, in the corner across from the Vietnam Memorial.

The centerpiece of the memorial was 19 free-standing statues, somewhat larger than life, depicting 14 American troops, 3 Marines, a Navy medic and an air forward observer, wearing helmets and ponchos, as if they were moving from a wood through a cold wind toward an American flag flying above

a reflecting pool. Alongside these statues was a 164-foot wall containing the images of nurses, chaplains, crew chief, mechanics, cooks, helmsmen and others etched by laser into its polished granite surface, giving the wall a nearly three dimensional quality, as you see your own image reflected among the veterans. At the center of the memorial next to the flag and reflecting pool is the legend: Freedom Is Not Free.

From Sunday June, 25, 1950, when the North Korean army crossed the 38th Parallel to invade the South, through the cease-fire at 10 a.m. July 28, 1953, the war in Korea claimed the lives of an estimated 1.4 million in the army of the Republic of Korea in the South; and another million civilians killed. Some 600,000 North Korean and Chinese armed forces were killed in action. The U.S. lost 54,246 lives. An additional 103,284 Americans were wounded, 7,140 were taken as prisoners of war; another 8,177 are still missing.

On the plane to northeast Asia, such moments of quiet reflection occurred, as they always do, in the midst of life in other, more immediate and more modern, worlds. Now on the job, with a new chairman's regime questioning everything, the work at hand was staying ahead of the reengineers and downsizers by doing what I could to make a "company-maker" deal happen.

Yet the whispers of ghosts continued to intrude. In the final moments before our 8:50 p.m. landing at Seoul's Kimpo Airport, I looked out the window at the illuminated city below and heard the echo of history. It happened that the previous day—September 15—had marked the 45th anniversary of the Inchon invasion, one of the most momentous military movements in modern times.

U.S. General Douglas MacArthur led 70,000 United Nations troops into Korea through Inchon, a maneuver costing but 20 lives, and wounding only 200. At the time of the Inchon flanking maneuver, the forces of North Korea's Kim Il Sung had taken just three months to come south of the 38th Parallel, overrun the ROK and U.S. forces, and force the allies behind a small perimeter around Pusan in the south. The Inchon invasion would occur in a narrow channel, amid mud flats, with 40-foot tides, and during only a three-hour window when the sea was deep enough to handle the invasion force. The invasion had to begin in the dark. MacArthur dismissed the pessimists who said it couldn't be done.

"I can hear the second hand of destiny," Gen. MacArthur told doubters. "We shall land at Inchon and I shall crush them."

With MacArthur's invasion, Inchon—originally settled in 1883 to be the Hermit Kingdom's Yellow Sea port to the rest of Asia—would become a vehicle to prevent South Korea's forcible union with nut cakes working for Moscow. With his successful maneuver at Inchon, MacArthur took back the U.N. initiative—placing a superior force behind the North Korean forces; in effect, cutting them off. For two weeks after the night-time invasion, 20,000

U.S. Marines fought along a 40-klick road to reach Seoul.

On September 30, MacArthur stood astride the rubble of the capitol building in Seoul. Exclaimed the general: “By the grace of Providence, our forces fighting under the standard of the greatest hope and inspiration of mankind, the United Nations, have liberated this ancient capital city of Korea.”

Now, 45 years later, Inchon is a city of a million and South Korea’s link to Dalian and Tianjin in Mainland China. Wolmi-do, aka Moon Tail Island, where U.S. Marines slogged through mud flats, is now a broad seafront promenade. Visible on the walkway is a 30-foot statue of MacArthur constructed in 1957, and a replica of the Statue of Liberty. Students protest to get the statues torn down.

X.ARRIVAL

Some things have changed in the 45 years, but not everything. Much remains the same. The terminal at Kimpo, Seoul’s airport, was a low-down structure, with dull gray-beige colors, giving the setting a distinct military feel. The clerks behind the customs and passport processing desks were—if not welcoming—efficient, expressionless and perfunctory. Entering such a place was a routine, no big deal, no beauty, all business. After checking quickly through immigration and customs, I went to the change desk to get some \$40 in Korean won, and entered the open reception area behind the closed doors.

My anxiety level quickened. Meeting Sun Oak’s cousins was at hand. Had they gotten the message about my time? Would I be met? Which one is which, would I recognize...?

Sure enough, a bit older, was Jae Ee Lee, who at that moment was looking for me. I imagine I wasn’t hard to recognize. Jae Ee smiled genuinely, and I waved in return. Jae Ee called to his daughters, Sun Hwa and Sun Kyung, walking several gates away, and to Wan Soo, his son-in-law. Wan Soo, married to Sun Kyung, was carrying Soo Bin, the couple’s baby daughter, in a front baby pouch. The little girl had just celebrated her 100-day ceremony, a traditional family milestone for an infant. Soo Bin had a little gold ring on her finger in honor of her day.

In greeting, it was taboo, of course, to hug; much too forward. The protocol required us all to just stand there, perhaps lightly touching each others’ arms, smiling and sharing a common emotion. I had last seen Jae Ee in Fairfax, when he visited for a week several years before. He had suffered from acute jet lag and slept a lot. But our visit was pleasant. He came away believing Lee and Micah were superstars, and since then demanded photos and news of their growth regularly. As a family, we had last seen Sun Oak’s first cousins, Sun Hwa and Sun Kyong, and her husband Wan Soo, in Hawaii in 1994. Soo Bin, the baby, of course, was new. But we took no time

to enjoy our feeling of mutual family. Seeing them here, half a world from my home, I was overcome with a wave of genuine affection; choking us all up momentarily.

We struggled along with the language. I spoke virtually no Korean, though Wan Soo, particularly, and the cousins spoke a little English. But in time we all got the picture. Some parts of the conversation turned hilarious, as all of us tried to fit into the small Hyundai sedan. Though I can't recall what precisely was so funny, our various facial expressions and attempts to communicate enabled us all to enjoy belly-shaking laughter at several points as we made our way to the hotel downtown.

The urban turf on the ride into town had the feel of Queens. Seoul had a strong veneer of influence of the American culture. But it's not Madison Avenue. Try Hillside Avenue, Jamaica, with a strong hint of Pentagon BX. The airport, roads and street signs have the look of a strong, mature city with the flash of a military camp. Not surprising, since Seoul had been the front line in the Cold War for nearly 50 years.

We drove north on Yanghwa Bridge over the Han River into the center of town, through crowded streets. On the 40-minute, 16-klick drive in from Kimpo, we passed dozens of buses and, at several intervals, hundreds of people lined up patiently waiting to get aboard. Wan Soo explained the buses were waiting to take home the hundreds of out-of-town protestors who attended that afternoon's mass demonstrations held to demand the prosecution of those behind the 1980 massacre at Kwangju.

Though the demonstration was long over, thousands of cops dressed in gray fatigues, and outfitted with riot helmets, clubs and heavy steel shields with slit holes for vision, stood along the sidewalks at the ready as we drove by.

We parked in the underground parking at the Westin Chosen, a first-rate modern hotel on the top of a rise tucked amid downtown office towers at 87, Sokong-dong, Chung-Ku. We made our way to my Room at 1420, where I put away my things; we all took turns freshening up. It was past 10 p.m. and we were all a bit hungry.

We went downstairs and had two choices: a modest sandwich shop or a pub called O'Kim's. See, Koreans are often called the Irish of Asia, owing to the transparency of their moods, emotional directness, and unexpected flashes of charm. Another reason, of course, is the Japan/Korea relationship is a mirror for England/Ireland. Both are prisoners of their geography, and the willingness of one to organize for the purpose of aggression (Japan-England), with the other (Korea-Ireland) refusing to organize into a ruthless force yet also refusing to be conquered. Over the generations, however, with relations continuing, economies integrating, the peoples' intermarrying and living in each others' country, the love-hate tangle becomes so dense, it is hard to imagine one without the other. Thus the O'Kim's name of the pub in the first floor. (Get it?)

But we passed up O'Kim's and made for the more modest snack shop, where we ate so-so chow and drank diet Coke, while making plans for Sunday.

XI. FAMILY REUNION

On Sunday, September 17, after a fitful sleep, I got down to the lobby about 10 a.m. and found Jae Ee and the cousins waiting. As we greeted each other across the hallway, a sturdy man wearing casual weekend clothes you'd find in Pittsburgh came over to me with his hand extended. The family resemblance was so strong, I recognized him right off. I saw Sun Oak in his eyes, the same sense of reality—as if the same person was at home. This was an odd familiarity; his manner was as easy as pie. His face was the face of my wife, Sun Oak—the coal black eyes, the strong cheek bones, the wide jaw, the slightly tanned complexion. He was dressed in white Coogi denims, with vest and sports shirt, and wore a white baseball style golf cap over what I knew was a bald head. He was built strong, trim, wide.

Jae Ee was saying his name, Kee Jong Ee, in introduction. A few years before, he had been good to Lee and Micah, who both said they thought he was terrific during their visit to Seoul. On my first attempt, I tried but failed to get the pronunciation of his name just right: Kee Jong versus Kee Jang.

“Just call me K.J.,” he quickly said, in an excellent American accent. No language problem here. Kee Jong Ee possessed all the ease, confidence and brevity one would expect from someone accustomed to dealing with Americans who didn't get things just right. But I'd fool him. On my next pass, I got the Kee CHAWng Ee, down, I think, enough to pass muster.

About 60, Kee Jong Ee was Sun Oak's cousin, the grandson of Sun Oak's grandfather's brother and, though a dozen years older, of the same generation. Kee Jong Ee's parents had died early, and his grandfather was older than Koon Wu, Sun Oak's grandfather. In the Confucian way of the Yangban class in Soon Chun, this meant Kee Jong Ee's family had everything a bit better, being upper in the family hierarchy. The problem was that his grandfather died shortly after his parents and Kee Jong Ee was orphaned, and only rescued from oblivion when taken in by Sun Oak's grandparents. He was close to Sun Oak in her childhood, like an older brother. When he became a teenager Koon Wu asked Yung Ja in Seoul to take him in, which she did, making Kee Jong Ee's later success possible. Kee Jong Ee lived with Yung Ja at her house in Seoul, where she helped him enroll in an English language school run by the U.S. Army. In Soon Chun, meanwhile, his sister, Kee Nam Ee, who was like a sister to Sun Oak, had an arranged marriage. But she became unhappy. She killed herself. To call this tragic doesn't quite translate. Tragic, yes, leaving behind broken hearts that never heal and memories that cause tears to well up at a moment's notice decades later. But tragic even more for how common such a final solution was for one so unhappy; so ordinary, so expected, so routine.

XII. CHOSUN

When somebody said that land is destiny, they had in mind the people of the Korean Peninsula, who find themselves on land attached to the continental expanse occupied by Chinese, bordering mainlands occupied by Russians and across the water from a somewhat nervous, expansionist people called Japanese. The land called Korea points like a knife south toward the islands the Japanese believe is the center of the universe. A shorthand way of understanding Korean political history is to imagine the great Chinese, Russian and Japanese peoples all vying for authority, each distrusting the other, and all considering control of the land link that is the Korean Peninsula crucial to their security and identity.

The people who came to occupy the peninsula in the mists are descendants of several Mongol tribes, distinct from modern Chinese and Japanese, who had migrated from present day Manchuria and fused into a homogeneous ethnic group. These peoples who came to rest in Korea brought with them a language that belongs—like Hungarian and Finnish—to the Ural-Altai language group, whose origins are from central Asia. These people would contend with the fears of their neighbors throughout history and resist—to their core—each and every attempt to control their lot.

These people tell themselves their mythical origins began long ago when Hwanung, a heavenly being, spoke with his father, Hwanin, the King of Heaven, of his desire to rule the land of the humans. Hwanin sent Hwanung to Earth with 3,000 subjects, arriving at the base of a sandalwood tree on Mount T'aebaek. One day a bear and a tiger came to the new ruler and begged to be turned into humans. Hwanung gave them mugwort and garlic, telling them if they ate nothing else and avoided the sun for 100 days, their wish would become true. The tiger was impatient and unable to last 100 days and ran away. The bear persevered for the full period and changed into a woman. She was called Ungnyo, the “bear woman,” and she married Hwanung and bore him a son, Tan-gun, who was the legendary founder of Korea.

Tan-gun founded the nation called Chosun on the third day of the 10th month of 2333 BC. Tan-gun's ruling family were called Han, who presided over the era called Tan-gi. By 1,000 BC, the nation known as Han Chosun prospered in the Taedong valley of Northern Korea. Korea entered the Bronze Age around 400 BC, and the present territory of Korea was fixed during the Chosun period. Today's Koreans consider their country nearly 5,000 years old.

The agricultural period of Ancient Chosun was dominated by Korea's shamanism. Until about 57 BC, the peninsula was ruled by the Three Kingdoms: Koguryo, Paekche, and Shilla. This period saw the introduction of Chinese culture and Buddhism, which merged with shamanist traditions. The Three Kingdoms ruled for somewhat overlapping periods until they were unified under Shilla in 676 AD. During the 10th century, Shilla fell to the Koryo

Dynasty which unified the peninsula in 935 AD; it was this culture that first became known in the West, which is how Korea got its name. Buddhism was dominant during these periods.

In 1388, late in the Koryo period, General Yi Song-gye was ordered to take armies north to drive Ming forces occupying a former Mongol fortress. General Yi knew the Ming forces were too strong and any allegiance to the Mongols was folly. While at the Yalu River, General Yi decided he wouldn't go after the Mings, and instead turned his armies south, overpowered its defenders and exiled the royal family. In 1392, Koryo gave way to the Choson dynasty. General Yi instituted land reform and declared himself king, the first of 27 Yi rulers.

A blend of Korean shamanism, Buddhism and traditional Confucianism fused with pragmatism to form the basis for the Korean culture during the Chosun Dynasty, which came to revere teaching the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, decorum and wisdom. During this period scholarship, education and inventions flourished. The Choson Dynasty would last until Japan annexed Korea in 1910, beginning the nation's 35-year nightmare.

Every people have achievements of which they remain proud. Korea, too. Though known in the West as the Hermit Kingdom, Korea was a pioneer in the first communications technology: writing and printing. The world's oldest example of woodblock printing is a sutra printed from woodblocks sometime before the reign of King Kyongdok of Shilla in the 8th century AD. The first printing using metal type was produced in the Koryo Dynasty in the 12th century, and in the year 1234, two centuries before Gutenberg's Bible appeared in Europe, Korean artisans devised the first printing using moveable metal type. The world's oldest book printed with moveable metal type still in existence was printed during the Koryo Dynasty in 1377.

Before the 15th century, Korea has no alphabet of its own and most documents were printed in Chinese. If Koreans wanted to write in Korean they were forced to use a cumbersome writing called idu. In 1443, Sejong the Great, the 4th King in the Chosun dynasty (1392-1910), instructed scholars to come up with a solution. After three years of study, the scholars' devised Han-gul (meaning the one script or great script) set out in a book called: The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People. Han-gul originally had 28 characters, but four eventually fell into disuse. Today, linguists east and west say Han-gul is the most precise, versatile, simplest yet subtle writing system ever devised.

Korea's oldest cultural artifacts, its earliest art, are decorated pottery dating back to a Neolithic 3000 BC. Korea, its land its destiny, was a bridge between China and Japan. And in the 6th century, Korean monks, scholars and artists went to Japan bringing traditions and art forms that survive in Japanese culture, though today's Japan doesn't like to remember its Korean

origins. Korean celadons, the kingfisher colored porcelains of the Koryo era, are among the world's most beautiful pottery. Korean painters reinvigorated Chinese landscape painting in the 18th century.

Traditional Korean costume for the women is called a hanbok, a high waisted billowing dress with a short-waisted upper jacket, and printed in a rainbow of colors. Men's traditional clothing by contrast is white. Men wear wide trouser pants, a vest and magoja (jacket) indoors and put on a turumagi (coat) and an undersized horsehair stovepipe hat when going outside. These traditional clothes are still used at formal gatherings and special occasions, such as Sunday outings.

The flags of most countries display a political or nationalist spirit. The Korean flag invites people to contemplate the meaning of the universe. In the center is the ancient Yin-Yan symbol of the universe in perfect balance and harmony, with red atop representing Yang, the blue below representing Yin. Surrounding this circle are a combination of four sets of three bars conveying ideas of opposites and balance: the three unbroken lines in the Northwest representing heaven; the three broken lines in the Southeast—earth; three bars with center bar broken in the Southwest—fire; with broken outer bars and solid center bar in the Northeast—water.

The emotional heart of the Korean family is the traditional home and the food shared around a circle on a warm floor. The traditional food was of seven courses, plus rice, with the favored dish called kimchi, the pickled cabbage concoction with a variety of spices, vegetables, meat or shrimp, red peppers, garlic and ginger. This fermented dish—often accompanied by a pungent odor—has become a national obsession, a cultural standard so compelling Koreans view life as incomplete without kimchi.

The homes have a distinctive tile roof whose edges are curled up to protect the walls from the elements. The home is a U or L shaped structure surrounded by a hard packed dirt courtyard behind a high gate. The home's main living area has segregated areas for men and women, as well as common dining areas, all connected by hallways. Koreans devised a unique heating system called ondol, where flat stones were installed beneath the floor to retain heat. These stones were heated through a wood, straw fire outside which forced heated air through a ductwork under the floor of the home. The family sat on the warm bare floor, huddled together, over the brazier, which roasted food and treats.

Japan crushed this dream for millions of Koreans forever. In 1895, Japanese murdered Korea's Queen Min because she opposed Japan's growing influence in her country. Koreans turned to Russia for protection, heightening tensions between Russia and Japan, and leading to the Russo-Japanese War, which Russia, in effect, lost. Korea proclaimed neutrality, and President Theodore Roosevelt won the Nobel Prize for the Portsmouth

Peace Conference, in which he brokered the end of the Russo-Japanese War in August 1905. But U.S. Secretary of State Taft and Japanese Foreign Minister Katsura negotiated a side letter (disclosed later, in the 1920s) in which the U.S. promised to recognize Japan's prerogatives over Korea if the Japanese stayed out of the Philippines. The Taft-Katsura Pact, in effect, sold Korea out.

Emboldened, the Japanese encroachment between 1905 and 1910 continued, as Japan met Korean armed resistance with violent, brutal repression. Korean leaders were forced to sign many agreements, paving the way for formal annexation. With the Japanese military nearby, the Korean Peninsula became a "protectorate." Japan then dissolved the Korean Army and drafted the 1910 annexation treaty, which a Korean stooge signed. Then came 35 years of hell so brutal and still so remembered, that nothing in Korea today can be understood unless through that prism. This was a rape of Korea's national consciousness too complete to forgive.

XIII. KOON WU

Yung Ja's father, named Koon Wu Lee, was born in 1882 in Soon Chun in the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula. Though of the Confucian Yangban class of artisans, professionals and civil servants, Koon Wu was the third son of his father's third wife, and so low in the family hierarchy, he occupied a station too modest for an education. Only eldest sons needed to obtain an education and thus protect parents. Younger boys in a family were uneducated; Koon Wu never learned to read or write.

As a young man, he was agile and strong, and possessed an independent spirit. When Koon Wu came of age, he inherited 50 acres of farmland, but he had no interest in working the land. He leased the land to tenants and invested in a variety of enterprises and schemes, among them a salt business.

His salt enterprise required Koon Wu to walk over the wooded hills to the coast where he would arrange to bag salt and get it hauled back to Soon Chun. Often he did this himself, carrying the bagged salt on the return trip on his back. In those days, long before Japanese hunters wiped them out, the Korean countryside was the province of tigers. These legendary predators were featured in the early stories told to every youngster as a warning to stay in the village and never wander off; otherwise a tiger would pounce and they would never be heard again. This children's tale was more than a just a myth. Tigers occupied a place of respect but also terror; they struck fear in the hearts of the people.

On one particular day, when 21-year-old Koon Wu was returning to Soon Chun alone after picking up his load of salt, he encountered one of these animals in the forest. Armed with just a knife, Koon Wu slew the fearsome tiger after a struggle. When Koon Wu returned to Soon Chun with the

giant animal across his back, his reputation as a man of standing and respect was sealed.

In 1907 Koon Wu married Wul Kuk Lee, who was born in 1887 in Kwang Yang, a village located 10 miles from Soon Chun. Their first son, named Saeg E, born in 1914, was a tall, strong, handsome boy, while their second son, Chang E, born in 1918, was a smaller, less robust boy. A year later, their older son died from fever, breaking their parents' hearts. For Koon Wu, however, the spirit seemed to go out him. He gambled, wandered the countryside; his enterprises failed. He had to sell his property to pay debts. In a village nearby, he took a mistress, who would bear him a son, Chun Ye.

Koon Wu tried to keep his grip, and he and Wul Kuk had a daughter, Chung Dok Hango Ja (whose Japanese name was Sachiko—Happy Child) in 1923. But the family was destitute. At the time, Korea was in the vice of Imperial Japan, and opportunity was limited for any Korean in his or her own land.

In 1925, Koon Wu went alone to Kyoto, Japan. He lived in a boarding house in a Korean enclave and worked over time as a laborer, digging ditches, in construction, in a textile dying factory, and in a restaurant. He saved his money and, in January 1928, his wife, Wul Kuk, son Chang Ye, 9, and daughter Chung Dok, 4, joined him in Kyoto. On November 20, 1928, their second daughter, Yung Ja, was born and three years later another son, Jae Ee.

In Japan there was considerable prejudice against Koreans. The Lee family lived in a section of Kyoto in ghetto-like conditions, banding together as best they could.

Koon Wu's Yangban class and the reputation he had established from the tiger incident permitted him to occupy a position of leadership in Kyoto's Korean community. He was called on to exercise that position later in 1928 during an earthquake that struck Tokyo and Yokohama. Though not as severe as the quake five years before which claimed the lives of 143,000, the 1928 earthquakes set a rash of looting and rioting. For some reason the townspeople of Tokyo and other cities blamed Koreans for the quake and the fires that followed. Korean sections in Tokyo, Kobe, Osaka were overrun by Japanese mobs who indiscriminately burned Korean residences and murdered men, women and children. The carnage claimed the lives of thousands.

Word of the rioting reached Kyoto, where Koreans feared for their lives. A neighborhood meeting was held at which Koon Wu was selected to go to the police and assure cops that there would be no rioting in Kyoto and that Koreans expected the authorities to prevent any Japanese attacks in the Korean neighborhood. The details of the conversations were unknown, but the result was that no rioting occurred on either side in Kyoto, unlike other Japanese cities.

Koon Wu later found work in a silk-dying factory enabling the Lee fam-

ily to live a modest but safe life in Kyoto. Koon Wu was eager for his children to be educated. He lamented his inability to read and write. "I have eyes but cannot see," he would tell his children, insisting they attend school despite the prejudice against them. The Lee children, who never had close friends among the Japanese, learned to fend for themselves.

By that time, Japan's attempts to dominate Asia were underway. In 1931, Japanese armies overran Manchuria, seizing the province and setting up a puppet regime, renaming the province Manchukuo. In the coming decade, Japanese occupation forces imported thousands of Koreans, Japanese and other Asians to Manchuria to build and work in iron and coal mines, steel mills, railways, refineries, power stations and on roads and other public works. Schools and factories in Japan, meanwhile, were fed a constant stream of propaganda about Japan's widening war in Asia, the victories of its troops and the destiny of the Japanese people.

Koon Wu's elder daughter, Chong Dok, was raped in Kyoto as a teenager and became pregnant. A son was born. Koon Wu forced her to give up her illegitimate son, breaking his daughter's heart. (She never forgot her son. Years later, Chong Dok would stand at the fence at her son's school yard in nearby Kobe and watch the boy play.) Koon Wu arranged to have Chong Dok marry a Korean who worked for a road construction company in Manchuria, in Japanese occupied China, where Chung Dok moved with her husband in the early 1943.

In Japan, Koon Wu sensed the inevitable, and worried his family in Kyoto might be caught in the American bombing raids that would inevitably come. Meanwhile, in Manchuria, Chung Dok had met a colleague of her husband named Chung Kuk Kim, who was born March 4, 1923, in the town of Keumneung, in the Kyungsang-Pukdo province in southern Korea. Chung Kuk's parents were Kim Sung Hwa and wife, Soon-Yi, whose family originated from the town of Kimhae, north of Pusan. (Ironically, Chung Kuk in Korean, means Man from China.)

In early 1944, Koon Wu and his family left Japan for good, ostensibly for the arranged marriage of Yung Ja to Chung Kuk Kim in their hometown of Soon Chun. The ceremony was held in Soon Chun on March 10.

XIV. ADMIRAL YI

The guidebooks say there are 360 different family names used in Korea. Most, it seems, fall into the Park, Kim, Lee, Moon varieties. In our case, we have only the Lee and Kims to deal with, which makes things simple. To be in the same clan you have to have the same family name and have the same place or origin, or pon-gwan, and a sub clan is called your p'a. In Sun Oak's case, her father's place of origin was Kimhae, north of Pusan. Her father's mother was named Soon-Yi, who came from the same area.

Yi is another form of the names Lee, Rhee and Ee, which get their English spellings depending on who is translating. Since I am a history and genealogy nut, Soon-Yi's name strikes my fancy. The George Washington of modern Korea is Admiral Yi Sun-shin, of the 16th century, who devised the first armor-plated naval craft, the Turtle Boat, which helped defeat a Japanese navy in 1592. His military skills were such that even the Japanese military studies him and his tactics far into the modern age. Admiral Yi's massive statue dominates Seoul in heroic fashion in the boulevard dividing Seoul's ceremonial main drag where all important national buildings are located.

Between Pusan and Yosu, along the coast of southern Korea of Chungmu in the area called the Hallyo Waterway, is Admiral Yi's country, where several major islands provide a buffer from heavy weather. It was here when Japanese armies under Hideyoshi invaded Korea in 1592, that the defending Korean military commander, Admiral Yi Sun-shin, and using unique naval tactics and The Turtle Boat, the world's first iron-clad ship, successfully engaged the Japanese fleet in a campaign of naval engagements in 1592-1593 still studied today for their military brilliance.

The distinctive Korean warship took its name from the iron cover placed over the crew and ship to protect them during battle. Using matchlock muskets that far outclassed Korean weapons, however, Japanese troops marched up the peninsula and reached Seoul within two weeks. Through skill, daring and knowledge of his surroundings, Admiral Yi was able to maneuver his vessels and armed forces enough to harass and eventually defeat the invading naval forces of Japan. The Mings in China, fearing Japan, sent troops to help Korea. Admiral Yi was killed in 1593 by a Japanese sniper during the final battle that drove the Japanese invaders home.

Of course, Sun Oak's mother is Yung Ja Lee, whose family comes from the Chollanamdo area, as her father, Koon Wu Lee, was from Soon Chun, and mother, Wul Kuk Lee, originally from the village of Kwangyang nearby.

All were from Admiral Yi's home area, as was Sun Oak's paternal grandmother, Soon-Yi, who shared the same name and spelling with the heroic admiral. Same clan? From where I sit, it's close enough.

XV. CHINA MAN

No matter the status of this distant and honorable ancestor, more than four centuries later, the Lee family rather than return to Japan in 1944 remained in Soon Chun, in Japan-occupied Korea, while newlyweds, Yung Ja and Chung Kuk, went to Manchuria where Chung Kuk resumed work with the Japanese road builders.

In early 1945, the allied war against Japan was having its effect. American bombs were destroying Japan's links with its military in China, isolating the troops and the civilians with them. Civil order began breaking down in

Manchuria. The Chinese began to massacre the isolated Japanese and Koreans in their midst, military and civilian alike.

Amid the disorder, Yung Ja gave birth July 27, 1945, to daughter Sun Soon. The Russian army invaded Manchuria. Five days after giving birth, Yung Ja and her newborn and husband were able to escape south on the last train to Korea. For a week, the young family traveled in a cattle car with hundreds of others, with no food or water. Sanitary conditions were foul. The family finally reached Soon Chun August 9. The world around them was in chaos: the Americans had dropped the first nuclear bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, and on August 8 the Soviets declared war on Japan, its advancing army reached deep into Manchuria. On the day of their arrival in Soon Chun, the Americans dropped its second nuclear bomb on Nagasaki. Japanese in Korea were in a panic.

On September 2, the U.S. accepted Japan's surrender. Under an agreement worked out with the Soviet Union, the Soviets took control of Korea north of the 38th Parallel, and the U.S. took responsibility for administering Korea to the south. Within months, the boundary between the Soviet and U.S. administrative districts solidified, dividing Korea into two countries. Korea was in ruins. For more than 35 years, the Japanese had run everything, all public services, the utilities, the economy, the government. Now, abruptly, the Japanese were gone and the war-weary Americans assigned to the Korean occupation were ill-equipped to deal with the people and their blighted country.

The months ahead were hard. At first Yung Ja and Chung Kuk lived with Chung Dok and her family, but the dwelling was too crowded and food scarce. In time, Yung Ja and her husband settled in a home abandoned by a Japanese businessman. Yung Ja gave birth to a second daughter, Sun Oak, in late 1947/early 1948. (Because of the lunar calendar, it's hard to be sure of the exact day.) There was little food. Often the only food Yung Ja and her children had was the powdered milk distributed free by the U.S. As a liquid, the milk made them sick. So they fashioned the milk powder into a meal to bake into a nutritious biscuit, preventing starvation and saving their lives.

Beggars roamed the countryside. Neighbors were starving to death. The wandering living collapsed into the dead at roadside in the night hours. Bodies of strangers were found in the morning light.

Chung Kuk tried to find work with the railroad and failed. For a time, he traveled to Seoul, purchased rubber shoes and brought them back to Soon Chun to sell, using the meager profits to support his family. Finally, he applied for work as a member of the Soon Chun Police Department. He passed the test and in time was promoted to sergeant and then lieutenant.

Korea was in ferment. Among the refugees in the south were Reds. Some gathered a following, who turned to terrorism and sabotage. The government

of the south, the Republic of Korea, created after the U.N. election on May 10, 1948, ordered local cops to jail anyone known to sympathize with the North. Many arrested were hardened revolutionaries. Others were caught up in events they knew little about.

In Soon Chun, Lt. Kim did his duty and arrested those suspected of favoring the North. Unlike other cops, he allowed the families of some of the prisoners to visit their jailed relatives to deliver food, clothing and the like. Then the trouble started. In August 1948, a South Korean Army Division en route to Chey Judo Island erupted in rebellion. Reds in the ranks mutinied. By the time the ship arrived in Chey Judo, the rebels had killed the unit's officers, taken over the ship and returned to take over the town of Yosu, 30 miles south of Soon Chun. In Yosu, the rebel troops rounded up cops, judges, teachers and town elders. After a cursory review before a tribunal, the Reds killed them all. The countryside was in turmoil. Shortly, units of the rebel division arrived in Soon Chun, where town officials and elders again were brought before a rebel tribunal for judgment.

Lt. Kim, in Red custody, was brought before the rebel panel and one of its members recognized him as the cop who had let his family visit him in jail. The local communist operative argued that Lt. Kim was one of the "good" residents and should be spared. The others on the panel agreed, on the condition that he sit on the panel and judge his neighbors. Stunned, fearing for his life and that of his wife and children, Lt. Kim sat on the panel. Later he argued he believed he had no choice and took some comfort in his efforts to argue, sometimes successfully, that some of the townspeople brought for judgment be spared.

Days later Soon Chun and Yosu were liberated by ROK forces, scattering the Reds who fled to the mountains, Korea's mythical haven for misfits, bandits and outlaws. Lt. Kim, fearing the ROK would execute him for his collaboration, joined in the flight to the mountains, leaving behind Yung Ja and their daughters. He told Yung Ja to always keep the children with her when she was interrogated by the authorities, to insulate her from any suspicion.

Lt. Kim stayed in the mountains for a year while Yung Ja and the daughters moved in with her parents. While her husband was in hiding, Yung Ja earned a living as a sewing teacher and, at night, sewing for her neighbors. Chung Kuk got word back that he was miserable. He hated the Communists, hated hiding among society's outcasts, and wanted to come back. But he didn't dare. Finally, the ROK dropped leaflets throughout the countryside offering a general amnesty: The government said that all suspected Communists could turn themselves in and go free. Chung Kuk risked it. After turning himself in, he was released and returned to his family.

But the reunion was short-lived. The North soon invaded the South, and the Red Army moved quickly toward Soon Chun. Chung Kuk was anxious.

He was convinced the invading Red army would execute him because he had returned to South Korean authority. And he feared the South would execute him as a suspected spy. One evening, Chung Kuk slipped away from his family, and fled to a fishing boat on the coast, his intended destination Japan. He was lost to his family forever.

During the siege of Soon Chun, control of the countryside and town was in doubt. Yung Ja hid in the hills near town with his parents and children away from their home while the Reds maintained control of the city. In the hills, Sun Oak came down with diphtheria, burning with fever and struggling to breathe. Wul Kuk feared if she didn't get medical attention soon, Sun Oak would die. Yung Ja took her daughter and, accompanied by her mother, walked two hours to the other side of Soon Chun, which was now deserted. Yung Ja found a North Korean Army medical tent. A doctor with the enemy army saw this grandmother, mother and baby as civilian innocents. He heard their pleas and gave Sun Oak a shot of antibiotics. Yung Ja and her mother walked back with Sun Oak to the family's hiding place; in a short time Sun Oak's fever broke and she recovered.

Later, American soldiers and South Korean allies were battling North Korean regulars around Soon Chun. Yung Ja and her daughters and parents huddled in the Lee home as the fighting took place nearby. There were rumors of rape. The women hid themselves and their children in the eaves as squads of soldiers—from all armies—went house to house.

Artillery shells exploded in town and machine gun fire filled the air. Suddenly a shell exploded in the Lees' courtyard. Shrapnel ripped through Koon Wu's thigh. With her husband severely wounded before her, Wul Kuk tore off his white muslin shirt and wrapped the flesh of his thigh back into place, securing the wound. Neighbors ran through the village streets. Several were cut down by machine gun fire, others when artillery shells exploded near them. Rumors abounded. It was time to flee. Wul Kuk told Yung Ja to take the girls and leave. Yung Ja, carrying Sun Oak piggyback and leading Sun Soon by the hand, ran across a rice field at the back of the house toward the South Korean army line, where she had been told they would be safe.

Suddenly, the rice field was ablaze with explosions and gunfire. Bullets whistled through the air past Yung Ja and the girls as she continued to run. Neighbors a few feet away were hit, falling dead in the shallow water of the rice field. A man who was running ahead, turned around and waved for Yung Ja to go back. He was hit and fell dead. Yung Ja continued running, stepping over his body as she continued, ignoring everything except her belief she was running toward safety.

In a few moments, she was behind South Korean lines, away from the firefight and protected. Later she learned her parents also escaped without

further injury. In time, Soon Chun was again in the hands of South Korean and U.N. forces. After the landing of the Americans at Inchon, September 15, 1950, the North Korean armies in the south were routed.

But the war was long and life was hard. There was little food, little work and little fuel for warmth in the winter. Refugees were everywhere. Neighbors froze to death. Yung Ja worked in Soon Chun as a school teacher and as a sewing teacher, taking sewing in at night. Finally, toward the end of 1952, a friend told Yung Ja the PX at the U.S. Army base in Pusan was hiring sales clerks. Yung Ja walked to Pusan and got a job selling batteries, flashlights, gum, cigarettes and sundries in the PX. Though Yung Ja at first couldn't communicate, she got by. Then, as if Providence had revealed her true calling, Yung Ja began piecing together an enterprise that eight years later would be one of the most ingenious black market operations in South Korea.

XVI. YUNG JA

Yung Ja, without a husband and responsible for three children at home with her parents, had become skilled in a world in the shadows. It was here that reputation was key, where your word and standing as a person of respect mattered, to men and women. There was no room for mistakes.

Yung Ja started with sticks of chewing gum, very popular on the black market, which came two-dozen packed flat in a single package. You pay for the stick in the PX; never steal, the cash receipts must always match the store inventory perfectly. Hide the sticks of gum in your clothing, and start small, charging double outside what it cost inside. You buy \$25 worth of gum in the PX, sneak it out to an older woman nearby who operated a wholesale depot and sell the gum for \$50. The women in the distribution house would sell the items to merchants in the Korean stores, who sold American products. You do this with Life-Saver candy, Camel cigarettes, Colgate toothpaste, Alka Seltzer, Bayer aspirin, Hershey chocolate bars. There was no margin for error. Cash only. You deal in GI scrip in the PX; when you have collected \$100 worth, take the scrip to a moneychanger downtown and exchange it for new \$100 greenbacks. Collect c-notes and guard them with your life. Trust only those whom you would trust with your life, and the lives of all those 25 family members and 50 other employees who depend on you.

In her bedroom, Yung Ja had a foot locker under her bed containing only bundled c-notes. She sent money home, becoming a lifeline to her family. After less than a year in Pusan, the American HQ moved to Seoul. Yung Ja followed in 1954 and worked at the PX in Seoul. Authorities began cracking down on the black markets; security made her double-life difficult. Hoping to get another job out of the PX, Yung Ja began taking English lessons.

Soon her language became good enough to get a new job in the American

Service Club, which ran the officer's club. Yung Ja was put in charge of purchasing for the club—everything from dishes, salt and pepper, food, liquor, cigarettes. Hard goods were all purchased through the Sears Roebuck catalogue. There were up to 300 items, including refrigerators and air conditioners. Each time Yung Ja ordered an item for the club, she doubled the order, using her own greenbacks to cover the second purchase, in effect ordering one for the club and one for herself. Yung Ja would order the items in the name of the office, she was in charge. No one ever knew.

Eventually, Yung Ja had acquired more than \$12,000 in cash, and considering going to the U.S. to go to college. But she couldn't leave her two children. Deciding to stay in Korea, Yung Ja acquired two taxi cabs in Seoul, a small clothing stall in a market, and homes in both Seoul and Soon Chun. She purchased the largest home in Soon Chun where her parents would live with her daughters and her former husband's stepmother. The home had once belonged to the family to Kee Jong Ee's future wife, which had fallen on grim times. In Seoul, her home was in the Nam Sam hills where today's Hotel Shilla is located. Her brother, Jae Ee, moved to Seoul, hoping to avoid being drafted into the army, and eventually went to Japan.

After a few years, Yung Ja was growing desperate. Now 29, she was sending money to Jae Ee in Japan, to her parents, two daughters, stepdaughter and to her brother Chun Ee in Soon Chun, as well as providing what she could for any cousins and other relatives who showed up in Seoul for help, including Kee Jong Ee, who lived at Yung Ja's home while he went to school to learn English before he went to officer's candidate school. No Korean man was interested in such a woman. One who took her out burned her with cigarettes. Then a young GI from Lynn, Massachusetts, asked Yung Ja for a date. In time, he proposed marriage.

"I didn't know if I love him or not," she said, "I just needed to get married. I was dying to get out of country, to give my children some kind of future."

Yung Ja persuaded her brother, Jae Ee, to return from Japan and take care of their parents and her daughters in Soon Chun. She would give him the home she had purchased and her savings from the black market operations. Jae Ee could begin his own enterprise to support their parents and her children until she could get enough money to bring them to the U.S. with her and her new American husband.

Yung Ja, born and raised in Japan, a resident of Soon Chun from only just after World War II until the Korean War, was a modern woman from Seoul. She wore fashionable clothing, had city ways and language. When she arrived to see her family in Soon Chun, it provided the neighborhood with a spectacle to see and talk about. Her two children, Sun Soon and Sun Oak, had been raised in the country town of Soon Chun, and had never felt comfortable in Seoul during their visits over the summer. Now, in 1960, Yung Ja arrived in

town with her new husband, a foreigner, to say good-bye and promise that she would send for the children soon.

Who can know what went through the mind of 14-year-old Sun Soon? She believed a chronic ear infection would prevent her from joining her mother and younger sister in America. She had lost her father. She thought she would never see her mother again, and that she would remain in Soon Chung without parents, to live in shame at this loss of face. This shame was worth her life. A few days after Yung Ja left town, Sun Soon swallowed poison and died.

XVII. K.J.'S TOUR

Now, decades later, in the lobby of the Westin Chosen, Kee Jong Ee was saying he wanted to take me on a tour of Seoul. We'd spend the morning seeing the city's highlights and then have lunch at a traditional Korean restaurant on the southern side of the Han River. Perfect. We took two cars. For the first leg, I rode with the cousins, though after a bit I wondered if I should go with Kee Jong Ee and Jae Ee. It was hard to parse—under Confucian rules—which was right? In Korean style, I just rolled with it, not making more out of it than practical. I switched to the other car later.

Seoul is the big town, no doubt about it, sprawled out over a series of hills along the Han River, with the older side on the northern bank, the postwar side to the south. Seoul became Korea's capital six centuries ago in the Chosun Dynasty, and has been the country's cultural, social, commercial and government center ever since. More than 11 million have moved to Seoul's environs, about a quarter of the country's population, looking to make their way in modern Korea, away from the more restrained confines of the traditional countryside.

Seoul began in 1394 behind a wall enclosing a few square kilometers connected by four gates. Our tour that morning began when Kee Jong Ee drove past the ancient Namdae-mun, or South Gate, once the southern entrance to the ancient city of Seoul. Today it is the centerpiece of a huge traffic circle. We drove past the Japanese-built City Hall, along the Kwanghwamun intersection, and down a wide boulevard called Sejong No lined by impressive government, commercial office and cultural buildings, such as the Sejong Cultural Center (aka National Theater). Right next to the Kyobo Insurance Building—a modern skyscraper, in which Mobil had its offices, was the U.S. Embassy, which was behind a high security fence and whose roof had an array of electronic antennas and microwave dishes.

A massive statue of Admiral Yi Sun-shin dominated the boulevard—with a figure of the famed Turtle Boat at the statue's base. Later I would look out from a window in Mobil suite of offices to see the Admiral Yi statue from above. The setting was out of a postcard. Seeing this statue and its centerpiece

to the city, I wondered whether this heroic national figure might be an ancestor to my son and daughter. I decided if my children's great-grandmother, Soon-Yi, of Kimhae, wasn't descended from this historical figure, I wasn't going to be the one to prove it.

At the north end of this massive boulevard was the ancient and ornate Kwanghwa-mun, the North Gate, to old Seoul. Right behind the elaborate landmark was a makeshift billboard hiding something at the foot of a large park that stretched up the mountains behind. Later that week, I learned the billboard was hiding the dismantling of the onetime National Museum, a building originally constructed by Japanese as the HQ of its colonial imperial government. Though turned to nationalistic purposes after the defeat of Japan, the building itself had remained a hated symbol of a hated era.

When the nation's first democratically elected civilian president, Kim Young Sam, took office in January 1993, his first act was to order the building destroyed. Kee Jong Ee explained that Koreans saw the Japanese selection of that spot for its imperial government center as particularly insulting to Korean national consciousness. Koreans traditionally see the earth, sky, water and mountains as the elements from which they gain strength—a spirit evoked by the symbolism of the national flag. Japan choose that central spot in Seoul to block the people's view of the Puk'an San mountains and blue sky. Its continued existence in Seoul became a symbol of the insult that was Japanese rule. When Kim Young Sam got into office, his overwhelmingly popular decision: Tear it down!

We drove past this national eyesore through the park, past many government and historical buildings behind walls, and on up the side of Puk'an San Mountains. We could go no farther when we stopped at the presidential residence called The Blue House, which was well guarded by slim, muscular, well-trimmed uniformed guards. These guards wore uniforms of blue pants, white shirts, pistols, shiny black shoes, utility combat belts, caps at a slight and earnest angle, faces of the seasoned hardness of killers. The plain-clothes guards wear loose-fitting business clothing, but looked just as serious. Whether uniformed or plain clothes, each possessed the look of serious doings, which conveyed in total clarity: if you move wrong, you will die.

No wonder. These environs have been the Cold War's front gate, the flash point for a half-century of global tension. Since the 1953 Korean War armistice, more than 350 North Korean agents have died in border clashes. In the past three decades, Red agents have attempted to infiltrate into South Korea more than 300 times. The bloodiest clash occurred right here in 1968, when 31 North Koreans snuck over the Puk'an San mountains before being confronted on the grounds of The Blue House. Here in this beautiful tightly manicured setting, a gun battle occurred, during which 28 North Korean agents were killed, along with 34 South Korean troops, police and civilians.

Today the condition of these surroundings was utterly perfect—clean, manicured, swept, spotless open and public places, like the best-tended garden you have every encountered, where human sentries ensure that nothing goes amiss. Nothing but business here.

We drove south through Seoul on the Mapo Bridge over the Han River to Yoido Island. The area possessed a new federal park with acres of high-rise residential apartment/condo towers and a massive wide boulevard where the National Assembly Building and other governmental offices were constructed. The roadway grid on Yoido had wide boulevards, huge open spaces, federal buildings, broadcasting stations and—our destination—the gold colored 68-story Korean Life Insurance building, one of the most distinctive landmarks in town.

Kee Jong Ee said this was the best place to see the layout of the city. We parked underground and took a high-speed elevator to a top floor observation deck. Hospitality ladies dressed in modern slim yellow suits, saying hello and goodbye in unison, waved their arms in a stylized way to indicate where we were supposed to go. On the top floor observation desk, we walked the 360 degrees, looking out the windows at the magnificent view, browsed in the curio shops, where the cousins bought key rings for Lee and Micah. There were other families on tour too—many dressed in traditional clothing—there for a Sunday outing. I was probably a bit of a spectacle. But the entire setting had the friendly feel of a family outing.

Kee Jong Ee explained at intervals what was what, making sure I got a full vista of Seoul and the mountain ranges nearby, the Han River and its 18 bridges—one of which had fallen down recently, joining the department store south of the Han that collapsed recently, killing hundreds, as symbols of a construction industry working too fast and loose. Korea's overseas construction crews were the best in the world, known for efficiency, productivity, and utter reliability. At home, it was a different story: Municipal corruption had led to lax enforcement of construction standards—and to catastrophe.

Kee Jong Ee showed me how the traffic patterns worked in the city, and then took me over to the northern window and said: "Over Puk'an San you can see well into North Korea."

Like most adult men in South Korea, Kee Jong Ee had personal experience in dealing with the reality of North Korea. After finishing English language lessons in Seoul while living with Yung Ja, he had volunteered for the ROK Army and was accepted into Officer's Candidate School. He originally had hoped for a naval commission but was too old by the time he applied. Kee Jong Ee served for 20 years in the ROK Army, rising to the rank of major. His specialty was artillery, in which he served for 16 years, at points commanding artillery batteries along the DMZ. His English skill determined his final four years, as the ROK Army assigned him to work as a liaison officer with the

U.S. Army. This explained why his command of the American idiom was so sharp. He was accustomed to Yanks who communicate best in shorthand. After retirement, Kee Jong Ee went to work for a Hong Kong-based shipping company. He had just retired after working for the firm for 16 years. One of his sons is employed by the same company.

As a family, Kee Jong Ee his wife and their children have lived in Seoul throughout. As he described the city landscape below, he made sure I understood that the 11 million people of Seoul, South Korea's heart and capital city, live 25 miles from the DMZ, the distance equal to that between D.C. and Dulles Airport.

Across the border, an estimated one million of North's 25 million people are in the uniformed service of the Worker's Paradise, most strategically positioned somewhere behind the 155-mile wire fence that stretches along the DMZ. Some of these Northerners are posted at artillery batteries that can fire shells at targets 40 miles away, well within South Korea. The U.S. and the Republic of Korea (ROK) spend nearly a billion dollars a year (the U.S. two-thirds of the tab) to make sure the Reds don't try.

To avoid traffic, Kee Jong Ee drove to the north side of the Han, then along Kangyonno highway and back south again over the Yongdong Bridge past the Olympic Stadium and then west through the Yongdong neighborhood to a traditional Korean wedding center and restaurant, called Neulbom gongwon, at 92-12 Nonkyun-don, in Kangnam-ku. We pulled into a prefab, two-story parking lot made of light metal sheets. It was strong enough to hold a few hundred cars, but it had a Blade Runner erector-set quality about it. Functional, I suppose, but when we walked along the metal plates on the second floor, our footfalls resonated throughout the entire structure. Odd feeling. The wedding center and restaurant, though traditional in style, was new. This wasn't a tourist spot. Around the restaurant people were in their Sunday best, for family gatherings, western-style clothing mostly, but with a few older people in traditional dress.

Kee Jong Ee led us into the spotless dining area, where we six adults and baby, arranged ourselves in a spacious booth of wood, marble and leather cushions to enjoy a traditional Korean meal. Wow. Using English, Korean and sign language and laughter, we made our way through a wonderful hour: a 15-course meal of kimchi, rice, peppers, lots of noises, chop sticks, gal-bi (ribs), pulgogi, brazier cooked back steak cut with scissors, vegetables, tea. Kee Jong Ee enjoyed being the host and treating this gathering. In time, language became less of a problem, as we all got to understanding each other okay. The varieties of kimchi were terrific. Bite sized green peppers burned our lips and tongue. Jae Ee and Kee Jong Ee challenged each other about who could eat the hottest peppers. We laughed so hard watching their facial contortions as they did their best.

At the end of the meal, as our gathering prepared to break up, Kee Jong Ee asked more about Sun Oak. As I spoke he became very emotional. His eyes filled with tears. He listened and, as we spoke, his chin dropped to his chest, and he whispered to himself in Korean. This was a guy who in his early years in the Army, assigned to lonely, hazardous duty on the DMZ, had written his young cousin in Soon Chun. Both of them had lost their sisters to despair, and shared that special knowledge of loss. Wan Soo later explained Kee Jong Ee that in speaking Korean during our discussion about Sun Oak, Kee Jong Ee was telling his Korean relatives of genuine feelings of absence and loss. That's what I had figured he was saying.

We made our way out of the restaurant, and gathered ourselves to separate for the rest of the day. Kee Jong Ee had other family duties to attend to, and we stood together silently those last moments waiting for the cars to come back around. As we parted, I promised we'd come to Korea, bring our children, and renew our family connection. His eyes, still moist from tears, closed. He shook his head.

"It's been too long," he said, "Sun Oak should come back."

At that moment, I experienced a moment of understanding nearly too sad to stand, and glimpsed what all her kinfolk believed had happened to Sun Oak. Through the familiar eyes of Kee Yong Ee, I could see the young girl who, by the age of 14, had lost nearly everything she had—her father to war, her sister to suicide, others consumed by the chores and compromises of survival, and whose mother, flirting with disgrace, saved the lives of her family and a score of others, and had married a foreigner and gone away. Her grandparents had not told her mother about Sun Soon's death, believing it would prevent Yung Ja from starting over in America. They kept up the fiction for two years, until a neighbor wrote Yung Ja an anonymous letter telling her the truth. Yung Ja quickly arranged for Sun Oak to come to America.

The youngster, who had been forced to fend for herself in a ruined inner landscape, living in an obscure village on the periphery of the great and grand in an ancient country impoverished by conquest and war, was pulled from what family and home she had left and, without being asked, planted in a far-away country and lost to her life and loved ones in Korea forever.

XVIII. CAMPUS TOUR

After Kee Jong Ee had departed, I continued the Seoul tour with Sun Oak's Uncle Jae Ee, his daughters, Sun Oak's cousins Sun Kyung and her older sister Sun Hwa, her husband the brain surgeon, Wan Soo, and their baby Soo Bin, as guides. We were quite a carload.

We recrossed the Han River north over the Hannam Bridge and aimed for the Itaewon neighborhood where U.S. tourists think they should shop; a

cheesy, crowded strip with stores filled with the kinds of knickknacks GIs buy and send home to their families and girl friends. Despite my sudden upper-brow reaction, there were some neat curio shops in Itaewon after all. I got out at one and tried my hand at haggling for a wooden carved Turtle Boat. By that time, I'd decided that the inventor of armored warship Admiral Yi—the Korean patriot, enemy of Japan, and most accomplished Asian naval warrior—was a lock-on ancestor for my kids. Alas, regardless of my unprovable fantasy, I met with no success in finding a suitable Turtle Boat.

We snaked our way through Seoul's streets, and over the Nam San Mountain (a series of steep hills), through a park, and past the Shilla Hotel, and wound our way through the neighborhood Kee Jong Ee had said was where Yung Ja had once owned a house. He'd lived there when he moved to Seoul, along with a few other random relatives now and again. Yung Ja, by that time, had grown prosperous on her black market earnings. The home required a high cinder block fence, topped with razor wire and broken glass, to keep thieves out. A guard dog lived between the house and fence to chase out whoever was lucky enough to survive the fence. If the dog didn't work, the hired men, who doubled as drivers of Yung Ja's two cabs, would be called to protect their padrona. Sun Oak and her sister, Sun Soon, would come to Seoul to live with their mother during the summer break from school. Sun Oak said she and her sister hated those trips. They were away from their friends in Soon Chun, their mother was often busy, and neighborhood kids in Seoul laughed at their country accents. They often went home early, back to their grandparents' care.

This was all in my mind's eye, however. Yung Ja's home had been torn down long ago, and the neighborhood was a prosperous center for corporate offices, hotels and grand in-town estates.

We changed gears from this reverie, and drove through the crowded Myong-dong shopping area near Westin Hotel, much more upscale, younger, hipper, trendier; very, very crowded by both pedestrians and vehicles.

I asked to see where the cousins went to school, and Wan Soo took me on a college tour. First was the campus of Yonsei University, founded by an American missionary in 1886. It was here that student demonstrators frequently gather to protest this or that. The university is laid out in a traditional Yankee campus, with buildings covered with ivy, the grounds with lush trees, on either side of a boulevard leading to the school's central administration and class rooms on the side of a hill. You could easily be in western Pennsylvania. English-language signs were well in evidence, many advertising where to take courses for the Tofil (SAT tests for students where English is a second language) exams.

We then drove over to Ewah Women's University, the Radcliffe of Korean women's colleges, where Sun Kyong graduated in 1988. Ewah, with

an enrollment of 20,000, is Korea's most prestigious university for young women. Wan Soo, in deadpan, made sure to point out the number of stores for shoes and other accessories outside the university's gates, which was a definite truth, as the streets were crammed full with very high fashion shops.

"Notice how few bookstores?" Wan Soo teased. Get it? This was very funny, honest.

But despite the ways of young women with perhaps a few extra won to spend, after graduating in 1988, Sun Kyong had gone to graduate school in pharmacology, and obtained her degree and license—considered to be just about the most perfect profession for a woman in Korea.

Sun Hwa, the younger sister, now in back listening to all this about her older sister's education, was currently studying nutrition in graduate school. Sun Hwa graduated from Sookmyung University, a different school nearby, which Wan Soo evenly explained wasn't as good as Ewah. I carefully watched Sun Hwa listen to Wan Soo's description about Sookmyung being in the second tier, and recognized her emotion.

"I bet you get tired of hearing that," I said to Sun Hwa, never having gotten used to listening to having my school, Boston University, compared negatively to a couple of schools in Cambridge across Boston's Charles River.

She got my point instantly, smiled and demurred. "I think so."

For years, Sun Oak had seen photos of these two cousins as they grew up, reading of their progress in holiday greetings and the occasional letter. These were two smart kids who had been raised well in Soon Chun, performed well in high school and gone on to thrive at excellent universities in Seoul, where they obtained advanced degrees. Sun Oak's fate had been different. Her first public school experience in Salem, Massachusetts, had been to be placed with all the other foreign kids, no matter what age or country of origin or language, into one room with a teacher who spoke only English.

After a few weeks of this, Sun Oak was rescued from this classroom by Yung Ja's pastor, Father Joe Cronin, from the Catholic Church in Lynn, and placed in Ste. Cretienne's Academy for Girls, a parochial school nearby. The nuns nurtured Sun Oak through high school, from which she graduated with honors in 1967. Sun Oak finished two years at Stonehill College, a Jesuit school in North Easton, until she was forced to work because money ran out. We met in Boston while she was in training as a flight attendant for Northeast Airlines; she later flew with TWA to Europe for two years. Despite Sun Oak's achievements, the lack of an opportunity for more education haunted her; a fate not shared by her younger cousins who came in the generation right behind.

When evening fell our first day, we went to Lotte Shopping Department Store, a 12-story monster located near the Westin Hotel; the largest department store I'd ever seen. It had everything, just everything. The aisles were

crowded with fashionably dressed shoppers, who didn't give me a second look. I bought some goodies: a lacquered box, a brass bell, a few other Korean knick-knacks.

Jae Ee wanted to purchase gifts for the stateside family. No amount of polite declines and turndowns would do. This simply would be done. Wan Soo explained that it gave Jae Ee pleasure to do this, so I went along, helping select scarves, ties and such that I thought the family members state-side would think okay. Jae Ee paid for it all in cash, taken from a half-inch thick stash of clean bills—won—stored in his breast pocket billfold. This was a man who had just visited the bank. I watched as he pulled out his full billfold, took out the money, and leafed through the clean bills by folding them backward and with a licked thumb and forefinger counting out the precise amount required. This mirrored perfectly the technique I'd seen his sister use often. Jae Ee enjoyed himself as he purchased these gifts. The prosperous operator of two electronics shops, father of successful children, now a proud grandfather, had done well in the 35 years since his sister grubstaked him when she left for America.

We found a bulgogi shop in the food court on Lotte's top floor where we chowed down on calbi and kimchi, drinking the brown/green tea out of a glass liter bottle. We laughed, making noises while we ate, and having another contest about who could eat the hot green peppers. I was definitely getting to like the food, place, people and surroundings plenty. Back at the hotel that evening, we took some photos, relaxed in my room, talked, snacked and off they went in their car, waving back at me as Wan Soo drove off at 11 p.m.

XIX. PIWON

During the rest of my stay, we got together for dinner and evenings, but one afternoon I played explorer myself and wandered around Changyonggung Palace, one of the five palaces still in Seoul from the Chosun Dynasty, and the "Secret Garden" Piwon, nearby, located at the foot of Puk'an San Mountain.

Called the Palace of Glorious Blessings, Changyonggung was first a residence of King Taejo, founder of the Yi Dynasty, until he moved elsewhere. The palace fell on hard times until rebuilt by King Songjong in 1483. I took a formal tour of this setting, hosted by an English-speaking docent, whose stylized manner reminded me of a person singing a narration. This palace relic and the grounds of the royal compound formed a window on a time of Confucian simplicity and order. Our tour began at the massive double roofed entrance gate—Honghwamum "The Gate of Vast Transformation." We were then led along neatly manicured paths to the main palace, out-buildings, stables, work areas and formal parks. The buildings all had that distinctive

Korean roof, with heavy, angled tiles that formed an elegant impression of heft and grace on the skyline.

North of the palace was the Piwon or “Secret Garden,” a 78-acre park of woods, streams, ponds and pavilions where only the royals had been allowed to idle their time, walk and contemplate their lot. This park, though magnificently manicured and sculptured, was also a prison behind high stone walls, in which only the royals could reside, and from which they could never leave. Serving their wishes and needs were resident Yang-ban bureaucrats and artisans, whose residences were built nearby to ensure the maintenance of Confucian order.

That evening, I had a western style steak dinner with Sun Hwa, the Lims, and their baby, at the Ninth Hole restaurant in the Westin Hotel, overlooking an old Korean garden. Though the company was wonderful, the food was a failure. The next evening, the cousins treated me to a traditional meal at Sam Jung Garden restaurant, served in the traditional Korean style in a separate cabin. I had by that time become a native, comfortably seated on the floor around the foot high table, with the kimchi, grilled meats, vegetables, rice, and spice pickles going down natural as you please. At one point, they caught me watching Sun Kyung take a large mouthful of rice, lettuce and meat. I joked how, for a moment, I thought I was watching Sun Oak. I imitated some of the full-cheeked chopstick shovel style of eating I’d become used to and we all laughed so hard we rolled on the floor.

Afterwards, they took me to Wan Soo and Sun Kyung’s apartment nearby. Their tiny apartment, in which Sun Hwa also lives, sleeping on a roll-out blanket on the floor next to the washer/dryer, is located in a crowded neighborhood of tight, small streets near Kyunghee University and Medical Center, where Wan Soo is completing his final two years of residency in brain surgery. The neighborhood, located in the northeast section of town, reminded me of some of the close neighborhoods of Queens. Their apartment was a rectangular unit one flight up from the street. The building and street were new but in a congested neighborhood, where parking was scarce, and all traffic, human and auto, was a tight squeeze all around.

Despite the fit, there was a comfortable feeling on the street, with people casually milling around; many families with young children, who were out late to get ice creams, sodas and relax with each other. The street life seemed safe. There was a cozy, warm sense of community. It was clean, too. We stopped at one mom and pop deli to get some soda and dessert treats. It was so friendly, and if my presence caused undue notice, I couldn’t sense it.

I recalled a chat Wan Soo and I had in Hawaii the year before about how he might like to emigrate to the U.S. with his family. Seeing the rhythm here, I had to wonder how one could leave this cocoon to come to the States, a place that could only be alien and, by comparison, so unfriendly.

I now asked again about this, and Sun Kyung, the Ewah grad and new mother, was less certain about any moves to a new country. Wan Soo also said such a move would have to wait, perhaps until a point where such a move might be a boost to a medical career. Sun Hwa, who was single, was another possibility. Still, leaving behind her family now, with no hurricane at her back forcing her out, I had my doubts.

We enjoyed some traditional sweet rice tea in their apartment. I leafed through their wedding album, old family photos, and baby pictures. I carefully inspected their diplomas and graduation pictures on the walls. Wan Soo played a video of beautiful images of natural settings combined with classical music, and we sat down to some probing chat. Ever direct, Wan Soo asked, during one twist in the conversation, why I had married Sun Oak. Upon reflection, I had to say it was fate or destiny; that I simply knew. Wan Soo asked what my family or others might have thought. I said I didn't particularly care what anyone thought, but that nobody objected or made any comments.

I explained that the U.S. is a complex society, not homogeneous like Korea, and that Lee and Micah have a strong, healthy sense of both sides of their heritage. I said that it had been important for me to help them understand their diverse family background. Wan Soo nodded. Apparently, his parents had divorced when he was young, something unusual at the time in Korea.

"I kept asking, why me?" he said. "I think family is very important to children. I think family is your heaven on earth. I am thankful that I have my wife, my baby, and all my relatives, who now include you."

XX. HQ RETIREMENTS

I was up early Monday morning and had read through the English-language *Korea Herald* and *Asian Wall Street Journal* well before the scheduled 9 a.m. pickup by the driver assigned from Mobil Oil Korea. When it got to be 9:45, I figured I'd enjoyed the morning air and hotel pedestrian traffic long enough. I called the Mobil office and an efficient office administrator explained she had just been called herself. The driver assigned had gone to the Hotel Shilla instead of the Chosen and should be there in minutes, which he was. The driver, a slight fellow in his early 60s, who showed up in a Cadillac-style Hyundai minutes later, was so embarrassed he could hardly look at me straight. Named Mr. Kim, he spoke a bit of English and explained he'd gotten the signals wrong. We'd get on great. After a five-minute drive through mid-morning traffic, we were pulling up next to the U.S. Embassy and behind the tall steel and brown glass office tower called Kyobo Life Insurance Building, where Mobil Oil Korea Inc., had a small suite of offices on the 19th floor.

I was greeted by the office administrator, who spoke excellent English in

a laid back California-style. A Korean Generation-X'r, this admin was a marvel of cross-cultural communication and confidence. Ms. E. Y. Park, who asked to be called E.Y., had worked at the U.S. Embassy until Mobil hired her away a year or so ago. She learned her English from the Americans there, and dressed like a stylish urban young woman from L.A.

She quickly introduced me to my host that day, Kyung M. Chung, vice president MOKI, who had been with Mobil a year and asked to be called K.M. About 43, K.M. was a graduate of Yonsei University in Seoul, and had been a vice president with Chase Manhattan bank somewhere after obtaining his MBA from George Washington University in D.C. some years before. The timing of schedules was such that John Kim, K.M.'s boss, was in the U.S. getting his kids settled at Northwestern and Yale. K.M. wasn't quite sure just what I had in mind, except that he was extremely eager to contain this American visitor from HQ his boss had said to pay attention to. Our first hour of conversation dealt with my mission with Korea Gas.

We plotted our schedule for the next two days and I turned to look at the interoffice electronic mail. It was then I learned two key guys in my world were to be no more. Both Larry Atwood, E&P's executive vice president for Africa and Asia and all parts where I've been busy for five years and who had been my pal, and Jim Boyes, the short-lived vice president for Corporate Public Affairs, and who had been my adversary, announced their retirements that day. This was a bittersweet coincidence. It later turned out that Atwood, tired of Corporate second-guessing and the tug-of-war over E&P's future, read the winds and retired on his own. Lou Marconi, the recently appointed Mobil chairman, had told Boyes to retire.

For me, Atwood, 63, was irreplaceable. He was Humphrey's right-hand man in the day-to-day operations of the E&P Division. His departure would be a huge blow to my ability to function. He was the HQ executive in charge of E&P operations in Indonesia, Nigeria, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Qatar and Korea, to name a few. All were his turf. I had worked closely with him personally, as well as within the operating units he commanded. We'd had our wins and very few losses. With him, I felt I could stay on. Whoever followed him wouldn't have the experience, clout or sand to withstand the SRP juggernaut. With him soon to be gone, who would be left to say I was needed? This was grim news indeed.

As for Boyes, 53, well, I can say I was neither sorry nor surprised. Ineffectual in his post, Boyes had lost everybody's confidence. In E&P, Boyes's lack of stroke had prompted Humphrey to grab a greater share of the company's public affairs operations, elevating me, in his boardroom maneuver. Some months before Atwood, for one, dismissed Boyes as "a Riley stooge."

Perhaps a more polite assessment was made by Paul Somme, a naturalized

Brit who worked for Atwood and who had been my partner on the E&P Host Government Relations study.

Somme said Boyes reminded him “of an aide to some senator from Mississippi, all smiles, handshakes and mint juleps. Some might see the charm, but at base, completely untrustworthy.”

Boyes’s tenure in my professional function reminded me of those one-paragraph news items in the back of the paper about road accidents in Bolivia, far away and about which no one cared. The news brief was just filler in the paper. In this case, however, Boyes had driven the school bus containing the Mobil public affairs function off the road, killing the driver and nearly all aboard. It was my fate to be seated in the back of that bus at the bottom of the jungle ravine, alive and still able. But no rescue parties were out; and, with Atwood leaving, one of the guys who might have called to help get me out was out of reach, boarding an airplane in La Paz on his way to his ranch in east Texas.

XXI. KOREA GAS

Mr. Kim drove K.M. and me over winding roads through the Nam Sam Mountains and south over the Han River to Seoul’s growing commercial center in the Kangnam-Ku area. In spots, the construction was new and modern, reminding me of Tysons in Fairfax. In others, the district was closer to the familiar 1950s-style Queens Boulevard, where low buildings aligned along wide streets, crammed with commercial space. Traffic moved briskly, giving the area a vibrant new-town feel. Many of the new buildings were huge glass, steel, and aluminum towers. Among the most modern was the Hae Sung Building where Korea Gas Corporation was headquartered at 942, Daechi 3-Dong.

K.M. guided me through two hours of meetings with a series of public affairs functional leaders from Korea Gas. The two key players were Young-Bock Kim, the general manager of Korea Gas’s PR office, and his deputy, Chul Kyu Lee, who was identified on his English-language card as a “public speaker,” though I made him to be a press spokesman.

They killed an hour of their courtesy time by showing me a professionally packaged, modern, English-language videotape their department prepared for visiting foreigners. It explained that Korea Gas purchased 5.9 million tons of LNG a year, with 5.1 from Indonesia and the remainder from Malaysia, Brunei and Australia. It didn’t say so, but its Indonesia LNG purchases were from Mobil’s Arun operations, going back 10 years.

What struck me was 1) the ambition of Korea Gas’s purchase projections—10 million tons by the year 2000, and 2) that some of Korea’s current demand was satisfied by purchasing “spot” cargoes on the water from Brunei. Could this mean that the LNG market was in for a mega-shift away from the

long-term supply commitments that guaranteed prices and revenues for 25 years both for the purchaser and for the seller? Such long-term agreements enabled financing on \$10 billion projects. Would future LNG plants be possible if the market tolerated spot purchases? Would anybody build a \$10 billion plant to be financed over 25 years if the investor knew that the plant's output would have to compete with free market spot cargoes out of someplace like Brunei?

I was sure Atwood, Humphrey and the other E&P brass understood the risks Mobil faced. Mobil, a company that couldn't rely on exploration to find new reserves, was now positioning itself as the world's premier developer of LNG mega-projects. But if the LNG world was going to become a spot market paradise for buyers, this was trouble for suppliers. A stable negotiated long-term price was essential. If any bozo could show up with an LNG load at cut-rate prices, this was a formula for going out of business.

This, however, was for another day. My chore was to focus on the fundamental building blocks of a professional relationship with these guys—cooperative supplier to appreciative customers. In this, we discussed common public affairs/external relations issues: emergency response to accidents, media relations techniques, marketing support, management “best practices” orientation and training. They agreed it would be very helpful if Mobil could help supply this kind of training if Korea Gas wanted it. We'd work out how to pay for it later. At the minimum, we agreed we needed to call each other on common press relations strategies, announcements, etc. This was a long-term thing—the “engineering trust” I believed was the basis for any productive relationship.

More specifically, in the short term, I was there to find out precisely what they knew of Korea Gas's problems with Ras Laffan LNG Company's processing train #2. In their small, functional government-style offices and later over soup and sandwiches at the Inter-Continental Hotel at 87 Trade Center, two blocks down the street, both Mr. Kim and Mr. Lee repeated that their boss and the Korea Gas planners were held up over the security of the Straits of Hormuz. They kept talking about options Korea Gas had with other potential LNG suppliers, Royal/Dutch Shell in Oman, and the French company, Total, in Yemen. Both of these countries, though part of the volatile Persian Gulf community, were on the eastern side of the Straits of Hormuz, the narrow ship passage in the Gulf, separating Iran and Saudi Arabia. If a bad guy from, say, Iran or Iraq or whoever, wanted to sink a ship in the Straits to bottle up Saudi or Kuwaiti oil, at least Korea Gas's LNG supplies could keep flowing from Yemen or Oman. At least, that was their argument.

I listened politely, and simply made the counter-argument: The U.S. had already guaranteed the security of the Straits of Hormuz, and Korea Gas's

purchase of a second LNG train at Ras Laffan would enable Korea Gas to dictate so much—finance terms, selection of designers, engineering and contractors for the plant itself and all the transportation and infrastructure along the way. Why split its supplies between two countries?

Why indeed? There was money to be made by the Koreans if they got a hunk of the Ras Laffan project. This was brought home after lunch when K.M. and I went next door to a large convention center called KoEx, a modern convention hall worthy of Vegas. There, 101 companies from 16 countries were exhibiting their wares at the 20th Green Energy Exhibition held by Korean Energy Management Corp. Energy consumption in Korea has been growing 10 percent year, far faster than the worldwide average of 4.5 percent and even higher than Korea's overall growth rate. The trade show had all the standard trade-show fixings—girls clad in sales uniforms, cheap giveaways, cheesy graphics—touting a variety of energy-saving devices.

The centerpiece of the Korea Gas exhibit was a model of a Hyundai-constructed tanker showing the transport of LNG from Mobil's Arun plant in Indonesia. Was Hyundai going to get a shipping contract with the Anglo/Dutch in Oman or the French in Yemen? Maybe, maybe not. But with Ras Laffan in Qatar they would.

Korea Gas's argument about security of supply and the Straits of Hormuz sounded bogus. I mean, here Korea Gas was saying they wanted 10 million tons by the year 2000, and here was Ras Laffan LNG saying, okay, we can get you there. Nope, says Korea Gas, we want to work with Oman and Yemen! It didn't parse. It sounded to me as if they were using security as an excuse to argue for a better deal. Or, at worst, somebody from France had paid a visit to somebody in Seoul carrying a case with money in it. This is what I said to K.M. and to John Kim in a phone call later. They didn't disagree. It was possible. But there was no proof, nor would there ever be. In the phone call from Greenwich, John Kim said the best way to sign them up was to stay cool, and not let Korea Gas know that their reluctance to sign up Ras Laffan #2 was a problem for us. The simplest way was to get another country, say, Nationalist China, Thailand, Malaysia, or Vietnam, to purchase Ras Laffan LNG train #3. If Korea Gas saw the market interest and that Ras Laffan's LNG supplies were being taken up by others, they'd act to protect themselves, bags of money or no. Getting other customers was the province of the commercial guys. My job, it seemed to me, was to get the security issue off the table and call Korea Gas's bluff. To do that, I'd need the help of the U.S. government.

XXII. CURE & DISEASE

One day, K.M. and one of MOKI's sales managers, S. H. (Sam) Yang, took me to a favored luncheon spot for visiting business types, a restaurant named Dae

Won Gak (Big Garden). The setting had all the hallmarks of a theme park. The restaurant was part of a re-creation of an old Korean mountain village, where, set in the foothills of the Puk'an San Mountains, visitors could make believe they were visiting and eating in an historical village; something like eating at Raleigh's Tavern in Williamsburg or the Griswold Inn in Essex.

We sat in a cabin only big enough for a dining table and six patrons. We sat on our haunches around the table as the hostess served a traditional Korean meal of dozens of vegetables, barbecued meat, rice and spiced dishes. Both Sam and K.M. said I treated the food like a native, which I supposed in some ways I was.

I stuck with club soda and tea, but Sam and K.M. had a couple of beers with their meal. The ambiance and good food were enough for us to relax and let the moment float. Fresh from dealing with the issues of prices, LNG and oil supplies, the conversation turned to politics, national security and like. I asked a few questions about the U.S. and its relationship with Korea, and in a heartbeat Sam picked up the topic, about which he turned out to be passionate and articulate.

I said that since arriving in Korea I had a keen sense that the presence of U.S. troops in the country was a decidedly mixed blessing. I mean, come on: 40,000 troops? Young men, armed and single, with money to spend attracts the loose, the ambitious, the clever, the grateful and, from time to time, the unstable. The U.S. troops were obviously an opportunity for some, many well-grounded, honorable and honest entrepreneurs. Many of these interactions have created life-altering ties, marriages, partnerships, friendships. But you would have to be blind not to see that the U.S. presence has had a corrupting influence: greed, lust, corruption. As for women? Any Korean man starts resenting the hell out of this dynamic on principle.

For example, one of the bones of contention between the U.S. and Korean communities on the peninsula is crime. At the time, the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the U.S. and Korea had been signed just two months before, in July, giving the Korean government greater jurisdiction over crimes committed by American servicemen stationed in Korea. But local perceptions about having Yanks based in East Asia can be dicey, and gets put under strains from time to time.

Just after the SOFA signature in Korea, for example, it happened that three bonehead Marines in Okinawa kidnapped a 12-year-old Japanese girl; one raped her in the back of a car. After their arrest, the U.S. Commander in Chief-Pacific said the Marines were really stupid, when all they had to do was spend a few bucks on a local whore. The reaction to this remark was so swift the military chief lost his job. What a mess. The Marines would eventually wind up convicted in a Japanese court and sentenced to long jail sentences. This event was publicized in all of Asia, including in Korea, where GIs have

been known to screw up big time. This kind of thing drives locals nuts.

Sam was careful in his explanation; this was a serious subject, to be taken seriously. He began carefully, by saying that the older generation appreciated what the U.S. did and is doing and understands why troops are here and generally supported it. The younger people, however, don't. Simple. To them, the Americans have brought both "cure" and "disease."

The cure—the defeat of Japan. The disease—the division of Korea at the 38th and occupation. Cure—counter attack at Inchon to drive the North out. Disease—going to the Yalu River, pulling China in and creating a longer war. Cure—driving the North and the Chinese back to the 38th and liberating the South. Disease—the Cold War border and DMZ atmosphere in country, and 37,000 troops in the South ever since.

I didn't get into it at the time, but the "disease" of U.S. involvement was even worse than Sam had told. At the Portsmouth Peace Conference, brokered at the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, and which earned President Roosevelt a Nobel Peace Prize, the U.S. sent Korea to hell. In exchange for Japan leaving the Philippines alone, the U.S. would stand by as Japan continued its dominance of Korea. The so-called Taft-Katsura Pact had sold Korea out. In the wake of this sordid agreement of realpolitik, Japan, emboldened and knowing it had a free hand without U.S. or other western interference, continued its encroachment in Korea between 1905 and 1910, dealing with Korean resistance with violent, brutal repression. After the 1910 annexation came 35 years of hell.

Sam explained that of all the issues that nag Korea today, the greatest was the unforgivable massacre at Kwangju in 1980, which was done by Koreans. Students occupy a place of respect in Korean society, Sam explained. This is because the youth of Korea have, over the generations, sacrificed and showed character and heroism against oppression and totalitarianism, particularly under the arbitrary rule of invading Chinese or Japanese. The sanctioned role of student protestors in Korea allows for both the maintenance of a Confucian order as well as the expression of an idealistic, iconoclastic spirit prized in Korean culture.

Though street fights between students and uniformed soldiers often—particularly on television—have a fierce look to them, to a Korean these street conflicts are more of a stylized, youthful civics debate that is permitted and indeed even encouraged by the entire society.

In Korean political mythology, young people have consistently taken on the honored role of idealistic rebel for the whole people. Where older, mature adults with responsibilities of family are obliged to honor the confining and ordered roles imposed by a Confucian-modeled society, the Korean young people—when they are organized for the purpose—are allowed license to express the community's romantic and idealistic spirit.

This translates into students' street demonstrations, even if organized by adults and supervised by adults. Sun Oak told of being drilled for such demonstrations in the 1950s as an elementary school student in Soon Chun. The children—guided by teachers and coaches—practiced their street-order drills for hours in the school yard before being sent en masse to the center of Soon Chun to protest—in those days—the abuses under the final days of President Syngman Rhee's regime.

It is such students who take to the street and fight with young soldiers who themselves are in uniform representing society merely because it is their turn at national service. Though the fighting appears fierce, and on occasion is, injuries are an accident of the passion of the moment, like a sports injury, and accepted as a cost of this Korean style of political debate.

This was underlying cultural background that explained the intense reaction to the incident that occurred in 1980 at the provincial capital of Kwangju; and why the death in the streets there had crossed the line.

The two key players in the Kwangju killings were Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo, who weeks later would come to grief over their roles at Kwangju. Roh Tae Woo, born to a poor family, had been given his big break when he entered the 11th class of the Korean Military Academy, where he graduated in 1955. Roh had risen to the rank of major general when President Park Chung Hee was assassinated October 26, 1979, by the then-chief of the Korean CIA, and was replaced by Prime Minister Choi Kyu Ha in a caretaker role. One of Roh's classmates from the Korean "West Point" was named Chun Doo Hwan, also an army general from the Kyongsang region.

On December 7, 1979, the two classmates conspired to stage a coup, which Chun executed December 12 by seizing a military base at the Kyong Bok Palace and arresting the army's chief of staff. To seal the coup, Roh sent a regiment of his crack tank and artillery troops to support Chun, who, as he consolidated power, rewarded his friend Roh by making him military commander of the capital region.

In the weeks that followed, as Chun consolidated his power, anti-coup demonstrations erupted across the country. Finally, to restore order, Chun Doo Hwan on May 17, 1980, put all of South Korea under martial law. The next day students in the southern city of Kwangju in the Cholla region (same as Soon Chun City), demonstrated and police and army paratroopers put down an uprising of 100,000. Protestors seized armories and armored personnel carriers. A week later, the army attacked at dawn, firing randomly with machine guns at anybody. The official estimates are set at 193 dead, but others say up to 2,000.

The U.S. role in this massacre has been debated ever since. The U.S. commander in South Korea, though technically the head of all military on the

peninsula, did not have operational control over any army units in the crack-down. However, he did agree that South Korean army troops would be used in Kwangju. The U.S. commander later said using regular army was better than paratroopers.

His problem was that he didn't act to stop the use of any troops, or act to prevent the massacre. And less than a year later, President Reagan hosted a White House dinner for now-President Chun Doo Hwan, earning the American leader the contempt of a generation of young Koreans. This has since become a tender point of conflict between the U.S. and South Korea, as well as altered the South Korean political landscape.

Partly as a result of the continuing controversy surrounding the Kwangju massacre, President Chun promised he would step down in 1988. To prepare the way for his successor, Chun chose Roh in 1987 to succeed him. Continuing protests in the streets made clouds of thick tear gas a constant phenomenon in Seoul in the spring and early summer of 1987. To quell the disturbances, Roh gave a speech June 29, 1987, endorsing a presidential election, the restoration of civil rights of Kim Dae Jung and other dissidents, a lifting of press restrictions, and other reform measures. Roh's speech ended demonstrations and set the stage for the peaceful gatherings at the Olympic Games in Seoul in the summer of 1988.

The killings in Kwangju represented a pivotal moment in Korean history: nurturing a new radicalism and a continuing anti-Americanism. A recent poll of Korean students found that they believed that Kwangju was—by an overwhelming margin—the greatest tragedy to befall Korea since 1945. The tragedy of the Korean War was a distant second by comparison. This is what continues to motivate anti-government demonstrators, as it had when I arrived the previous Saturday.

XXIII. AT HOME

After the few days of working with K.M. and the Mobil Oil Korea crew, I came to enjoy the office. I was able to use the email system, fax and telephones to stay in touch with work around the E&P system, and became accustomed to the rhythms of the MOKI office.

In the afternoons, I browsed in the mammoth bookstore in the Kyobo basement, which served as a combined college bookstore, Borders, Crown, and Starbucks coffee shop. This huge organized complex sold books, texts, study materials and all manner of sundries and accessories relating to reading, writing, learning and school. It also had a world-class supply of CDs with every variety of music, rock to classical. I played tourist.

In the 19th floor office, I could daydream, looking out the window on the boulevard below. My window was just above the commanding statue of Admiral Yi, who seemed to be overlooking the surrounding prosperity. The

expanse of this major thoroughfare led to the Blue House in the picturesque Puk'an San Mountains to the north. I knew President Kim Young Sam had been right to smash the symbol of colonial Japan's oppression by knocking down its occupation headquarters at the foot of the mountains.

In addition to K.M. and E.Y., MOKI employed two sales representatives and two financial analysts. The chief chore of this office was to manage Mobil's relationships with Korea Gas, and to help Indonesia service its supply contract out of the PT Arun Plant. Now that Qatar General Petroleum Corporation was in two joint ventures with Mobil, the Korea office was learning how to help the Qataris represent themselves to the Korea Gas bureaucracy. This required a wide variety of commercial and relationship building activity, much of it technical and boring and which I was pleased to have nothing to do with. The MOKI people, however, were congenial, polite and of very high quality. I only met one sales rep, Sam Yang, who had given me a tutorial on U.S./Korean relations. The other guy was on a sales trip to Japan. The women analysts, professional office workers in their 40s, had also been hired out of the U.S. Embassy and were genuinely pleasant.

My relationship with MOKI had begun in a professional way, as a visiting buttinsky from headquarters. But after a few days, we became more familiar and swapped life stories. After they learned about Sun Oak, the dynamics of our relationship changed. The women treated me like a relative, confiding all manner of personal and professional gossip. As for K.M., at first he repeatedly asked if I wanted evening entertainment—dinners, night clubs, etc.—and I had politely turned him down all week. Toward the end of my stay, I mentioned that my wife's cousins were taking me out to dinner.

K.M. became very curious: who were they, where did they live, where did they go to school, what were their names. I explained and thereafter, K.M. felt it perfectly okay to give me Dutch-uncle advice. K.M. would now express his private views about the intensity of the family feeling experienced by Koreans, and how important family members were. Maintaining family relationships, no matter what, is paramount.

"It is a value you hold," he said, searching for another way to explain. "How best to describe it? It's like breathing. Keeping your family together is so important to Koreans. Has your wife come back?"

"No," I said. "Her memories are hard. Wartime. Starvation. Loss."

At that he fell silent, but his expression gave away his belief that Sun Oak was staying away too long. He was crossing the line a bit, I thought, being more familiar than he should. But allowing for the emotion of the moment, no harm done. This was family talking. He was taking on the quality of a modest scold, a teacher instructing his pupil, perhaps a minister guiding a member of his flock to return to the path of righteousness.

When it was time to leave, K.M. and E.Y. came downstairs to the Kyobo lobby at 1:30 p.m. to see me off. I was prepared to say our good-byes in the 19th floor office. But both K.M. and E.Y. made the excuse they needed to come downstairs to get a sandwich. Their ruse was transparent. They came down at such a late lunch hour to see the cousins, who were waiting for me. When they introduced each other, Wan Soo took the formalities in stride. And I guess, as the elder in-law, I basked in the reflected youthful beauty of my wife's cousins, Sun Kyung and Sun Hwa, who both looked smashing. There was no question: K.M. and E.Y. approved.

We got to Kimpo with plenty of time to spare, and the cousins came inside to keep me company in a coffee shop where we spent our final hour together. When it was finally time to go to the exit lounge, I stayed in the Korean mode and gave a very brief hug and peck on cousins' cheeks. But custom required that we simply stand next to each other and be near. This was too much. We were all overwhelmed with intense emotion, each with tears to our eyes. This wouldn't be it. Our world wasn't so small any longer. Here, Hawaii, the mainland, wherever. The separation was over.

XXV. KOREA SOCIETY

After lunch at Smith & Wollensky's at 50th & 3rd, Calder, Mrs. Onitiri and the others took a cab to the airport. I had kept the afternoon open and worked the restaurant pay phone to call The Korea Society to find its chairman. I had kept my schedule flexible, but had known he'd be there. I introduced myself and said I was in town to go to The Korea Society luncheon the next day and wondered if I could visit with him about a business matter.

"Sure," said Ambassador Daniel P. Griggs, "come right over."

It was pouring rain. I finally found a cab to take me to 950 Third Avenue, where I found The Korea Society offices on the 8th floor of a modest midtown office building. I was soggy from the downpour and apologized to Ambassador Griggs, who had met me in the reception area wearing a red sweater; a very informal guy.

He invited me in for a casual visit. Griggs, 68, had a confident, relaxed and pleasant manner. I had done just a bit of homework on the guy and knew he possessed the pedigree of the once-dominant Eastern Establishment: New York-born, Episcopalian, Republican, volunteered U.S. Army, served 1945-47, and returned to graduate from Williams College in 1951 and immediately entered the CIA. He was a patriot, choosing July 4 as the day to get married. He and his wife had three children, one of whom was married to a son of conservative icon William F. Buckley. Griggs served in the CIA from 1951 to 1979, and had spent 18 years in Japan and Korea, having been CIA station chief in both countries. He served on the staff of the National Security Council from 1979 to 1982, and was Vice President Bush's national security aide for eight years until Bush's election as president. Griggs served as ambassador to Korea from 1989 to 1992, and after Bush's defeat became The Korea Society's first chairman in 1993.

After a bit of introductory chit-chat, Griggs instantly warmed to my subject: trying to cement a business deal in Korea. The Korea Society was devoted to building all manner of cultural, social and artistic links between the U.S. and Korea, of course, but all such links require commerce. Griggs understood the problem perfectly: If Mobil didn't succeed and sell Korea Qatar's gas, than the deal would fall to the Royal/Dutch Shell project in Oman, or the French Total project in Yemen.

"Seems pretty simple to me," he was saying, "why should they get the business instead of an American?"

I explained how the Korea Gas brass were throwing up all kinds of com-

mercial arguments to resist Mobil's business proposal, but Mobil's marketing team in Korea and Qatar could handle all that. What we needed help on was the so-called "security" issue about the Straits of Hormuz. How can we persuade the Koreans to take this off the table?

Personally, it never made sense to me that Korea Gas was more secure by having two "vulnerable" supply sources—one guaranteed by the U.S. and the other by either the Dutch or French—than having one "vulnerable" source guaranteed by the U.S. alone. Since the U.S. already guarantees Korea's security, and has guaranteed the supply source in the Persian Gulf, why is Korea made more secure by getting the Dutch or French into the act?

"Besides," I was saying, "the security of the Straits has been guaranteed, period. Obviously the Gulf war proved that. Then there's the bilateral security treaty signed in 1992 between the U.S. and Qatar, guaranteeing Qatari security. I don't know what more Korea Gas needs to know."

If this was a legitimate concern, having someone of standing in the U.S. government make these points would be helpful. And if this was a smoke screen to obscure other reasons to stop the deal, then we needed a gentle breeze to clear the air. Griggs offered to help. He suggested I send some background material to him; he'd see what he could do.

"This shouldn't be too difficult," Griggs said, thinking aloud.

XXVI. THE GILDED ROPE AT THE WALDORF

The Korea Society luncheon the next day took place at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. I had arranged to attend because the honored guest was scheduled to be Prof. K. S. Lee, the new governor of the Bank of Korea. Small world.

I arrived a bit early to walk around. I loved the hotel. Over the years, the spirit of the Waldorf continued to induce—for me—small epiphanies. One had occurred three years before, when I had been at the Waldorf with Larry Atwood to attend a dinner for Suharto, the president of Indonesia. Suharto, in town for the opening of the United Nations, was that year chief of the non-aligned nations, a chore he took seriously as he prepared to host the APEC meeting in Jakarta in 1994. The dinner at the Waldorf was held so all the American outfits that did business in Indonesia could publicly say welcome. This was a business courtesy, and gave Suharto a platform to give a little speech that could be put into all the Indonesian newspapers, where editors would say that he was demonstrating world leadership.

The protocols of the evening required that both the generous hosts and the honored guests try to ignore the Indonesian students scheduled to picket the hotel outside demanding greater human rights at home, or denouncing repression in East Timor or Aceh Province. This meant a little PR exposure for the sponsors of the U.S. dinner. But most attending were used to such heat

from time to time. Part of doing business in a world where people don't always behave just right.

Because of the size of Mobil's investment, we had to step out front a bit. Despite the whispered objections in parts of Mobil, we'd crafted an ad that had been published in the *New York Times* that day, in which Mobil welcomed Suharto, saying Indonesia was a great country and Mobil liked doing business there. The Indonesian ambassador to the U.S. loved it, and brought a copy of the paper to the table to show Atwood, as if he hadn't seen it. We'd paid for a table down front and were joined by the Indonesian defense and finance ministers, who, of course, sat right in sight of their boss at the head table. Routine PR stuff.

Waiting for the Suharto dinner to begin, Atwood and I had killed time wandering around the hotel lobby, exploring the winding corridors and looking in the shop windows. On this jaunt, we entered a narrow hallway that triggered a flash in my mind of a memory from another time, years before.

In my mind's eye I saw where I had stood nearly 20 years before. I had been a reporter for the *Daily News*, caught behind a gilded rope, watching the grand and mighty, who were clad in elegant evening wear, pass by on their way to a VIP reception, from which the press was excluded.

This had been an ordinary working night, but one I continued to remember. At the time, I was reporting on the night shift for the *Daily News*, and was detailed on the what we called "the coat and tie" circuit. This meant I ate at the press table at whatever fancy do might be held at the Waldorf ballroom that night. I did this perhaps twice a week for a year, ensuring the later editions were covered in case any actual news occurred at these events, which happened from time to time. Routine reporter stuff.

But that night, the event was a fund-raiser for the United Negro College Fund, and the honoree to draw the dinner patrons was Thomas Murphy, then chairman of General Motors, a consistent supporter of the charity. Though the evening created no news, I knew Murphy's story anyway. Years before, when my father had been a rising executive in GM, he and Murphy had been colleagues and potential future GM leaders. Murphy went on to become chairman, while my dad would become lost in whiskey. My parents had been divorced; the family ruptured, never to recover. My father, then lost, had retained a modest pension only because a forgiving supervisor allowed him to retire early on medical grounds.

Now, that evening in the Waldorf, Murphy, and his wife and daughters, radiant in their evening clothes, protected, secure and wealthy beyond measure, were walking along this hallway, while my Dad—the last I heard—was paying night rates in rented rooms near the railroad station in Hartford. Me, I was wearing a jacket and pants that didn't match, and corralled behind a gilded rope, earning a union wage as a professional observer.

I was struck by the comfort and confidence in the faces of the Murphy family that night. And, as I related this story to Atwood, it was in that hallway that I realized I wanted to be on the other side of the gilded rope, which I had accomplished by becoming the professional engineer of occurrences to be observed.

“What you’re saying then,” Atwood said, teasing me out of my reverie, “is that you actually once earned money by working for a living?”

Another epiphany—along the same lines—had occurred the year before, when Sun Oak and I had stayed at the Waldorf Towers with Lee and Micah when we were in town to celebrate my mother’s 80th birthday at my sister’s place at 86th & Riverside. It happened that at that moment, November 1994, the Arthur D. Little consulting study of Corporate Public Affairs was winding up. Its conclusions were still a secret, but if events proceeded as they would have under Riley, it appeared that openings and moves would be made that could elevate me to the Corporate general manager’s post. After all, that had been the plan I had hoped for.

But during that outing at the Waldorf, I sensed that the long-sought general manager’s job just might not happen. After all, my father had been my age in 1958 when he was passed over for a general manager’s post in Bristol he had worked to get for nearly 20 years and believed was his. By that time, GM may have suspected his drinking had gotten the better of him; maybe he rankled a few he shouldn’t have. Whatever happened, when he failed to get the job he had wanted, he was forced to find another berth in GM’s hierarchy. He found a post at GM’s Delco Products plant in Dayton, Ohio, where we moved in 1959. Rejected, misplaced, overcome, the spirit for his job fled him; he began a slide that ruined his life and destroyed his family. It would be 1978 before he finally quit drinking after so much damage had been done. We had reconciled before he died in 1988.

But when all this rushed into my memory at the Waldorf in 1994, I realized: what, who am I kidding? There were no guarantees about me getting the general manager job I’d figured was mine. Look at it: I was in a tug of war with the new corporate leaders, and Marconi was clearly not Riley. The old ways were over. Did E&P have a place for me for the rest of my career? Would Humphrey survive? Looking out the hotel window in the Waldorf Towers that November outing, I remembered I’d told my son and daughter about what had happened to their grandfather. Facing what happened to him, I realized that, like my father, the chances were even I’d likely get passed over—at 48 years old, too. Two months later, I was. Marconi would go outside to hire the new general manager.

Like I said, the Waldorf held all manner of memories. Now, in the fall of 1995, the guests at The Korea Society luncheon were gathering, making acquaintances, reintroducing themselves and making small talk. I did the

same. I saw out of the corner of my eye Ambassador Griggs come in escorting his honored guest, Governor K. S. Lee. I walked over and caught the ambassador's attention. He gave me a quick nod to come over.

"Governor Lee," he was saying as I walked up, "I want you to meet Tom Collins of Mobil."

We shook hands, and Governor Lee gave only the slightest hint he was interested in this introduction. I made a brief reference to the arrangements I'd made for the fellowship at Harvard's Korea Institute, and then cut to the chase: "I'm happy to meet you and I bring greetings from John Kim and Larry Atwood."

That got his attention. "Ah, how is my friend, Mr. Atwood?"

"He's just fine," I said, "but I regret to say that he is retiring."

XXVII. KOREA COZY

With President Clinton set to visit with South Korean President Kim Young Sam at the APEC meeting in Osaka later, in mid-November, I made sure the National Security Council had the dope on the Korea Gas issue. I knew energy supplies and LNG would be way down on any list of discussion topics. But we framed the arguments for the NSC guys anyway, putting the briefing notes together. During bilateral discussions between the U.S. and Korea, the U.S. could say: 1) We guarantee Korea's energy security, and 2) We would help cement relations if Korea Gas picked up Train #2 at Ras Laffan and solidified Korea's hold on Qatar's North Field through a mega-LNG industrial enterprise.

It turned out that Clinton, fighting Congress about budget matters, never went, sending Vice President Gore to Osaka instead. Gore was savvy about the issue, but we heard it never came up.

As invited, I had sent back-up material to Griggs and kept him updated as details developed. I never inquired what he did with it. Not for me to know, particularly. As expected, Korea Gas signed a Sales & Purchasing Agreement October 16, in Doha, Qatar, with Qatar General Petroleum Corporation and Ras Laffan LNG Company for the supply of some 2.4 million tons of LNG a year to Korea—equivalent to the output of one LNG "processing train." Because of Korea Gas's reluctance to commit to a second processing train, Qatar was forced to give Korea Gas an extension on its option to purchase another 2.4 million tons of LNG.

However, if Korea Gas did purchase the output from a second LNG "processing train," Ras Laffan LNG Company's engineering, procurement and construction contractors would view Ras Laffan as an "all-Korea" project and offer investment, business and commercial opportunities for a wide range of Korean industries and business interests. This was a tremendous economic incentive. The LNG marketing guys filed an analysis with the

U.S. Department of Commerce that showed that the potential benefits of such a second LNG train to Korean contractors and materials suppliers could result in up to \$1.5 billion in goods and service for the Korean economy, and up to a 10 percent ownership by Korean interests in the LNG trains in Ras Laffan.

We also appealed to Korean nationalism, pointing out that with two trains, Korea had its first opportunity to be involved in a “grassroots” LNG project in a country with huge energy supplies, and, in effect, act like Japan does in dominating a project’s development through all stages—earning profits from design to construction to transportation to financing, the whole deal.

But Korea Gas was cozy. Despite all the arguments, and despite its need to act to get deliveries by 2000, Korea Gas by mid-October told Qatar it wouldn’t decide until the end of 1995 whether to purchase the output from a second LNG train from Qatar, or from competing LNG projects in Oman or Yemen.

XXVIII. CHANGE OF GUARD

Atwood’s retirement dinner took place October 25 at the Ritz-Carlton Tysons. Despite the lift provided by the wives attending, it was a sad do, perhaps the last gathering of the old E&P management regime under Humphrey. Though no one would admit that night what underlay Atwood’s decision, it was clear the new chairman, the SRP regime and E&P’s proposal to manage itself through a so-called Strategic Leadership Council (SLC) in Fairfax and four regional councils supervising and coordinating the 11 affiliates and other business development initiatives, wasn’t a hit with an old time East Texas player like Atwood, who chose now—on his own terms—to put in his papers.

During the reception before dinner, I went over to pay my respects.

A look of concern came across Atwood’s face. “I don’t know what happens to you, Tom.”

“Don’t worry,” I said, “Humphrey says I got a chair on the SLC. I’ll be okay.”

Atwood shook his head. “Sometimes things just aren’t fair, is all.” He told me to hang in, which of course I would do. I had all my normal routines to do, plus the Korea initiative.

But that evening, after coffee, a few of us remained seated around the circular dinner table tossing around the bittersweet events of the business day, Atwood’s departure, the struggles with Marconi’s SRP, and the odds that Humphrey’ SLC counter-proposal would fly with Marconi’s full Ex-Com. We’d know for sure within a month. E&P’s vice president of Planning, Steve Common, began talking about the Korea Gas deal, and the variety of initiatives underway to cement the deal, the number of issues involved in the Ras

Laffan purchases. He got wrapped up in the difficulties and forgot himself.

“The Koreans are sonsofbitches,” he said.

This was a sharp and false note. Everybody knew Sun Oak, seated right there, was Korean. All knew that Common had stepped over the line. One never gets used to racism. But over the years, you recognize what is racism and what is merely thoughtless. You can fight or you can cope. To clear the air, I tried a quick joke.

“And, of course,” I interrupted quickly, “we are speaking here on a business basis.”

My remark released the tension of the moment. Common’s shocked expression served to redeem him and the moment; his genuine chagrin at his own stupid remark prevented what might have been a very embarrassing follow up. Common, normally confident and polite, was mortified at his remark, as was his wife, who glared at him. This soon prompted laughing and teasing, as catching Common in such an obviously embarrassing non-PC moment was in fact funny. And, indeed, Common did mean on a business basis.

But the fact that such a sentiment was in his head and that close to the surface meant that he considered it true, too. For some of the brass at Korea Gas have had their hands out for years; we knew that, they take money from all kinds of people. They are wired up with other suppliers, and the most immediate past gang of managers—guys John Kim had worked with for years—had been fired and replaced. Doing business with crooks isn’t fun.

This sentiment was echoed a few evenings later, at a Mobil reception at a Latin American embassy in Washington. I fell into a chat with Hal Carlson, a regional vice president for M&R in Asia, whom I had known from my US-M&R days. We’d both moved on from those days. We talked about travels and Common’s comment and Korea came to mind.

“No,” he said, “Korea’s never on my travel list.”

“How come? Lots of people driving lots of cars, building lots of goods ought to mean fuel and lubes.”

“Simple,” Carlson was saying. “They got government approved outfits who oversupply their own market with product, ruining the price and crowding out others. If you want to invest there and compete, the domestic guys will overspend you all the time.”

“What’s the deal with Korean business, anyway” I asked.

“Closed shop.”

“How so?”

“When I was in S&T (Supply & Trading), we’d try to do deals out of there all the time, move loads of fuel in or out, trading on the margins. But their agenda just wasn’t commerce alone. There was always another agenda. They operate according to their own rules.”

XXIX.THE CONCERT

On Wednesday, November 1, Sun Oak and I drove in the early morning to National Airport. We parked in Lot B, took a shuttle bus to the US Air Terminal and a flight to LaGuardia, where we arrived shortly before noon. A cab dropped us at The New York Palace, on Madison between 50 and 51st Streets, where we checked into room 3021.

It was a cool, rainy, fall day in Manhattan. Sun Oak and I stood at the window; the view from the hotel window was enchanting. St. Patrick's Cathedral and Rockefeller Center stretched out before us below. Off to the south stood the old Newsweek magazine building. Cabs crawled along slickened black streets. Pedestrians made their way under umbrellas, dodging puddles and each other. Manhattan appeared bathed in a melancholy beauty. We had a simple lunch, walked through neighborhood shops and relaxed the afternoon away. As the dinner hour approached, we got ourselves dressed in formal clothes.

We were there on a dual professional-personal mission. I decided after the trip to Korea and after corresponding with Ambassador Griggs that it would be prudent to double up on family and professional interests and attend The Korea Society's 1995 Annual Dinner, which would be combined with The Korea Society Music Series' Inaugural Concert at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center, at Broadway and West 65th Street.

Over the years, Sun Oak and I have attended scores of corporate functions. At each one we took care not to confuse why we were there. To avoid my father's fate, I had quit drinking 13 years before, so the artificial sociability of such gatherings was absent for me. We were always cordial with my business colleagues and their spouses; in fact, over the years we'd become friends with several. However, we were never confused about the roles. Strictly business.

This trip, however, was different. I had become interested in the works of The Korea Society personally. Rather than attend under a Mobil membership, I joined under a family membership. I enjoyed the newsletters, became familiar with the Society's artistic, cultural and social exchange work, attended a few cultural events in D.C., and figured The Korea Society was doing right. The purpose of our trip today was for Sun Oak to see for herself, and to let nature take its course.

We got to Lincoln Center in time for the reception. Eventually more than 2,000 guests assembled for the evening's events. After checking our umbrella, I briefly went over to say hello to Griggs. He introduced me to several of the visiting Korean VIPs and mentioned in passing that he had gotten my package and that he would be on his way to Korea in a few days for a visit. He made no comment beyond that; just pleasant, polite, somewhat distant and reserved. Who could tell what would happen, if anything.

We would schmooze with a variety of Korea Society types, mostly reps from the large construction, engineering, marketing and manufacturing firms, the law firms, accounting partnerships, the advertising and public relations agencies who all had delegates in attendance. But there were also many prosperous Korean-Americans from the metropolitan area. Among our dinner companions was a Korean-American professor about our age, who lived on Staten Island with his wife, a pharmacist, and who was now head of the Korea-American Association of Greater New York. The four of us had a long talk about their experiences leaving Korea, coming to America and making their way.

After dinner, we shifted to Avery Fisher Hall, where the 2,000 gathered for the two-hour musical program that included performances from a 9-year-old Korean-American girl named Christine Kwak, a virtuoso violinist from Bayside, Queens; a 33-year-old soprano from Seoul named Sumi Jo, who trained in Italy and who now tours the world from a base in Rome; and a guest conductor, Dong Myung Park, a Julliard grad out of Seoul who lives now in the U.S.

The musical program included some Rossini, some de Sarasate, some Verdi and also a somewhat muscular Rachmaninoff concerto by Earl Wild, an 80-year-old pianist, who was a widely-recorded house musician for NBC and then ABC, until his retirement in 1988.

Sun Oak listened, captivated by the performance of Christine Kwak, the 9-year-old Queens girl, who showed complete mastery of de Sarasate. Sumi Jo, a stylish diva, sang treatments of both Verdi and the traditional Korean song, Arirang, using a composition made in 1993 by Jung Joon Ahn. Sumi Jo was a strong, commanding performer.

But it was the finale that did it. After more than 90 minutes of this musical journey by Korean-American performers, a chorus made up of some 200 Korean-Americans from metropolitan area churches, singing clubs and music school alumni gathered on stage behind the orchestra to perform the finale: "Korea Fantasy." The work was composed by Eak Tay Anh during the Japanese occupation in 1936, and contained the refrain of the Korean national anthem, which was also composed by Eak Tay Anh—Korea's George Gershwin and Francis Scott Key.

The themes in this music were as familiar to a Korean as "America the Beautiful" and "The Star Spangled Banner" would be to a Yank, packing the same emotional punch. The opening refrain—Uri Dae Han Mansei—traditionally expresses the dream that Korea will persevere and last forever, and its repetition throughout hammered home the same patriotic and nationalist sentiment. Performed by the full orchestra, and backed up by this large throaty chorus, the impact of this music was nearly overwhelming.

I looked over to see Sun Oak, wrapped in the music, bursting with appre-

ciation and joy. She looked up at the stage, and quietly surveyed the prosperous audience, dressed in their formal evening wear and contained in what is New York's most distinguished cultural setting. So many hundreds of Koreans gathered in such a setting, on top of the world, at once celebrating their cultural heritage and their standing in the New World they shared with others from so many places.

People have asked how it was that Sun Oak and I, who had come from such diverse backgrounds, could have formed such a strong bond. I thought about it at that moment. Despite the superficial differences of our ethnic and geographic origins, we weren't so different at all. Though our families came in different eras, they all came from someplace else to this country and found each other and a place where they could make their future and where their dreams could come true.

"I'm so proud," she said to me, "the distance we have traveled."

But from my standpoint, lost to her family in Korea, coming to this country alone at age 14, it was I who was so proud of her, the distance she has traveled in overcoming so much. I was overwhelmed with admiration, and with sorrow at what Sun Oak had lost so long ago.

XXX.TTUK KAB

On the flight to New York, I had seen a story in the *New York Times* about the corruption and bribery investigations underway in Korea. Such crimes in Korea, of course, were well known. But the story this day focused on former president Roh Tae Woo, who was being grilled by the Korea Justice Department for amassing a slush fund of \$650 million during his rule between 1987 and 1993. Roh had apparently given some of the loot to his political party, but he'd kept most for himself when he left office. He was being chased like a crook; he'd been caught on TV at 2 a.m. leaving the police station after a 16-hour grilling. This was hugely embarrassing.

I had showed the article to Sun Oak, who began reading as I watched. Sun Oak had long told me that when she was young, nobody in her home would ever talk about politics or politicians. Politics was only discussed in school, when students occasionally were organized to protest en masse, which they did only to get roughed up by the cops from time to time. Sun Oak's grandparents accepted all this as a way of life. Yung Ja never paid any attention to politics. Political power simply was, that's all; a condition of life, like the heat from the noonday sun or frost in the night. To Yung Ja, when contending with these forces, nothing was called for except endurance.

In Soon Chun, if you went to the polling booth in those days and filled out your ballot, it was inspected by the polling official. If you had voted for the wrong candidates, the ballot was torn up and you were told to do it again. If your neighbors couldn't accept rules like this, they were branded

Reds, jailed or worse.

Sun Oak finished the article. “That’s good. It shows they are trying to get rid of the corruption,” she said. “A few years ago you’d have never seen this. When I was young, if anybody talked about this kind of thing, they’d have disappeared.”

So there’s progress.

In the days and weeks following our visit to New York for The Korea Society gala, there was a flood of developments in Korea; the country’s political dynamics were changing forever. Prosecutors in the government of President Kim Young Sam would arrest the two previous presidents—Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo—and charge them not only with corruption but, in effect, with treason for the 1979 coup and murder in the 1980 Kwangju massacre.

As these charges were investigated and as events forced statements and confessions, a sickening culture of corruption was exposed to the light of day. At its heart was the interlocking relationship of mutually reinforcing power among the military, the government, and Korea’s corporations called chaebols. The chaebol, a legacy of the first military government of Park Chung Hee, 1961–79, were a relative handful of huge all-purpose companies who have consolidated economic power while squeezing out entrepreneurs and challengers—with government help. In 1995, 30 such conglomerates generated 82 percent of the country’s GNP.

The government’s over-regulated financial system, geared to benefit the favored chaebol, enabled selected companies to obtain privileged access to cheap loans and foreign currency on the condition that they meet export targets. In effect, these chaebols are all subsidiaries of Korea, Inc. This successful nationalistic economic strategy was distinctive in two respects. The first was competition among the chaebols; because the government chiefs would not allow monopolies, a high-level of economic efficiency was engendered through pro-competition and pro-export strategies. Also, the government insisted the chaebols export products that could compete internationally. Second, and more importantly, was that the fact that the state was the dominant partner. The corruption didn’t make the politicians the tools of business; it was the other way around. Companies did as they were told and paid up. And in Korea, the government was the military.

From 1961 to 1987, the Korean military backed the government rulers; the conglomerate chiefs worked like their commercial generals and field commanders. The government decided which sectors and companies would prosper. The government funneled cheap capital and favorable tax treatment their way. Today four companies—Hyundai, Samsung, Daewoo and LG—account for a third of Korea’s total sales. Of the 63,000 exporters in the country, only 100 are responsible for 60 percent of exports. The top 10 are responsible for 43 percent.

The cancer on this system was the corruption. In return for favored treatment, the military leaders demanded cash. Beginning with Park Chung Hee in 1961 and until his assassination in 1979, from 1979 to 1988 Chun Doo Hwan, chaebol business leaders were required to give “donations,” for which they received receipts that were good for tax deduction write-offs. Chaebol leaders called these payments a “survival tax.”

In the chaebol world, there is a term called “ttuk kab” or rice cake money, of 5-15 million won (\$6,500 to \$19,500) given each cabinet minister to make the major holidays during the year. This kind of bribe or gift offers a traditional form of protection.

When Sun Oak was a schoolgirl in Soon Chun, it was the practice for parents to give teachers holiday gifts, with the understanding that if they did not give the gifts, they couldn't predict what the teacher might do to the child's report card.

Normally a ttuk kab is a traditional holiday treat. But with the chaebols, such ttuk kabs are given by each chaebol to each minister. Just in case. This isn't for favors necessarily, just a hedge against punitive treatment by the powerful bureaucrats. The tax agency, the Office of National Tax Administration, for example, might punish companies the government doesn't like with audits. A top government bureaucrat can clear a billion won, lesser bureaucrats in the tens of millions. Old habits die hard, and everybody was susceptible. This so-called black money had obviously corroded everything. Despite the high tone of public rectitude, payoffs in Korea remain routine; even the journalists who denounce graft demand it.

In the late fall of 1995, however, all this was in the future. Through the remainder of November and into early December, in addition to my chores in following up as best I could on the Korean initiative with the Qatar LNG marketing guys, I also performed my duties with the E&P operations in the U.S., Canada, Indonesia, Germany, U.K., Netherlands, Qatar, Nigeria, Vietnam, Australia, Kazakhstan, Venezuela, Peru and other countries as they came up, acting as the leader, supervisor, manager and doer of the various public affairs programs and communications chores there as required, as well as continuing to be the go-to public affairs guy for the E&P management team in Fairfax.

Most of those countries were in the news, but none quite like Korea, where Mobil was hoping to make an LNG sale to a customer otherwise distracted. The leaders of the Korean economy, along with the military and political leaders, were all in hot water of a decidedly ginger sort: The intelligent and honest people of South Korea were out for blood.

At the November 3 meeting of the Federation of Korean Industries (FKI), the chiefs of the nation's 23 largest companies offered a formal public apology for the involvement of business in Roh's slush fund and adopted a resolution to never again make secret political donations. FKI Chairman Chey Jong Hyon, chief of Sunkyong Group and an in-law of the now-disgraced Roh Tae Woo, apologized to the Korean people "for the past's undesirable connections between politicians and businessmen."

In late November, I got a call from Ambassador Griggs. "I just got back and I wanted to follow up with you about our discussions," he began. "While I was there, I was mindful of the issue of concern to you, but as you can image, much is going on. I must say that I don't believe any of the chaebol chiefs will be concentrating on any long-range strategic issues of the type we discussed for some time."

We discussed the general condition of the political situation in Korea and it was obvious that the immediate future was no time to be seeking to persuade South Korea's leadership about issues involving energy security or the relative merits of one LNG supply source over another.

This was bad news for me, of course, and my narrow problem. As a result, my gambit to engineer a political link that would trim the time line for Qatar LNG contracts between Mobil and customers in Korea failed. But it wasn't a surprise. In matters of this kind, timing often is everything. In the days ahead, prosecutors would quiz the heads of 24 chaebols, eventually indicting the chiefs of eight of the country's largest, including Hanbo, Samsung, Daewoo, Dong Ah, Dongbu Jinro, Daelim and Daeho. The leaders of these organizations were household names in Korea, wielding enormous power over the economy as well as among the country's political, military and industrial elites. None of these guys would be eager to talk for a while.

EPILOGUE

By the first week of December, more than six months had passed since Chairman Marconi announced the massive internal reorganization called the Staff Redesign Project (SRP). The SRP targeted 14,500 current “staff” in May and said that by the first quarter of 1996, that figure would be downsized to 10,500, saving \$1.05 billion in annual operating expenses. Just as Marconi knew, investors on Wall Street loved it, jumping Mobil’s stock price from \$84 to around \$110.

My particular professional area—public affairs—was a drop in the bucket. The SRP identified 223 public affairs professionals worldwide and declared that only 139 were required, saving Mobil \$35 million. Of course, for the past six months, just like the other E&P functional chiefs, I had questioned everything, so I was not among those who endorsed this plan. And in late November, Humphrey failed in his final attempt to save the E&P Strategic Leadership Council (SLC), his alternate management scheme. The Ex-Com refused to approve Humphrey’s method of managing the E&P Division and refused to permit the upstream to control or maintain a dedicated “staff.” As a result, Humphrey lost control of his business domain.

So in the first week in December, between the SRP and the Ex-Com realignment decisions, not only was my position in the E&P Division eliminated, the entire E&P Division was eliminated. Marconi decreed that regional decision-making management structures would be established, and Mobil operating units would not need worldwide staff managers. Mobil’s functional chiefs would reside in the corporate center, business units would have local advisors, and new generic staff service centers would be created outside the business units on standby offering professional service at market rates negotiated every year.

At the corporate level, the vice president’s position once occupied by Vince Palermo was eliminated. The position’s roles within the old public affairs function were separated into two. A general manager of government relations would now report to the legal department in Corporate. A general manager of public relations would report directly to Chairman Marconi, who shortly would hire an advertising pro, who’d been a career company-jumper in the computer industry, to run public relations for Mobil.

Though my position, role and job as a division public affairs manager was eliminated along with the division itself, I continued to do my job until the SRP decided how to handle public affairs chores for the units that were continuing to operate regardless of what headquarters was doing.

In recent weeks, the SRP game became working with the “redesign teams” to create “shared service” organizations that would operate like independent agencies and find new ways to “deliver client service” in accord with the market place. The SRP then created “selection teams,” which would use

SRP written forms and procedures to decide who went where and at what level. After the SRP had created the “shared service” boxes, there was only one job open that I might get. Marconi and the SRP had candidates, and could veto a wrong choice by the “selection team.”

On December 7, Humphrey phoned and asked me to come by. As I entered his corner office I had a premonition. I looked at my watch. It was 4:23 p.m. Pearl Harbor Day. Sonofabitch, I thought to myself, I’m going to get clipped.

“Tom,” he said, after I had sat down, “the SRP selection team decided there is no job for you at Mobil.”

Just like that.



When I joined Mobil in 1979, the company employed more than 100,000. Once the U.S. government ended crude oil price controls in 1980, and Mobil began selling its non-oil operations, headcount steadily fell. By 1991 Mobil’s headcount had dropped to 60,400; when the SRP initiative was announced in May 1995 Mobil’s headcount was 50,300. After SRP, Mobil’s employment would hit 45,000, and a few years later Mobil was acquired by Exxon.

As for my inability to gain favor with the new regime, well, what can I say? I played by the rules I’d been taught by the guys who brought me in. I sleep well. I betrayed no one, protected all those I could, stayed true to the standards I’d learned, and did what I thought right. What had made me successful under one regime, caused my demise in the one that followed.

I had a good run. Crossing that gilded rope in 1979 had been the right move. Mobil provided me a backstage job to a massive drama; occasionally I even got onstage to speak some lines. I played my part willingly and wouldn’t have missed it for the world. I had traveled the world and explored upstream to search my own origins. In fact, my last initiative in Korea gave me a priceless gift: a glimmer of knowledge about the love of my life. The drama continues; I would find another oil outfit to work for. And despite the failure of my efforts to speed up the time line on Qatar LNG development, it would eventually work out. The difference was that the Mobil E&P Division would be gone; the economic benefits of that project and all the others would flow to the shareholders of a new company called ExxonMobil, run by people I don’t even know.