

I was born in a deep mountain village in Manchuria, China when Korea was under Japanese Rule. My father owned enormous agricultural land in Manchuria, and he provided food and weapons to the Korean guerrillas

When World War II ended, my family decided to return home to Taegu, which is in the southern part of South Korea. My mother and my siblings and I left for South Korea, but my father and one of my brothers, Oong Hee, stayed behind in Manchuria to wrap up the business. They were to join us in Taegu in a few weeks. But right after we left, the border between China and North Korea was closed, and my father and brother became trapped in Manchuria.

In 1988, I went to Manchuria to find out what had happened to my father and brother, and I learned that they had moved to North Korea in the end of 1949.

In 1992, my nephew, who was a minister in Chicago, visited North Korea with a group of ministers. In Pyongyang, he mentioned my father's name to an official. A few days later when he returned to the hotel, Oong Hee and his son were waiting for him. From the reunion, we learned that my father had already passed away and why my father and Oonghee hadn't come home.

Shortly after they arrived in North Korea, the Korean War broke out, and Oonghee was conscripted into the North Korean army and fought for North Korea while my three other brothers fought for South Korea, and one of them was killed. When the War was over and Oonghee returned home, the 38th parallel was drawn between South Korea and North Korea. This time, they became trapped in North Korea.

At the age of 54, my father started running marathons, and later he became well known as a marathoner, educator and inspirational speaker. And they made a movie about him, and I have a copy of it, here.

In 1989, I transferred my job as a director to the Albany Park Library which was located in the heart of the Chicago Korean community, and I built huge Korean collections with grants. And the library was crowded with Korean patrons from all over Chicago and suburbs, and a lot of them were divided family members.

In March 2000, I went to see Congressman Mark Kirk about the divided families. Since then, several resolutions have been passed in the House. And then congressman Kirk passed two bills: one signed by President George W. Bush in February 2008 and the other signed by President Obama in December 2009. On January 9, 2023, President Biden signed our third bill, and Ambassador Julie Turner's registration bill was passed in the House on June 25 and in the senate on September?.

The problem is most of the divided family members have passed away, and 90% of the remaining divided family members are in their late 80's and 90's. Time is running out for us. Please help us to meet our family members in North Korea.

