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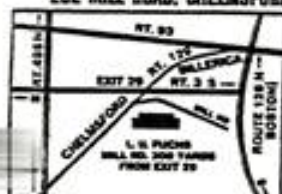
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She has gone from welfare mother to stand-up comic to Oscar-winning actress. Now, here's Whoopi Goldberg, talk-show host. BY HILARY DEVRIES

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During World War II, thousands of Korean girls were forced to serve as prostitutes — or "comfort women" — for the Japanese military. Apologies aren't enough, say these women, who have emerged from decades of shame to speak out. BY DIANE MANUEL

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BY DIANE MANUEL

SMALL COMFORT

The scars on her hands, back, and psyche tell of wartime atrocities: The nails on both of her hands are hardened scales, sharply ridged down the middle, where Japanese police drove sharpened bamboo spikes under her fingernails. Amoeba-shaped depressions several inches long cover her back and shoulders, her skin was seared with ~~ing~~ iron rods. As wrenching as Shim Mi-Cha's physical scars may be, her deepest and longest-lasting pain is the psychological trauma she suffered as a result of systematic sexual abuse by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II.

Today, Shim and a handful of other elderly Korean women who live with memories of similar wartime treatment are beginning to tell their stories. In the telling, they are reminding the world that Japan, for all its posturing as a modern-day economic miracle, still has much to account for in its treatment of neighboring Asian nations.

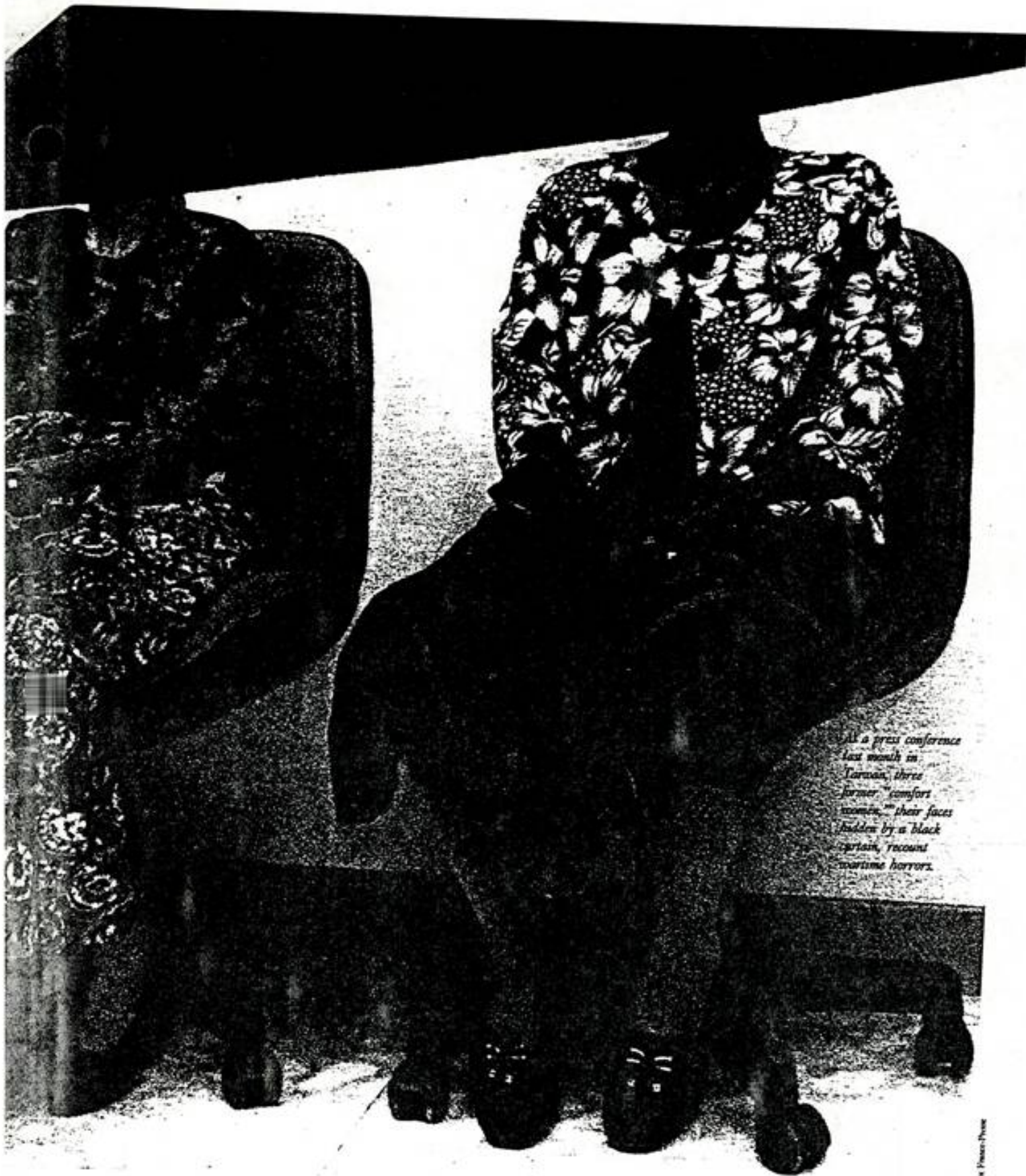
The women's courage in speaking out has once again drawn international attention to Japan's reluctance to address wartime atrocities. In the past, Japan has contended that private entrepreneurs organized and maintained whatever military brothels existed during World War II, but on July 6 government officials reversed that long-standing position, to publicly admit that its own military officers had recruited girls and young women from Japan, Korea, China,

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Diane Manuel is a free-lance journalist. She was a Peace Corps volunteer in Korea from 1969 to 1970.



DURING WORLD WAR II, MORE THAN 100,000 KOREAN GIRLS WERE
APOLOGIES FROM THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT AREN'T ENOUGH, SA



At a press conference
last month in
Tokyo, three
former "comfort
women," their faces
shaded by a black
curtain, recount
war-time horrors.

Agence France-Press

...CED TO SERVE AS PROSTITUTES - OR "COMFORT WOMEN" - FOR THE JAPANESE MILITARY.
Y... EN, WHO ARE FINALLY EMERGING FROM DECADES OF SHAME TO SPEAK OUT.

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SMALL COMFORT

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Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia to be prostitutes for the Imperial Army. Although spokesmen expressed "great remorse" for the suffering caused, they declined to describe the recruitment of these women as a crime. What's more, they argued that Japan could not be held responsible for financial compensation, since no evidence had been uncovered to prove that the women had been abducted or coerced.

While Japanese officials say that no public hearings are planned on this issue, they would do well to hear Shim Mi-Cha's story. Although it has been more than 50 years since Shim was dragged by police from her fifth-grade classroom in a rural North Korean village, she recalls the afternoon clearly. She remembers fighting off an attempted rape at the police barracks by biting an officer's ear. She remembers being strapped to

a chair; her ankles and wrists were bound, and an iron stake was thrust between her legs. She was tortured for several days until she lost consciousness.

The only part she doesn't remember clearly is the boat trip from North Korea to Fukuoka, Japan. She knows that when she finally came to, she was confined with 26 other Korean schoolgirls in a military brothel. Abducted at age 14 from a moralistic Confucian society, tortured beyond description, and shamed to the core of her Korean soul upon being forced into prostitution, Shim would spend most of the next four years in a tiny room in a Quonset hut, under 24-hour guard, and she would be raped by soldiers 20 to 30 times each day.

Her crime? A Japanese teacher had asked her to embroider some flowers on a map of his homeland, and she had chosen to stitch morning glories instead of cherry blossoms, the national flower of Japan. "Everyone in Korea had that kind of

feeling against Japan at that time, even schoolchildren," Shim recalls. "In the morning glory, that opens in the morning and closes at night, I saw the fall of Japan."

At age 69, Shim Mi-Cha is a member of a generation that is renowned in Seoul for its fiery patriotism. She grew up during the so-called colonial period, when Japan illegally annexed and ruled the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945. Often described by Western historians as an era of cultural genocide, it is characterized by Koreans as an attempt by a barbaric "land of the sword" to dominate an educated "land of the pen." Newspapers were shut down, and anyone who spoke out against the occupation was imprisoned and tortured. Schoolchildren had to wear military-style uniforms and were forbidden to speak Korean by their Japanese teachers. Families were forced to adopt Japanese names.

As a staging base for Japan's invasion of China, Korea first was stripped of raw

materials. Later, as the Pacific War intensified, more than 1 million young men were lost to the Japanese military effort, working as forced laborers in factories and as conscripted soldiers.

These facts and figures are all part of the historical record. What hasn't been widely known — or provable — until recent months was the conscription of between 100,000 and 200,000 Korean girls and young women to serve as prostitutes for the Japanese army and navy. The estimates are based on Japanese documents that recorded one prostitute for every 29 soldiers.

EUPHEMISTICALLY REferred to as "military comfort women," a term coined by the Japanese that echoes the wartime "comfort bags" of canned goods, magazines, soap, and toothbrushes sent by Japanese families to sons and brothers stationed on the front lines, the "women" were more accurately girls, some as young

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SMALL COMFORT

Continued from Page 47

as 11 and 12. They were classified as ammunition in the army's records and were considered royal gifts from Emperor Hirohito to his troops. Their sole function was to raise the morale of soldiers and prevent raping and pillaging by troops.

Many comfort women, like Shim Mi-Cha, were taken by force from their schoolyards or abducted from their homes as parents stood by helplessly. Most were rounded up in three rural provinces in the southern half of the peninsula - Chollanam Do, Kyongsangnam Do, and Cheju Do - which were accessible to military transport ships.

Comfort women were sent first to China, beginning in 1937. As the war there escalated and spread throughout the Pacific in the early 1940s, they were shipped to Southeast Asia, the South Sea islands, and Japan. According to US Army interrogation reports

declassified only last year, the girls usually were confined to small, curtained-off rooms in tents or stables, called "public lavatories" by the Japanese, and were expected to provide sex to between 30 and 40 soldiers a day, and more on weekends. Most girls received irregular medical checkups but were provided with weekly injections to control the spread of venereal diseases.

If their treatment during the war years was less than humane, the retreat of the Imperial Army spelled an overnight death warrant for tens of thousands of these women. According to eyewitness accounts of former Japanese infantrymen, comfort women were shot or burned alive in mass graves to prevent Allied forces from learning of their existence. In one case, hundreds of girls were herded aboard a submarine, which was subsequently torpedoed by the Japanese.

Allegations have been made that US forces, after taking over Japanese military

bases at the end of the war, also sexually abused the comfort women. Yun Chung-Ok, a retired professor of English literature at Seoul's prestigious Ewha Women's University, has traveled widely in Japan to interview former comfort women who were not able to return home to Korea. She says stories have circulated for years among villagers living on the island of Tokashiki, in the Okinawa chain, that Korean comfort women held there were required to service soldiers of the US occupying force from 1945 to 1946. One former comfort woman who died last year at age 77, Peh Bong-Gi, testified that she had been kept in a camp with captured Japanese soldiers on Okinawa and had been raped by American soldiers there.

Reports obtained from the Hoover Institution archives, at Stanford University, to the commandant of the US Naval Operating Base on Okinawa, dated November 23, 1945, do refer to more than 150 "Korean

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comfort girls" being "housed" and "fed" by the US military government on Okinawa some three months after the end of the war.

For all the thousands of girls who were massacred, or who died from untreated venereal diseases and tropical illnesses, there were others who were abandoned or inadvertently left behind by retreating troops and who eventually made their way back to Korea to rebuild their lives. Three of these women - Shim Mi-Cha, Kim Kyung-Soon, and a third, who does not want her name used - have only recently agreed to speak of these years of shame. They speak for themselves and for the many women who, having survived years of sexual abuse and torture, headed back to their homeland on ships, only to throw themselves overboard rather than bring shame to their families.

"SHAME" IS A WORD that comes up in virtually every conversation with Korean citi-

zens, government officials, and even women activists about the comfort women. For decades the humiliation and degradation of Korean women by the Japanese has been a taboo subject in Korea.

Unlike the stories of Holocaust victims, which made front-page news within days of the Allied liberation of concentration camps, it has taken former comfort women more than 50 years to speak out. Ewha professor Yun Chung-Ok explains that the perception of their involvement in a "shameful" part of Korean history derives from Confucian values at the heart of her society. "Christians think that every individual can have eternal life through accepting Jesus Christ, but most Koreans think that only by having a son will you have a blessed and long life," she says. "That's why, for Koreans, both male and female, a woman's virginity and purity is more valuable than life itself. Marriage in Korea is not generally based on love

but on the need to keep the family line going, and that family line can only be continued from a purely-kept woman's body."

By contrast, Japanese history is full of accounts of shoguns and feudal lords who used women as gifts to consolidate their own power bases. "The Japanese way of thinking is quite different from ours," Yun adds. "In Japan, a man's sexual drive shows his masculine power, and being slightly cruel to women is a kind of masculinity. That's why, historically, if a man had an honored guest, the best way to entertain that guest was for the man to give him his wife or daughter."

In the past, the reluctance of former comfort women to tell their stories has hindered activists' efforts to hold the Japanese government accountable. But in recent months, some of those traditional perceptions have begun to shift, if only slightly. A damage suit filed in Tokyo district court last December by the Association of

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Bereaved Family Members of Pacific War Victims, on behalf of 35 Koreans, including three former comfort women, charges the Japanese government with "crimes against humanity" and seeks financial compensation in the amount of \$160,000 for each plaintiff. This marks the first time that many Japanese have heard about the forced prostitution of Korean women. The response has been mixed: There has been both right-wing resentment against the Korean emigre community in Japan and unexpected support for the Korean claims from numerous Japanese women's organizations.

At about the same time that the lawsuit was filed in Tokyo, legislators who sit on the foreign-relations subcommittee of the Korean National Assembly were hearing testimony — the first of its kind in Korea — from a former comfort woman and a Korean man who had been conscripted for the Japanese army in World War II.

Then, in January, came the biggest bombshell of all. Documents were uncovered in the library of the Japanese Diet and in Japan's Defense Archives that directly linked Emperor Hirohito, his Cabinet, and war minister Hideki Tojo to the establishment of military brothels and the mobilization of Korean women into forced prostitution. After decades of denying any official involvement in recruiting and maintaining comfort women, the government was forced to acknowledge its role.

Activists marched by the hundreds through the streets of Seoul in a January snowstorm; they carried banners bearing anti-Japanese slogans and burned effigies of Hirohito. When Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa arrived on January 16 for trade talks with President Roh Tae-woo, 12,000 riot police were deployed around the city. Although Miyazawa offered three separate apologies during his summit meetings with Roh, a statement issued by a Japanese government spokesman, noting that fi-

nancial compensation was not in order, caused most Koreans to doubt the sincerity of the prime minister's remarks.

SINCE THOSE EMOTIONAL days, a number of former comfort women have stepped forward to tell their stories. Shim Mi-Cha is one of only a handful of women who have been willing to reveal their names and identities. In March she traveled to Japan with a group of Christian church workers to talk with their Japanese counterparts, and she has openly participated in the demonstrations that have been held every Wednesday since early January in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. Similar demonstrations, demanding an apology from Japan for its war crimes and reparations for its victims, are also held each Wednesday in Tokyo and Manila.

Shim agreed to an interview in her home, in the satellite city of Songnam, an hour's bus ride south of the sprawling capital of Seoul. But there were conditions. For one, she prefers to be identified by the Korean word *jungshindae*, one translation of which is "conscripted worker." She hates the Japanese-coined term "comfort woman" almost as much as she dislikes being referred to as a military prostitute. "We were forced into service," she says. "We never willingly sold our bodies for money."

At one moment pounding her fist for emphasis and shaking with barely controlled weeping the next, she insists that she wants to tell her story, even though it brings her great personal shame and sadness. She wants to tell it before she dies, so that the full truth will be known.

Shim lives alone in three small, linoleum-floored rooms that appear to be part of a bigger house, rooms reached through a broken iron gate off a busy street. A single fluorescent tube hangs from the ceiling in the sitting room, where she serves a visiting Western journalist and

a Korean translator cookies on a low, lacquered table.

Shim has never married and today earns a minimal living by selling her exquisitely fashioned embroidery. When questioned, she explains that her living quarters were given to her by a senator from her district who pitied her because she has no family to care for her in her old age.

The fact that she has no living relatives is what prompted Shim to go public with her story. Her mother, father, and grandmother died years ago, she says, and even if her brother were still alive in North Korea, there would be no way to contact him. No one else, she explains, can be affected by her decision now.

For the past few years, Shim has been writing down recollections of her experience as a *jungshindae*. The memories she has reconstructed, image by image, are as sharply defined as the delicate roses and fishes that decorate her embroidered pillows.

She recalls the names of particular Japanese officers — Hiashi, Midaichi, Suzuki — and the number of stars on their uniforms. She can sketch the dimensions of the Quonset hut in Fukuoka where she lived with 10 other *jungshindae*. She remembers the bicycle-drawn cart that brought their daily rations of rice, yellow radishes, and spinach to the guard at the rear door.

Shim uses her handkerchief frequently to wipe her eyes when she is asked about a typical day's schedule in those long-ago years. Soldiers usually came to her room for five or 10 minutes at a time, she says, but took longer if they tried to rape her twice. There were no regulations concerning what they could or could not do to her, and she tried not to look in their faces during their sexual acts. One of her friends tried to run from the hut and was shot in the back by a guard and killed. No one else tried to escape after that.

At times, Shim says, she feels great anger for all Japa-



Abducted at age 17, a former "comfort woman" still bears scars from her torture at the hands of Japanese soldiers.

nese people because of what she was forced to endure. But she is quick to add that when she traveled to Japan in March, she found that 90 percent of the people she met with there felt genuine remorse for the actions of their government, and that realization has been a great source of solace to her.

More surprising, Shim also remembers individual acts of kindness during the war years, and she speaks fondly of a Lt. Taka. Perhaps because he was the first officer to rape her, or perhaps because he was old enough to be her father, she thinks that he felt both guilt and later affection for her. After the war, she says, he helped her find work in several Japanese factories, which ultimately enabled her to save enough money to book passage back to Korea on a smuggler's boat.

Shim says she has led a decent life since the war and has good friends today. Many of them, she adds, have called on her in recent weeks to encourage her to continue to speak out: "They ask, 'Why have you never told the world?' And they tell me, 'Have the courage, that it is they who should feel

ashamed, not me, that this matter has not been discussed openly until now."

In another suburb of Seoul, Kim Kyung-Soon is willing to talk on the record as well. She agrees to be photographed but hopes her picture will never appear in Korean newspapers.

When we meet her at the two-room, rooftop apartment she shares with her daughter and granddaughter, it has been only three days since she told her daughter for the first time about her experience as a *jungshindae*. She had gone to a public hearing on the issue and, after standing to be counted among former comfort women in the audience, had talked for a long time with a friend and fellow Catholic. When she returned home late that evening, her daughter asked where she'd been. It was only then, after keeping her secret for more than 50 years, that her story came pouring out.

Kim's experience shows the extent to which entire families were victimized during the colonial period. Like Shim, Kim is the last surviving member of her family. She had an older sister who was also taken as a *jungshin-*

dae and then returned to Korea to die a lingering death from venereal disease. One of her brothers was at Hiroshima, working as a conscripted laborer, when the atomic bomb was dropped. He returned home to die of radiation sickness. Another brother was killed in the Korean War.

As a naive schoolgirl in 1945, Kim had met a Japanese military officer on the streets of her hometown one day and asked him how she could get to Hiroshima, to visit her favorite brother. Before she could tell her parents she was leaving, the officer took her to the train station, where they boarded a train for the port city of Pusan, and from there went by boat to Japan and, ultimately, to Hiroshima, the officer's hometown. She stayed at his home for a number of days, fighting off his sexual advances and begging to be taken to her brother.

When she finally found her way to her brother's factory, he was shocked to see her and urged her to return to Korea. She followed his advice but was accosted at a train station by two soldiers, who took her to a warehouse building in Nagasaki.

Kim has been hospitalized frequently in recent years for a nervous condition, and she can rest at night only with the help of prescription-strength sleeping pills. She has difficulty controlling the shaking of her hands as she continues her story.

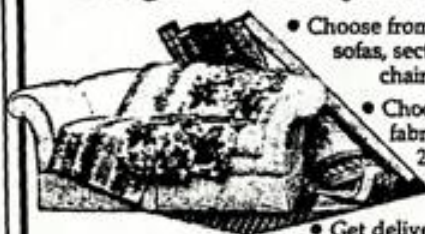
In Nagasaki, she and many other Korean girls were taught how to serve men sexually, she says, but she resisted day after day. One day she jumped out of a window and tried to run away, but she was caught. All of her fingers were broken, and she was kicked repeatedly in the stomach by officers wearing combat boots. One officer finally succeeded in raping her and threatened her with a knife when she continued to fight him off.

"Finally, I just lay down," Kim recalls. "I tried to resist, but I couldn't anymore. I felt sick and almost

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made the rounds of neighboring villages, collecting some 30 young girls before morning light.

The girls were shipped to Nagasaki and interned in the basement of a large warehouse. After several weeks they were moved to another building, nearer the harbor. There several soldiers tried to rape them, but they fought back. The soldiers then took one of the girls and cut off her breasts and disemboweled her while her friends watched.

"Would you like to see the marks of my own torture?" the mother asks unexpectedly, turning away and lifting her sweater to reveal deep burn scars across her back. When she tried to resist her would-be rapists, she says, she was hung upside down, and water was poured into her nose. She says she was also branded with hot irons.

The story continues, and mother and son take turns recounting the almost matter-of-fact horrors of five years of imprisonment and

daily assaults and rapes. There was a wartime pregnancy and the birth of a son who subsequently died. There was liberation day and the trek to the harbor at Nagasaki, past piles of dead bodies, to find a boat that would take her home. There was the final trip home, when Korean men by the scores were pulled from the hold of the ship and shot by Japanese soldiers. There were the hard years after the war, when two husbands died and she raised her two sons by herself.

Today, the son believes it is a miracle that his mother is still mentally and physically intact. They are both grateful for the family life they share. And they both think there should be some kind of international accounting.

At least one South Korean government task force, at the prodding of women's groups, is now collecting elementary-school records from the colonial period, as well as testimony from former *jungshindas*, in an attempt to doc-

ument Japan's drafting of schoolgirls and attach overall legal culpability. Requests have gone out for an investigation by the United Nations Human Rights Commission. And there is the current trial in Tokyo, which could set precedents for financial reparations.

As Japan tries to polish its image as an economic superpower on the world stage, it is haunted by an increasingly shadowy past. The Tokyo government must be held accountable for its war crimes, say activists in Seoul, because what happened to thousands of women more than 50 years ago cannot be forgotten or forgiven.

"When I go to Japan today, I meet people who really feel sorry for what happened," says Ewha professor Yun. "I know they are sincere, I can sense it, and that is enough. But when the Japanese government repeats its apologies, we know that they still are not speaking the truth. So we have to force them to do what they do not want to do." □

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