[00:00:00.250] - Kurt Harmening

Hi, my name is Kurt Harmening. Today is Tuesday, March 14, 2023, and I am interviewing Leona Werner through Zoom for the Colby College Korean Oral History Project. Do you agree to grant the College permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

[00:00:18.370] - Leona Werner

I do.

[00:00:19.810] - Kurt Harmening

Awesome. Then let's get into the questions. All right, Leona, could you give us a little background on your current life in Minnesota, including your family and occupation?

[00:00:30.730] - Leona Werner

So, I am pretty much a full-time volunteer. I'm married and I have a daughter, and she's adopted from South Korea and been in Minnesota on and off for 33 years.

[00:00:50.290] - Kurt Harmening

For the last startup question, can you tell us a little bit about your favorite food?

[00:00:59.250] - Leona Werner

My favorite food? That's hard. It depends on when I'm not feeling well. I definitely want it to be Korean food. And generally, if I have a head cold, *kimchi* stew. If my stomach's upset, then I want birthday soup, *Tteokguk* (rice cake soup); it has rice cakes and stuff in it so it's like a milder sort of soup. But those are my things. But other than that, that's when I'm not feeling well. But other foods, I don't have a favorite because I just love to eat everything.

[00:01:40.750] - Kurt Harmening

The first topic we're going to be moving into is your mother's experiences in Korea and in the US. The first question is who was your mother, and how was her marriage to an American soldier and further immigration to the US seen by her family?

[00:02:02.710] - Leona Werner

My mother's name was Park Yung Soon. She was born in Incheon, in the area of Incheon under Japanese occupation, and then survived all that was a difficult time. She couldn't use her Korean name, couldn't speak Korean language, had to learn everything in school. Under the Japanese occupation rules, they were discriminated against and made poor. Whether you were poor or not, it was it was difficult to get enough food and anything of quality. No white rice. They only got millet and grains. The white rice was all confiscated and sent to Japan because the Japanese didn't have enough rice. And then her father died. When she was young, she had an older brother, an older sister, and a younger brother. And when the Korean conflict started, her older brother was taken from their home in the middle of the night, they believed by the Chinese, they're not really sure. Someone came into their house and dragged him out at gunpoint. She survived the war with her mother and her grandmother and her siblings, and she got a job as a telephone operator for the US Army because she spoke fluent Japanese and Korean. A friend of hers taught her the phrases she needed to know in English so she could “Please hold, let me connect you,” those kinds of things. That's how she met my father. Because he was a sergeant in the Signal Corps, and he was the boss over the telephone operators. They were very poor, very destitute during the war. Being that there was no man in the family, she didn't have a father or a grandfather or anyone to really support them. When my parents did decide that they liked each other a lot, my grandmother, her mother probably wished she would have met a nice Korean boy, but under the circumstances, gave the blessing for my mother to marry my father.

[00:04:29.270] - Kurt Harmening

Next question is, how did the Korean War affect your mother's life in her time in Korea?

[00:04:40.170] - Leona Werner

Well, any money that they had, they had to use because they couldn't work, they couldn't get jobs. She was actually going to business school, which was like a secretarial school back then, but she had to drop out because there was no money and the school shut down. Everyone just had to do what they could to get enough food so they could feed everyone. It did force her to take a job with the army, which she really hadn't ever thought she would do. She ended up living in a dormitory style. It was a house. They would take all these young women lived together in the house that the army would provide for them, because when the Communists came down from the north, they had to just basically put them in jeeps and drive them out because they would have been killed for working with the army. So it separated her from her mother and her sister and younger brother and grandmother. She didn't know where she was going. She didn't know what was happening, so that was terrifying for her. But when they got them to Busan, which is further south along the Eastern Seaboard, the US Army set up camps on islands around there for prisoner of war camps, but the Army Corps, Signal Corps was actually in Busan, and so my mother lived in a house with all these other young girls, and then the soldiers would come and take them to work and then take them back. So they were always escorted, they were always chaperoned. But it wasn't like going off, being young and going off and having your first apartment. You're doing everything under guns and bombs and running from aerial bombings and snipers, and it was tough. It was really, really hard.

[00:06:36.510] - Kurt Harmening

Moving on chronologically: Once in the US, what was your mother's life like, and how did your parents navigate a dual culture family?

[00:06:48.210] - Leona Werner

When they first came to the US, my father has eight brothers and sisters and his mother and father, and my mother ended up on a small farm in coal country in southwestern Pennsylvania where no one looked like her. Everyone was still harboring a lot of hate from the World War II, and she had a tough time. She spoke very little English my father spoke very little Korean. When they were in Korea together there was always an interpreter with them until they got married. Mr. Lee was their personal interpreter and he worked for the army, so he would just be with them and that's how they talked. Then when they got stateside, they were like, “Oh, well, we didn't really plan on this part.” But out of his whole family, [there was] only one sister who was married. So his one sister and his brother-in-law were the ones who accepted my mom and no one else did. So life was really hard for her, and she had to try to assimilate as fast as possible. Then my father got sent to Arizona, and she ended up living with her in-laws, who weren't really thrilled with her but they did let her stay. Then eventually she went to Arizona and lived outside of Fort Huachuca, outside of Tucson, in the hills, in a cabin. When [my father] wasn't on duty, he would come there. It was really hard. She had my sister when she was there, in a military hospital, so that was difficult. She didn't know anything about being pregnant. She didn't know anything about babies. They'd been married for about a year-and-a-half, so that was really difficult for her as well. Once my sister was born, or actually, before my sister was born, they shipped my father out to Mississippi, and he didn't see my sister until she was three-months-old. My mother lived by herself up in the hills outside of Tucson, in Bisbee, Arizona, with caretakers [who] lived in the cabin down at the bottom of the hill. She was alone with my sister for three months. Yeah, it was rough. It was very rough. Then they moved back to Pennsylvania after my dad left the army.

[00:09:23.510] - Kurt Harmening

Did your mother ever express a desire to return to Korea?

[00:09:29.110] - Leona Werner

In 1969 I believe she did go back for the first time. We were poor. We were very poor. So getting a ticket to go back, an international flight was not something that we could do. But she did go back in 1969. I think I was eight-years-old. Her mother turned 60 that year and in the Korean culture, when you turn 60, it's a rebirth. You start over, you're one again. So it's the biggest party. It's your wedding, your bar mitzvah, your quinceañera, like everything rolled into one. That's the biggest party you have. So she did go back for her mother's 60th birthday, and while she was there, there was a cholera outbreak. Korea was still kind of Third World then. It was coming. The United States was doing what they could to pull them along and make them as Western as possible. I don't know if it was a great idea, but there was a cholera outbreak. There were lots of issues when she was there in 1960. She was very happy to see her family. She was supposed to stay for a month. She made it for two-and-a-half weeks, and then she just said, I need to come home. She came back because she missed myself and my sister and my dad. So then she came back and then she didn't go again until the 1980s. She was happy to go and she saw her mother, [who] was still alive, and her sister and her younger brother and other relatives. But she was ready to come home. She was ready to come back because it changed so much. Seoul is New York City on steroids, and she wasn't ready for that. When she was there, it was still dirt roads.

[00:11:22.570] - Kurt Harmening

Well, thank you so much. Some of the other questions come back to your mother as well. But now I'm going to move on to our second topic, which is adoption in Minnesota. My first question for that is how did you come to adopt your daughter Shin Bee?

[00:11:40.670] - Leona Werner

We had fertility issues, and so we decided that we were going to adopt. In the back of our minds, we had always planned on adopting as well. We were older parents, so we had planned on having a child and adopting a child like a year later. Didn't work that way. We adopted. We looked at domestic adoption, but we also looked at [alterative options]. At that time, this was in 2001 when we started, and the Korean adoption program was still very robust. It is completely shut down now. There's no Korean adoption. There are some, what they call “waiting children,” children with issues, health issues, emotional mental health issues, and some of those kids can be adopted. But at that time, we explored everything through a group here called Children's Home Society, and we looked at domestic and a few countries, but we always leaned towards Korea because I'm Korean, my mother's Korean, we had a huge Korean network. So that's what we did. We were matched fairly quickly. The biological mother picked us out of a book and nine months from when we started the paperwork we went and got her. My entire family in Korea was ready. They were all lined up. It was a lot easier for us, I think, than it was for others because of the support system that we had. My husband's administrative assistant at his job was from Korea, and she would just call over to the orphanage and say, “How is she today?”

[00:13:38.070] - Kurt Harmening

The second question, and these are going to be more centered around Shin Bee now, was it important to you that Shin Bee knew about Korean culture and why?

[00:13:48.170] - Leona Werner

It was very important to me. I have a very strong belief that when you adopt, take in a child that is outside of your race, your ethnicity, your nationality, whatever, you owe it to that child to teach them about where they are from so they have a sense of belonging. I know a lot of grown Korean adoptees who are now in their 50s who flounder. They don't know anything. I know I have several friends who were adopted by white couples who just said, well, your name is now Susan and you're going to live with all these other white people, and you are just going to do what everyone else does. And that's fine to an extent, but to this day, they have issues because they don't know where they came from. I think it's important that you know where you come from, and sometimes it manifests itself in really bad ways. For other people, they start to explore. I find a lot of people explore when they have their own children. All of a sudden it becomes really important for them.

[00:15:05.410] - Kurt Harmening

Following up on that, did you try to pass on Korean culture to Shin Bee? And if so, how?

[00:15:14.150] - Leona Werner

I very much did. My mother didn't live nearby, but we visited quite often, so that was easier. And then again, my husband had several people at his office who were Korean, who loved being involved in her life. I have always cooked Korean food, and we had books and costumes, and we celebrated her first birthday the way that you would in Korea. She had several friends who were also adopted from Korea all about the same time, so she had this little Korean gang from the time she was eight-months-old. They always hung out together pretty much all through up until high school. The other thing that we did is, the largest Korean adoptee population in the world is centered around the greater Twin Cities area, and it goes into Iowa, the Dakotas, and Wisconsin as well. That's because the Korean adoption program was actually developed out of Minneapolis way back when, right after the Korean War. That organization had a big following and a lot of people here adopted from Korea, so there were these moms, a group, luckily a group of white moms about 40-some-years ago who had all these Korean babies, and they decided we really should be teaching them something about their culture. They created a day camp once a year in the summer, and it was called Korean Culture Camp. There are several of these now, but this just takes place in Minneapolis. When we started you could [start to] go at kindergarten, but now we actually have nursery preschool as well. It's very basic, teaches the little kids little nursery rhyme songs and Korean [language] and dance and Korean drum. Now they teach K-Pop dance, Taekwondo, and we feed them. We make Korean food every day from scratch for hundreds and hundreds of people for lunch every day. Some of these kids don't get to experience Korean food as much and don't have as much exposure to Korean culture, so at least for five days out of the year [they can get that exposure at the camp]. And I will tell you that a very large majority of these kids will tell their parents, “This is my favorite thing that I do all summer.” I remember the very first day I went, my daughter was holding hands with a little boy. They were five, and his name's Noah, and they were very good friends. They were in front of me, and they were holding hands, and he turned, and he said, “Shin Bee, everybody looks like us!” Then they ran into the crowd, and I thought, “Oh, my God, they all look alike—I'm never going to find them!” It was just a sea of children that all looked like them. And it was so powerful for them, so incredibly powerful. They never missed camp. They did it until they got older. They were classroom aides and teachers. My daughter taught Taekwondo there. It was always the best thing, and their favorite thing all the kids will tell you is lunchtime. They come for the food. I also sent her to Korean language camp through Concordia language villages, and she did that for six years in the summer, up to anywhere from two weeks to a month. That's complete immersion. Food, language, culture, everything. There's nothing done in English. You don't have your computer; you don't have your phone. You're completely off the grid. She did that for six years.

[00:19:34.870] - Kurt Harmening

My next question off that is, did Shin Bee's adoption turn out how you expected it to initially, and then what were some external elements that may have influenced her upbringing other than yourself?

[00:19:50.010] - Leona Werner

Shin Bee was supposed to be a boy. They told us we were getting a baby boy, and then at the last minute, before all the paperwork came through, they called and said that a biological mother had picked us out to adopt Shin Bee. It was no big deal. I mean, mentally, we were ready for a boy, but the room was yellow, so that was fine. We were like, “It's a baby. We're good, we're fine.” [As for] external [elements], I think my mom had influence because she did tell Shin Bee, as she got older, some of the stories of her life and how hard it was. I think that going to the immersion camps and being with kids who weren't necessarily Korean, who wanted to learn Korean, that came with the whole K-Pop influence and K-Drama, that kind of made her think, “Why would you want to do that?” That helped her explore that as well, and she realized that she would go to camp, and she would kind of want to go and kind of not want to go because she had that FOMO. What was she missing at home for four weeks when all of her friends were back at home? But once she got there and got with the whole gang, she was fine again. I think it kind of helped validate being there, that there were people from all over who wanted to learn Korean and understand the culture and pursue education and careers in that. There were a whole bunch of kids who wanted to be ambassadors who came to the Korean camp. There were 17 other languages, but they came to the Korean camp. I found that really interesting, and I think it said something to her about being Korean's kind of cool!

[00:21:49.810] - Kurt Harmening

Now moving on to a slightly more difficult topic, the topic of Asian Hate. If there's anything you're not comfortable [answering] here, let me know. For the first question, how have you, Shin Bee, and your mother experienced racialization and anti-Asian sentiment similarly or differently?

[00:22:12.650] - Leona Werner

My mother came over in the 1950s, in late 1953. When my father came out of the army and did not re-enlist in the army and they moved back to southwestern Pennsylvania, no one would rent to them. They couldn't get a place to live. That was really hard. They ended up living with his parents for quite some time. Then finally, there was this elderly lady, Mrs. McIntyre, who was from Scotland. She loved my mother, and she said that she also had had a lot of hate from the Irish, so she rented to them. She let them rent a little house for them. My mother tried as hard as she could to be as American as she could, but she didn't look American at all. As a kid, there was a lot of systemic racism in my hometown where they would [say things like], “Your house is so clean—I didn't expect that!” People would say that to my mom. Okay, why [would you say something like that]? There were just all these little things like that. For myself, it was during Vietnam. I was growing up during the Vietnam War, and so a lot of parents still had the memories of World War II and Korea, and now [with the Vietnam War] we're engaged in this other conflict, an Asian land conflict, which never goes well. Children aren't born being racist and prejudiced, they're taught that at home. I suffered a lot of that from [a young age]. I'll never forget, in third grade when Kathy was having her birthday party and everyone was invited, and there were only two of us that weren't handed invitations in that class during that day, and that was Margot, who was black, and me. And [Kathy] said to us, "My father won't have N-words and "chinks" in his house. It was like, "Okay, I'm not Chinese, but I get it." Those were the kind of things terrible things kids said to you. One boy told me every day that his father said we should all be blown to smithereens. Great. Your father is my milkman. He puts milk outside of my door every day. Is he poisoning that? I wouldn't drink milk for the longest time. Then you fast forward and you think, it's going to be so much better [for my daughter], and it's not. For a while, when she was really young, it was quieter. It was more under wraps. People weren't as emboldened, but people are very emboldened right now. She's run into a lot of hate not only where we live here, but also where she goes to school. Not so much on campus, but she's in the St. Louis area, and she's had some issues there. Right now she's in Paris studying, and it's been actually kind of dangerous for her there. She's been spit on. It's like the monster. We've released the kraken again. I had hoped for so much more, but we'll just have to keep fighting the fight.

[00:25:54.290] - Kurt Harmening

How has this treatment affected your expression of Korean culture or your Korean identity?

[00:26:05.430] - Leona Werner

I'm probably even more in the forefront with it. It's like I want people to know that we should be viewed the same as everybody else, that there's no reason to hate someone because of the way they look or because of how they speak, and that we really are supposedly all created equal. Regardless of whether you're looking at it from a political standpoint—where if you actually read what the forefathers wrote, we are created equal—this guy named Jesus would have loved everybody. If you go into all of the religions, that's the whole basis. So, I get steamed, but I don't fight back in an angry way. I try to find other ways of working around it. Like, if you would just let me feed you, you'd want to hang out with more Koreans. It makes me want to lash out, and I just have to make sure I don't, but find more creative ways of [dealing with discriminatory treatment]. Being that I'm half Korean, I get more of a pass. When I was younger, I didn't, but now that I'm an old lady, I get a pass.

[00:28:00.650] - Kurt Harmening

How has the treatment affected Shin Bee's expression of Korean culture or Korean identity?

[00:28:12.720] - Leona Werner

When she went off to college, she was on Facebook—the Facebook site for her university—to meet people as potential roommates. As soon as she put her name out there, that her name was Shin Bee, she got a barrage of hits from other Asian girls who wanted to room with her, and she was like, “I don't want to be that Asian girl. I don't want a Korean roommate. I want to be with white people.” She's like, “I don't want to just be picked out because I'm Korean.” She's like, “That's not what I want. I don't want to choose roommates based on that.” I understood that that was the only reason that a lot of these people were reaching out to her, and she said, “I want to be more than that,” because at her high school, while there were other Asians, she kind of just hung out with all the white kids. She was like, “I keep forgetting that I'm not white. I keep identifying as white. And then I look in the mirror, and I'm like, oh, yeah.” So, when she went to college, that was her whole thing. She didn't want to have a Korean or Asian roommates. Then she met a girl on Facebook that she totally clicked with, and they were exchanging just real high-level information at the time. She told me that her name was Grace and that she was from New Jersey. I said, “Is there any chance she's Korean? Because that's a very Anglican Korean name, Grace, and she's from New Jersey, and the area of New Jersey she's at is very Korean—the street signs are in Korean.” She's like, “She's not Korean.” Then I said, “What's her last name?” And she's like, “I don't know. I'll find out.” Then she said, “It's Ok.” And I said, ““Oak or “Ok”?” She said, “Ok.” And then she was like, “Oh my gosh—my new roommate is Korean!” So, everything she didn't want, she got. And they're like sisters, so it really worked out.

[00:30:23.400] - Kurt Harmening

Moving on to the final question in this topic. What should be done to help prevent Asian hate in Minnesota, specifically or more broadly?

[00:30:36.540] - Leona Werner

Wish I had an answer to that. I do think if you could educate the parents, then the kids wouldn't grow up with it. But that's where it starts. It starts with whoever is raising children, because kids are not naturally prejudiced, they're not naturally racist. If we could just stop looking at everybody's differences, I think we'd be so much better off. But that's the problem. I feel like the way the environment is right now, we're just looking at how different everybody is instead of how much the same we are all are. And I don't know what you do to make it better. Minnesota, and especially the area in which we live, is extremely white, and it makes it very difficult. And the less white areas are marginalized. There's poverty and there's violence. These poor people are being shoved further and further out because of the cost of housing, so you're creating even a bigger separation. People can just pile up on how many things are different about that person, those people, the "they" word, I wish I had an answer.

[00:32:12.220] - Kurt Harmening

Wish I had an answer too. Moving on to our fourth topic, and this is going to be more centered around your life in the US: How did you learn about Korean culture and history in your family?

[00:32:30.000] - Leona Werner

When I was young, my mother did not teach us Korean because she did not want to make us seem any different than anyone else. That was very common, very, very common. When I was twelve is when her regret really started to hit her that she shouldn't have done that. She's not to blame. It was what it was. She really didn't even know how to cook Korean food because she had grown up with a grandmother and a mother in the house and they did all the cooking and their job was to get her an education. So she didn't really know any of that. Also, where we lived, there was nowhere to really buy the products. We would have to drive an hour into the city of Pittsburgh and there was one store and it was tiny and she had a ladder to get up to stuff, but nothing was fresh. It was all stuff that was canned and in boxes that she would import mostly from Chicago and New York, so we would have to go to the county seat, to the library and see if they could get us books so we could get recipes and figure out how to make stuff. They were really bad cookbooks, so she would just try to remember what things were supposed to and it was a lot of hit or miss, trial and error. So, I started to learn more. As I got older, I started to pump her for more information and she started to tell me more. After, when I hit my early teens, she wanted me to know more and she would just talk about more things. Then I read and I just read a lot, anything I could get my hands on. It wasn't easy. A lot of work, but it was all worth it.

[00:34:41.790] - Kurt Harmening

How do you keep touch today with your Korean identity in places such as Minnesota?

[00:34:51.550] - Leona Werner

Well, I do cook at the Korean culture camp and I do it mostly through food. Most of staying in touch with culture is through food. I have taught some Korean adoptees basic Korean cooking because they don't know. These women are now in their fifties and their kids are half-Korean and half-whatever else, and [the cultural knowledge] kind of starts to wash out. Their kids aren't interested. Now they're kind of sad about that because they didn't teach their kids because they didn't know, so now they're trying to learn. Being able to bring them along and teach them some things has been great. At the culture camp where I cook, we're a volunteer group, so we have parents who basically don't even know how to use a knife. We have to teach them basic cooking skills. But then we also teach them as much Korean food as we can. A lot of these people are now grown Korean adoptees who are bringing their children to camp. That's how the camp is staying alive. We're on second generation, and they are starting to explore as well. I have groups of friends who are either parents of Korean children or are Korean adoptees, and we do stuff together mostly. There's always a big meal, always a great big meal. You would like it.

[00:36:37.650] - Kurt Harmening

Most likely I would. This next section we're moving on to is all about Korean food and also about kind of cultural continuation in the US through Korean foods. You've talked a little bit about this, and it's absolutely fine if you repeat yourself, but how has food helped you stay connected to your Korean culture in the US?

[00:37:02.170] - Leona Werner

Well, especially like, feeding the kids who don't get Korean food very often because a lot of families who come to our camp aren't close to any Korean restaurants. Honestly, there aren't that many in the greater Twin Cities area. They're mostly around the universities; around Hamlin University over in St. Paul, and there's a few in Dinkytown around the University of Minnesota. But some people just aren't comfortable going into some of those areas, and they're not comfortable walking into the restaurants when everyone in the restaurant is Korean and no one's speaking English. It's intimidating for people to take their kids there. So, when you see a kid come in to camp and they're so excited because they're having *Mandu (Korean Dumplings)* that day, or if you can get them to try a piece of *kimchi*, or if you can get them to taste something they've never tasted before and they end up liking it, that's fantastic. I hope that I'm opening something in them—a little path that will make them want to walk down so they can further explore and have more interest in what their background is, where their roots are. I think food is huge in that. I just continue to try to find things that I haven't made before and just keep adding to my repertoire and working through it that way. I think sharing the food, to me, is my favorite part. Just having people ask about it. I did a Lunar New Year party this year [hosting] a whole bunch of people, and it was based around the two types of soups. Even some of the Koreans had never had it before, and they were just so excited to have the soup. That's fun. It's also interesting to watch the food scene in Korea change so much. I say interesting because it's becoming very Westernized. Obesity was a huge problem when we went in 2002—on every corner, there was McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, just all these Western food chains. A few years later, the [South Korean] government realized that the obesity rate was like that (motions upwards) and they started pulling back on licensing. I think when we went the next time, we saw one McDonald's, zero Burger Kings, and one KFC. I mean, there were more there, but nothing like it had been and they were trying to control how much processed food they were eating. But the Koreans are very enterprising, so they created Paris Baguette and all these other [franchises that] look Western, but they actually started in Korea, so they look French and they're not French at all—the Korean bakeries. So, there's a lot more processed sugar products, processed foods. You're watching what had been one of the healthiest diets kind of become very Westernized and full of a lot of stuff you'd really rather not have people have. So that's the bad part of the Korean food scene.

[00:40:45.740] - Kurt Harmening

For Shin Bee, does she enjoy eating American food or Korean food more, and why?

[00:41:01.540] - Leona Werner

Being that she's studying in France right now, she would kill for a good Korean restaurant. She really misses it. And I will say, when she's having a rough week at school, when she's here in the States, that's what she ends up eating. She ends up getting Korean instant ramen and *kimchi* at the store, and she makes a big pot of rice, and that's what she wants. That's her comfort food. *Mandu*, which are dumplings, that's her comfort food. But kind of like me, there pretty much isn't anything she won't eat. So, it's hard for us to have a favorite, but when we need comfort, that is what we want. We find that when we travel, if we've been on the road for more than seven days, we look for a Korean restaurant because that's what brings us back, that centers us. We generally look for a tour bus with a lot of Koreans, and we just follow the bus. It works.

[00:42:10.620] - Kurt Harmening

One final question for you: How will you continue to connect others in your community to Korean culture through food?

[00:42:23.640] - Leona Werner

By feeding them and offering to show them how to make it. I actually have a date with my girlfriend's husband, who loves to cook, and we are going to the Korean grocery store because when he walks in, he's very intimidated. We're going to go together, and we're going to plan a menu, going to get all the stuff, and we're going to cook together and then feed my husband and his wife. As I introduce people to Korean food and they want to make it, I get a particular cookbook which has a picture for every dish. It's just so well written, everything explained in very layman terms. I give people that book, and then I tell them what to start with. Like, “Here's where you start. And then call me if you have questions.” I love feeding people.

[00:43:35.480] - Kurt Harmening

All right, well, thank you so much, Leona, today for being part of this interview. Your responses were amazing and I just wanted to thank you on behalf of everyone that's going to be listening to this in the future. And I wanted to give you one last chance if there was anything you wanted to share that I didn't ask about or anything along that nature, you now have the time to do that.

[00:44:03.100] - Leona Werner

I do. I actually thought about this last night. There's something called GI stew, which Koreans of a certain age will know about it. It's not so much from the war, but because afterwards the US Army was installed in Korea—[this troop presence has recently] gotten much, much smaller but at one time had a huge footprint. The people who were Koreans who worked for the US Army could go into the PX, which is the army store, and buy stuff, and they could save a ton of money, but they were buying American food. So, they would make GI stew, which would have like hot dogs and *kimchi* and rice and all this stuff. In Korean, you call it *Ugeoji* (outer-trimmings cabbage stew). So, you make all this stuff, and there are actually recipes out there for it. When I was thinking about that, it made me remember this story, when my mom and all of the other phone operators had to quickly be evacuated as the communists were coming. They were put in this house in Busan, and they didn't know where food was going to come from or anything, but they also knew that they had to go. And a Jeep pulls up and it's some guys, some soldiers, GIs, who have a bag of rice, and they have some vegetables they found, and they had some pots and pans for them. They had this can, and they showed them, you take this key off the side of this big can and you can take the lid off. Inside, they told them, there'd be meat. It was a five pound can of Spam. I thought you would enjoy that. My mother said when they opened it the smell hit them, and they didn't know what to do with it. There was no refrigerator. They didn't have refrigeration. Well, they had been collecting animals, dogs that were starving, and they brought them to the house because then the dogs would bark if anyone would come. It was like their alarm system. So, they chopped up the Spam and fed it to the dogs. The next time [the soldiers] came and brought food, they said, “Oh, you like the Spam? It's all gone!” And they would bring them a five pound can of Spam twice a week, and [my mother and her friends] would say, “Thank you,” and then they'd feed the dogs. But Spam is huge in Korea, and that's why—it's the influence of the US military, and the same in Guam and Hawaii and all those places and it kept people alive. That's my Spam story.

[00:47:02.900] - Kurt Harmening

Yeah. I very much appreciate that.