KIM IM SOON

KIM IM SOON was born in the town of Sangjoo in Kyung Nam Province, South-Central Korea, on 20 March 1925 to upper-class parents. Kim Dong Kyu and his wife Lee Gui Duk (in Korea married women keep their family names), having five children already, entrusted their new daughter to a childless relative, Yoon Sook Ha, the widow of Kim's brother. Yoon raised IM SOON and her second-elder brother as her own daughter and son. Indeed, IM SOON was unaware of the identity of her real parents—whom she had been taught to call Aunt and Uncle—until she was fourteen years old. Yoon and her adopted children occupied a house in the larger family compound, however, so the children grew up in constant proximity to their real parents and siblings.

The whole family was passionately patriotic. In 1910 Japan had annexed Korea, bringing to an end the Yi dynasty that had reigned for over five hundred years, a dynasty that generations of the Kim family had served—in the Confucian tradition—as scholar-officials. IM SOON's father was such a man and at the time of the Japanese occupation he fled with his family to Manchuria where he joined other patriots eager to overthrow the intruders. His younger brother, the husband of Yoon, attended a school for Korean freedom fighters there and died while still in exile.

Most of Kim Dong Kyu's children were, in fact, born in Manchuria, but he had returned to Sangjoo County and entered trade by the time of IM SOON's arrival. Although rarely spoken of, the feelings of pride in Korea and loathing for the Japanese powerfully influenced the family. IM SOON believed that her father had died a martyr in Manchuria, and Yoon occasionally spoke of her own longings to be a Korean revolutionary. The child therefore made Korea's cause her own. In grade four, having heard how a member of the anti-Japanese underground was caught while buying meat at the marketplace, she began disciplining herself for tasks ahead by becoming a vegetarian! (The habit became ingrained and she continues to eat a primarily vegetarian diet today.)

Materially, the family was well-off; Kim Dong Kyu prospered as a wholesale merchant dealing in sea products. In the family compound most of the really arduous tasks were performed by servants, although by choice Yoon did the cooking. In accordance with the family's strong sense of social class, IM SOON and her brothers and sisters were not permitted to mix with other children after school. The young girl thus found consolation in her pet dog, Patoogie (Spot), whom she taught to carry requests to a neighborhood shopkeeper, and whose death at the hands of an overzealous rabies patrol exposed her early in life to the harsh reality of loss.

Although Japanese soldiers were not ordinarily stationed in Sangjoo, the occupation was present in the form of policemen and other functionaries, including teachers. Indeed, KIM's formal education was thoroughly Japanese: most of her teachers were Japanese nationals and even at Sang San Elementary School instruction was carried out in the conqueror's language. Korean was not allowed to be spoken and history lessons emphasized the glories of Japan. Only her instructor in Chinese characters, a Korean, managed to convey to the students something of Korea's pride and past. But for the most part, it was at night with Yoon that KIM learned about her own culture and language. She did discover, however, that some individual Japanese could be sympathetic. Her high school principal, Mr. Miahara, was such a person. "A literary man," she recalls, "he was very, very warm and . . . understood people."

By the time KIM attended high school, her father's business had grown and the family had moved to Kimchun, some thirty-two kilometers from Sangjoo. KIM and her brother lived with Yoon in a house provided by her father, although not in the same compound. All but a few of the students in the high school were Japanese, as were all the teachers. KIM was a bright student but, even though she excelled, could never advance beyond the rank of "number two." Since the "number one" student led her fellow pupils in public exercises, it was unthinkable that she not be Japanese.

KIM enjoyed the arts but took as many classes as she could in home economics in order to prepare herself to become an "agricultural community leader." She could not admit that her real goal was to become a revolutionary. Preparing for the challenges she saw ahead, she also trained herself to go without lunch and to survive with little sleep.

KIM intended to serve the cause of the one-day-to-be Korean nation, not only as a revolutionary, a community leader, and educationist, but also as a Christian. The latter was due to Yoon Sook Ha's influence. Yoon was a literate woman and a voracious reader. She read the Christian Bible for the first time when KIM was four or five years old

and was intrigued by its message but was unable to explore the new religion because of the family's strong Confucian beliefs. Instead she began secretly sending KIM to a local Christian Sunday School. KIM attended happily for two years before their little conspiracy was uncovered, and she still remembers the family confrontation and its unexpected outcome.

Returning from the church on a rainy Sunday morning with Yoon, who had come to fetch her, they were intercepted by Kim Dong Kyu. "Where are you coming from on this rainy day?" he asked. KIM listened as Yoon confessed, fearing that this would bring an end to her Sunday outings and Bible reading. But her father replied, "Well, you may go to Sunday School, and when you grow up you can even become a missionary!" But in granting his permission for KIM to become a Christian, he also made it clear that she was not to try and convert her brothers and sisters—in any case, a daunting ambition for a seven-year-old. In time, however, all of KIM's siblings followed her into the Christian church.

After graduating from high school in 1944, KIM took up a post teaching third grade at Hosunam Elementary School, in the town of Moon Kyung-kun where she lodged with another aunt. She was obliged to instruct the children through the medium of Japanese, of course, but she managed to assert a modicum of independence by leading her pupils in daily morning prayers, an act permitted by the school's elderly principal. It was a provocative action just the same, especially in the context of wartime. The Japanese police took note and placed her under light surveillance.

Despite the great hopes she harbored for Korea's independence, KIM never actually joined a secret revolutionary group. And by the time she reached age twenty, the war had ended and liberation had come.

Sudden independence, after decades of persecution and foreign control, left Koreans overjoyed but overwhelmed and confused. KIM stayed clear of the rancorous debates and power struggles that erupted between adherents of the Left and the Right and devoted herself to acquiring a university education.

Ewha Woman's University, a Christian institution, was famous in Korea and KIM longed to go there, but she thought her family would disapprove. Ewha was in Seoul, and single girls of her age were generally not permitted to live alone in a big city. Besides, it was now time for a girl of her social station to be married. Although it was not discussed openly, KIM knew that her biological parents were beginning

to seek an appropriate husband for her. She therefore kept her intentions secret, even from Yoon.

While telling everyone she was going to Seoul for a short teacher's training course, KIM took Ewha's entrance examination and was accepted. Then came the problem of tuition. KIM went home, closeted herself in her room, and fasted for three days. Finally, Yoon asked her what the matter was. "Mother," she blurted out, "I have been accepted at Ewha Woman's University and I need the tuition and I want to go to that school badly." Weeping with pride, Yoon embraced her. Soon thereafter she and KIM's sisters and brothers persuaded her father to finance her education.

At Ewha KIM was surrounded by other bright young women of high ambition and by women teachers of great skill and achievement. Such women were the exception in Korea and formed a tiny modern elite. (Up to that time even upper-class women seldom received a formal education, and Yoon was literate only because her father had sent her to elementary school disguised as a boy.)

KIM became a student of Domestic Science at Ewha and vowed to work for the social emancipation of Korean women, in particular Korea's rural women. Her chief mentor at the university was Professor Choi E Soon, a specialist in elementary education whose discipline and integrity KIM greatly admired and who became her role model.

Graduating from Ewha in July 1949, KIM immediately began teaching Domestic Science—which included cooking, sewing, and embroidering—to poor girls who attended middle school at Korea Women's Social Institution in Gyesung, Kyunggi-do. Less than a year later she married Song Sung Kyu, an acquaintance from high school days. His family, like KIM's, had moved to Kimchun from elsewhere—in their case, from Pusan. He had attended a private high school for boys, and the two young people met at church. (Song's father was a prominent Protestant theologian, the first Ph.D. in Theology in Korea, and the founder of Han Gook University of Korean Theology.) After high school, Song attended Yon Se University in Seoul where he studied English literature. Following graduation, like KIM, he had entered the teaching profession.

The newlyweds set up housekeeping in Seoul. Two months later they made a trip to Sangjoo where KIM's natural parents were once again residing. The occasion was her father's birthday: he would be sixty, an age marked by Koreans with special celebrations. After the festivities, Song returned to Seoul but KIM decided to stay behind with her family since she was in the early throes of pregnancy. Just a few days

later, 25 June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, and the conditions around Sangjoo made it impossible for the couple to reunite. KIM was, therefore, still in Sangjoo with her family on 22 January 1951 when her daughter, Woojung, was born.

In the turbulent months that followed, the fighting was very close to Sangjoo. Normal life was wholly disrupted. KIM sewed trousers and dresses for people in the neighborhood to help make ends meet. Meanwhile, in Seoul, communist partisans kidnapped her father-in-law. Her mother-in-law, fearing the worst, fled with relatives to the south and settled on desolate Koje Island (Kojedo), near Pusan. No word of her father-in-law was received for ten years. Finally, a newspaper article revealed that he had died while being taken north by his captors.

Stranded in Sangjoo, KIM had no word of her husband either. He seemed to have disappeared amidst the general confusion and she feared he was dead. Eventually a message arrived from his mother, asking KIM to join her on Koje. Strapping her baby daughter on her back, KIM ventured south, traveling here by train, there by bus or truck. Sometimes she walked. Finally, on 17 August she boarded a small boat to make her way from Pusan to the Koje Island port of Changsungpo, where her mother-in-law had been allotted a room in a house belonging to a local Christian school. KIM and Woojung moved in.

KIM now learned that her husband had survived the turmoil but had taken up life with another woman. Confronted with this "unbelievable reality," which came amidst so many other shocking and brutal events, KIM vowed to put the past behind her quickly. Comforting her bereaved mother-in-law who had taken her in, she proceeded to cope.

Although spared the danger of combat, Koje Island was in every other way war-torn and desolate. Koje's rough and largely mountainous terrain had never been a bountiful provider. Now a flood of penniless refugees overwhelmed its simple facilities and rudimentary economy. A huge prisoner-of-war camp had also been set up there. Along with its many thousands of inmates came an influx of Korean and international soldiers to guard and run it. In this frontier-like atmosphere the decencies and social norms of peacetime were often absent. People struggled just to survive.

KIM found succor among members of the Changsungpo Presbyterian Church where she soon began volunteering, and in a short time she was employed by the local middle school to teach home economics.

A fellow churchgoer was Mr. Kim Won Kyu, who was then head of the Koje branch of the government's Social Welfare Department and who would later hold a senior social welfare position at the national level. One Sunday afternoon he asked KIM to accompany him on a walk. Leaving her daughter in the care of her mother-in-law, KIM followed him up into the bleak hills outside of town. The lower reaches of the hills were covered with the makeshift mud huts of refugees. They approached one of the huts, so rudimentary that it lacked even a door—there was only a burlap sack across the opening.

Entering, KIM saw seven newborn infants lying on the floor, four of them so young that their umbilical cords had not yet dried. Kim Won Kyu then turned to her and ordered her to care for the babies. "For how long?" she asked. Losing his temper, the government official retorted: "What do you mean, how long? Don't you realize how lucky you are just to have survived this conflict? You *must* take care of these babies!" And he turned and walked away.

What was she to do? Overcome by her feelings, KIM broke down and wept. She wept for the infants who were so vulnerable and needy. And she wept for herself. At the same time she prayed for deliverance from the task thrust so precipitously upon her, as it seemed, by God himself. She remembered hearing about a saint who had lived his life for orphans and in her prayers she cried out: "I cannot lead my life like that saint; give me some other work to do."

All night long, remaining with the babies, she wept and prayed. At dawn she heard church bells and a voice saying: "Why are you afraid of going down to the level of these abandoned children? Why not bring them up to the level of your own life?" KIM realized then that she could not abandon the children, that she was being called upon to provide for them as for her very own. She knelt again in prayer, saying: "God, you are right. I will live with them forever."

Three of the infants were boys and four were girls. KIM had no idea who their parents were, but one was clearly Eurasian, probably the child of one of the thousands of United Nations soldiers and a local woman. The others were evidently Korean, children of refugees without hope, dying or dead. As KIM was well aware, in those days "there were abandoned babies everywhere. They were almost like wastepaper in the baskets." Entrusting her own daughter to her mother-in-law, KIM moved into the mud hut to devote herself totally to the care of her new children.

Feeding them, clothing them, keeping them warm, nursing the weak ones to health—these urgent tasks called not only upon her

compassion but upon her practical knowledge of cooking, sewing, and hygiene—skills that Kim Won Kyu was well aware she had when he placed them in her care.

In the grim months that followed she was often forced to beg for food, supplies, and assistance. Her mother-in-law helped, and soon so did other volunteers from the church. As word of her work got around, little by little other help arrived—but so did more babies! Kim would rise in the morning to find yet more abandoned infants outside the hut. In three years' time there would be over two hundred of them.

Kim learned to improvise. Further up on the deforested hills was vacant land. With the permission of the owners, she leveled a plot of land and laid a foundation of stones, mud, and sections of metal drums that had been flattened under the wheels of sand-laden trucks plying the road to the prisoner-of-war camp. Above the foundation, Kim erected a large tent contributed by the Social Welfare Department. She asked some young refugees, who had set up a Christian men's club called the New Life Movement, to help her with the heavy work. The tent dwelling was erected on Christmas Day, 1952, and Kim promptly moved in with her babies.

Her new "babies home" was larger and cleaner than the original hut and could be heated through the floor, Korean fashion. Around it she began to build more permanent dwellings. In time, through gifts from family, friends, and a Canadian United Church missionary named Ada Sandel, she was able to purchase the land. She also found she could call on Christian women—ministers' and deacons' wives and others—to share in the daily work of clothing and feeding the children and cleaning the home. In a spirit of mutual help, she shared with the volunteers the food donations she received.

There was not much food to go around, however. Korean relief agencies provided small rations of skim milk and rice but never enough; malnutrition and diarrhea often threatened the babies' lives. To make up for food shortfalls, Kim began to grow soybeans for soy milk and sought contributions from every conceivable donor.

Among the few with well-stocked kitchens in those days were camps of the American soldiers. One day Kim walked twenty-four kilometers to ask help from such a unit, explaining her needs to a Korean interpreter there. He summarily denied her an interview with a senior officer and sent her home in a jeep. She was bitter with rage. Soon, however, produce from American warehouses began arriving regularly twice a month at the orphanage—dried beans, soybeans, and green peppers, all "appearing like gifts from Santa Claus."

The signing of the Armistice Agreement in 1953 brought another boon from the Americans. Left behind in the wake of their departure was a treasure of useful debris including wooden crates, glass, and other materials useful for building. KIM exploited this windfall to put up permanent block houses as well as a two-story dining hall and multipurpose room. Korean soldiers, led by an army engineer, did the actual construction. CARE donated the roof.

KIM gradually assembled a staff of two or three young women who lodged with her and the children and helped care for them. But she also had the added responsibility of her own daughter because her mother-in-law had returned to Seoul.

By 1954 KIM had given her burgeoning hillside community a name: Ai Kwang Won, the Garden of Love and Light. That same year it was officially registered and acquired a legal identity as the Ai Kwang Won Foundation. From the small band of local friends and benefactors came its first board of directors. But outside the island, people had begun to take notice. Among them was Russell Sage of Foster Parents Plan, whose organization helped her annually from 1955 onward. In March of that year the governor of Kyung Nam Province, of which Koje Island is a part, awarded KIM a citation for public service.

Although the end of the fighting brought relief of many kinds to the beleaguered Koreans, it also deprived Koje of its only hospital. The hospital, a branch of the Seoul-based Severance Hospital, had been set up during the war and KIM had taken her sick babies to it for treatment and medicines. But the branch was closed when hostilities ended. Now when measles or pneumonia attacked, she had to take her ailing children across the straits to Pusan to the hospitals there. More than once some of her tiny charges died aboard the ancient, heatless ferry on the long, rough crossing, and she was compelled to strap their lifeless bodies to her back as she proceeded with the others to Pusan and back again.

Not all of KIM's charges were infants. Sometimes whole families of parentless children would arrive at her doorstep. And of course, in time, the babies themselves achieved school age. Ai Kwang Won thus became much more than a "babies home," and KIM strove to provide a healthy atmosphere for growing children—discipline, religious and ethical training, individual attention, and love. Try as she might, however, KIM knew that Ai Kwang Won could never provide the experience of growing up in a real family. She therefore took great pains to find permanent homes for her charges. She was not too shy to approach people at church, in the market, or even at public bath houses, to ask:

"Do you need someone? I have a daughter and a son who need special love and care." Sometimes, she admits, she begged.

KIM knew that Korean society generally tended to be inimical to orphans, subjecting them to scorn and resentment. Although she managed to find dozens of Korean families to adopt some of her children, the vast majority were adopted by couples from Europe and North America. She became adept at working with the various foreign adoption agencies established in Korea. Of the 250 Ai Kwang Won children legally adopted, approximately two hundred were placed with families abroad.

When they reached school age her children went to the free local grammar school, but they could not go on to higher schools because, for these, the government charged stiff fees. KIM was concerned that the children's education was limited. She was especially concerned for the girls—not only *her* girls but those of rural Koje who, because of poverty or conservative parents, were launched into adult life prematurely and without skills to fend for themselves.

Her formative years at Ewha University had instilled in KIM a desire to work for the financial independence and dignity of Korea's rural women, a desire the traumatic events of the war and the preoccupations of Ai Kwang Won had not diminished. Moreover, now she had numerous "daughters" of her own. With this in mind, KIM determined to establish a trade school for girls at Ai Kwang Won.

With assistance from the Korean government, from a group of Korean navy men stationed nearby who helped put up the new building, as well as from CARE and Save the Children Fund, which provided sewing machines and other materials, her new school was able to open in 1958. "One person, one skill" was the motto of Ai Kwang Won's Vocational Training Institute, where in six-month-long courses girls learned how to knit, sew, type, embroider, cook, and clean, as well as cut and style women's hair.

Many of the girls opened their own businesses afterwards, and Koje Island soon sprouted beauty parlors and knitting and sewing shops run by her graduates. Some years later (1970) KIM added a technical school where young boys learned carpentry, tree pruning, and gardening. This ran until the Korean government made middle school mandatory. Earlier (1967), by making shrewd use of idle space, KIM also established Korea's first summer youth hostel for Koreans and foreigners, an enterprising project that generated extra income for Ai Kwang Won for several years.

By 1970 KIM had also attacked the problem of Koje's medical needs. Not only were her children in need of a medical facility, so too were the other residents of the island. The fishermen, for example, had no recourse to rapid surgery if they suffered appendicitis at sea. With help from Dr. Kee-Ryo Chang,* founder of Gospel Hospital in Pusan, she set up a general medical clinic at Ai Kwang Won to serve her children and her workers, as well as the community at large. Dr. Chang helped equip the clinic and staff it with doctors and nurses from Pusan. KIM and the Ai Kwang Won Foundation provided the facility itself—another new building in the hillside compound.

Koje Christian Hospital—as KIM named the new clinic—operated on this basis for several years, assisted at times by American Peace Corps volunteers and by occasional donations from abroad. In the mid-1970s, however, Gospel Hospital abruptly recalled its medical equipment. KIM's daughter, now an adult and settled abroad, successfully combed the United States for surplus surgical equipment and Mr. K. A. Johnson, an American foster parent, donated a used X-ray machine. When a full-service hospital was built on Koje in 1978—yet another civic project in which KIM was instrumental—the Ai Kwang Won clinic was closed.

The war was long over and Korea was prospering; there were fewer orphans. As more and more of Ai Kwang Won's children found homes in Korea or abroad, only the handicapped and retarded were left. Aware that in Korea such children suffered as outcasts in their own families and were sometimes subjected to cruel mental and physical abuse, KIM resolved henceforth to devote herself exclusively to this scorned and vulnerable minority. In 1978, therefore, KIM transformed Ai Kwang Won into a home for the handicapped. In the following years it became a haven for the retarded, the speech impaired, the epileptic, and the victims of cerebral palsy. These young people required special attention. Some could neither sit, stand, eat by themselves, nor use the bathroom without assistance. Many suffered epileptic spells. Ai Kwang Won's simple buildings had not been designed with such needs in mind, nor for the number of specialists who were now added to its staff. It needed another new building.

KIM was quite adept at mobilizing enthusiasm for her projects and had the unqualified confidence and support of Ai Kwang Won's board members, plus a loyal circle of friends at home and abroad. Among them was Kim Won Kyu, the man who had forced on her the first seven orphans. She now called upon these friends to help her build a home tailor-made for the handicapped.

* RMAF Awardee in Public Service, 1979.

While contributions came from Japan, West Germany, and the United States, the Korean government paid half the cost. Local private donors included Mr. and Mrs. Yoon David Choong Sop; Kim Young Joon; Yeo Moo Nam; and Kim Woo Chung, president of Daewoo Shipping Company. Dandelion House, as it is called, was completed in 1986 and by 1989 was home to over two hundred handicapped children.

Why "Dandelion House?" KIM explains that most flowers, once they are stepped on, cannot survive, whereas the dandelion, though lowly and scorned, is actually both lovely and resilient—like these children.

Dandelion House was built with the realization that for most of these children it would be their only home. From it, she says, they will make only two trips: "to the hospital when they are sick, and when God calls them." This is why she spared no pain or expense to make it a pleasant place. Children receive the loving attention of therapists and housemothers (thirty-three of them) as well as of KIM herself. Their lives are punctuated by special events, including birthday celebrations and religious services. Moreover, Dandelion House is spacious, clean, and bright with sunlight and flowers. Its grounds are planted with evergreen trees and subtropical plants. And from its large windows the children may look directly out upon the beauty of Koje Bay.

So pleasant is Dandelion House that some people have questioned "such a mansion for *these* people?" But KIM responds by saying that normality is a gift from God, and normal people may hope for a better life on earth through their own efforts. These children have no such hope. Moreover, God has a purpose in placing them here. "It is our duty to help them," she insists.

At Dandelion House, severely retarded and other disabled young people receive daily care and life training. Where possible, their faculties for physical coordination and speech are developed. Many of them attend nearby Koje Ai Kwang Won (Special) School, founded by KIM in 1980 and run initially by her sister, Kim Mal Soon, who has been her partner for thirty-five years and now heads Dandelion House. The school's seventeen teachers provide instruction from nursery through high school for its 175 children. Meanwhile, at Erwin House (a workshop established in 1988), older students learn skills such as sewing, ceramics, carpentry, animal husbandry, and organic vegetable gardening. Other residents perform odd jobs in the compound, and one works in a bakery nearby. Many help make greeting cards and other items for sale in the foundation's gift shop.

KIM has had to make special arrangements for Dandelion House's adolescents and young adults, directing their energies to useful channels and providing separate quarters for males and females. One couple has married. She hopes that in the future some of her charges will be able to live in semi-independent family units.

This is but one of several plans KIM is making for the future. Another is a new school building. (She is still using the old pre-Dandelion House structure, which is showing its age.) More money is needed but KIM does not worry. She says that in her thirty-eight years of work on Koje Island, she has experienced the biblical miracle of the loaves and fishes "many hundreds of times."

Building and guiding the Ai Kwang Won Foundation over the years has taught KIM the power of patience, of good faith, and of her own will. In the beginning, sheer desperation made her uninhibited about asking, insisting, even begging that people *do something*. In time this became habitual and she became Koje Island's leading mover and shaker. Her interventions with outside agencies helping Ai Kwang Won brought boons to the larger community as well. In 1953 she persuaded the Foster Parents Plan to donate ten thousand pairs of shoes to Koje's primary-school children and CARE to provide one hundred goats to the town's returning war veterans. Later she prevailed upon CARE to donate eighty three-ton fishing boats to the island's fisherfolk after a 1959 typhoon had destroyed their fleet. In the same year some two thousand needy persons received free medical care when, at KIM's request, Dr. Choi Ha Jin and other doctors from Pusan University brought a medical mission to the island. A decade later KIM called in a team from Pusan General Hospital to help avert a deadly epidemic in the villages of Ah-ju and Ah-yang, and also persuaded the United States Navy to send a team of doctors and dentists to treat seven thousand villagers in Changsungpo.

At the same time, KIM became an active promoter of economic development on Koje. She helped coax the Ham-tae Coal Mining Company to locate a coal briquette factory there in 1959 and, for nine years, was a member of the Rural Community Development Committee of Kyung Nam Province. In this capacity she invited the Dong Ah University dean of the Department of Engineering to draw up a master development plan for the island. As a result, the Ministry of Construction designated Koje County a model county and stepped up its road building program there.

For four years beginning in 1969, KIM sat on the advisory committee of the provincial government, during which time she helped organize a credit union at Changsungpo, build a social center there,

and set up a children's library. She also hosted a series of workshops on commercial development that, among other things, led to the introduction of plum cultivation in the county.

Whenever she could she steered help to where it was needed: from Britain's Save the Children Fund to 150 needy families in 1970; from the Foster Parents Plan to 400 poor families between 1971 and 1977; and from the Korea Deep Sea Fishing Company to jobs for over one hundred of Koje's young men in 1972. KIM has also shared Ai Kwang Won's facilities with the community. For example, well over one hundred couples from local villages have been married in its multipurpose auditorium and worship room.

Over the years, Koje Island has prospered along with the rest of South Korea. Two of the country's huge industrial conglomerates, Daewoo and Samsung, have located shipyards there, and by the mid-1980s Koje was no longer an island of rural villages, and Changsungpo no longer a small fishing port. As one visitor described the latter, it had become "a modern, newly built, expanding, thriving, prosperous seaport with . . . new roads, shipbuilding yards, supermarkets, and heavy traffic."

As the island changed, so did its needs. Rapid economic development and prosperity for some altered traditional social relations and mores and attracted newcomers. With these changes came new tensions in the workplace and in the family—tensions that could not be resolved or repressed in the traditional fashion. For example, when serious conflicts arose between husbands and wives, legal action was often required to resolve them. But the legal system was complicated and lawyers were expensive. Many people did not know what to do and women, especially, needed help and protection.

For many years women in distress had sought KIM out for sympathy and counsel and for referrals to helping agencies. In 1988 KIM established and became the head of the Koje branch of the Korean Legal Aid Center for Family Relations, which had been founded by Lee Tai-Young.* There now exists this formal source of help and legal aid for families in crisis. KIM also took the lead in introducing family-planning education to the community.

KIM's good works have not gone unnoticed. Ever since the mid-1950s she has received repeated accolades and citations for public service from the Kyung Nam provincial governor. In 1963 the president of Korea awarded her the Medal of Merit for Public Good and in 1970

*RMAF Awardee in Community Leadership, 1975.

named her to the National Order of Merit. Awards from Korea's Ministries of Culture and Information, Health and Social Affairs, and the Home Ministry followed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as well as recognition by the National Women's Council, the National Red Cross, and many local organizations. In 1985 Ewha Woman's University named KIM one of its top one hundred graduates.

Why has she led such a life? KIM admits that had the war not intervened she might have lived out her life in a much more conventional way, mothering a family, fostering a husband's career, contributing where she could to the good efforts of her church and other organizations in the community, perhaps teaching at a university. But because of the war, she says, "everything was broken." This freed her to do "the enormous work of God, to be part of the Great Cartwheel." In all this, she says, her part has been no more than that of a tiny grain of sand within the vast universe. She points out, for example, that there are probably half a million mentally retarded people in Korea alone who need care.

Nevertheless, she believes God is mindful of what she is doing. For example, she says, in May 1985, shortly before Dandelion House was completed, she was returning to Koje from Seoul in a truck burdened with goods for Ai Kwang Won. On the way the truck collided with two men on a motorcycle. The two cyclists were killed immediately, as was the man driving the truck—Choi Ki Ryong, for some thirty-two years KIM's right-hand man, a fellow Christian, and the devoted manager of Ai Kwang Won. KIM herself was thrown from the vehicle and landed some five meters away with barely a scratch; not even her eyeglasses were broken. This miraculous deliverance she sees as a message that God wishes her work with the Ai Kwang Won Foundation to continue.

Today Ai Kwang Won employs over sixty people, and there are seventeen buildings within its hillside compound, including a pleasant guest house. Some 690 of its erstwhile residents lead normal lives in Korea and around the world; now and then they come home for a visit with *Umuh-nee* (Mother) KIM—including several of the original seven orphans.

KIM turned sixty-four in 1989. As she moves in sprightly fashion about Ai Kwang Won, she is oblivious of her advancing age and of the urgings of friends to slow down. Her fingers are crooked from years of washing dishes for hundreds of children. She does not mind. When her daughter chides her, saying, "Mother, you should take better care of yourself; look at your hands," KIM replies: "When I meet God I would

rather he see these crooked fingers than perfect ones—the result of idleness and pampering."

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Manila

REFERENCES:

Interviews with Kim Im Soon and her daughter, Lee Woojung Song. Visits to Ai Kwang Won and Changsungpo, as well as interviews with, and letters from, persons acquainted with Kim Im Soon and her work.

Kim Im Soon

김 임 순