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Heritage Korea

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Heritage Korea: A Solo Performance
Engaged Learning Project
By Kristen Lee

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By creating this solo performance, I hope to educate and spread awareness on the actual happenings of the Korean War by looking through the perspective of my grandfather as a North Korean runaway and eventually a South Korean soldier. When I first started on this project, I thought I would gain a greater sense of the importance of the Korean War, as well as the significance of my grandfather's journey from North Korea to South Korea. I have gained that and so much more. For the first time, my ancestry and heritage became alive inside of me. Getting to go to Korea for the first time in my life to further more research and develop my piece was one of the most significant events of my life.

I was able to perform my solo performance for my peers and faculty at Southern Methodist University as an Engaged Learning project and as a SMU Student Theatre production. I was also able to collaborate with LiNK, Liberty in North Korea, an organization that works towards the freedom of North Korean refugees. I worked in close relationship with my mentor, Gretchen Smith, who guided me in utilizing my playwriting skills and acting technique necessary to make this performance possible.

My end goal is that people will not only be touched by my grandfather's story, but come away with a greater understanding and deeper grasp of the lasting effects of the Korean War on the Korean people. I am grateful that I personally gained a stronger appreciation for my heritage as a Korean-American through this process.

[Pre-show music: Track 1. NY Philharmonic performs Arirang. Start at 0:21]

안녕하세요! 여러분! 저의 이름은 Kristen 입니다. 안녕하세요.

go up to person in audience

안녕하세요! 저의이름은 Kristen 입니다. 당신의 이름은 뭐예요? [Jake] 아 Jake 친구!
반갑습니다!

back on stage

안녕하세요! 저의 이름은 Kristen 입니다. Jake 와 Stephanie 와 Dylan 은 다 저의
친구들입니다. 여러분들도 다 저의 친구들입니다.

친구들. 친 [친] 구 [구] 들 [들]. Friends. 네! 맞습니다.

아녕. 안 [안] 념 [념]. Hello.네! 맞습니다.

아녕 친구들. Hello my friends.

안녕하세요! My name is Kristen Lee, and I would like to thank you for all coming to
Heritage Korea. My performance today is divided into two parts—

[Gong sound.]

Part 1. A Historical Fairytale.

[Gong sound.]

And Part 2. The story what I did this past summer.

So we'll start with Part 1.

[Gong sound]

A Historical Fairytale.

[Track 3. Korean Traditional Meditation Music]

Once upon a time, far far away, there lived a little kingdom. A humble little proud
little beautiful little kingdom. A kingdom with soaring misty mountains and clear
rays of sun. A hopeful little kingdom.

Bring out flower and place.

In Ancient times, this kingdom was known as the Chosen Kingdom. Its visitors, who
would come to marvel at its soaring misty mountains and its clear rays of sun loved
to call it: the Land of the Morning Calm. But everybody else called it something quite
different because of the kingdom's very interesting shape. The Rabbit Kingdom.

Outsiders would say look at it! It's a Rabbit! Do you see it? There are its ears and its
paws and its head. The Rabbit Kingdom. And all its people are like little rabbits
themselves, meek and weak and docile. The Rabbit people. Ha!

And the Rabbit people would bow their heads and fold their hands and not say a word—very much like actual rabbits—and they would wait until all the outsiders finished laughing and went on their way. But once they were all gone, the Rabbit people would lift up their heads and murmur to each other secretly: They are wrong. They do not know. This is not the Rabbit Kingdom, nor are we the Rabbit people. We are the Tiger Kingdom!

Do you see it? There are its ears and its paws and its head. The Tiger Kingdom. And we are the Tiger People.

Tiger form

People can say what they say and think what they think and know what they know, but we know better.

And the people would bow their heads and fold their hands and go about their meek business, and to all they remained the Rabbit people living in the Rabbit Kingdom, but deep in the hearts of the people, and pulsing deep inside the kingdom's misty mountains, and shining deep in its clear rays of sun was strength. Tiger strength.

Tiger form during:

Strength of the tiger—do not fail. Refuse to be destroyed. Refuse to give up. Live on, persevere on, hope on.

Pick up flower.

Oh hope, how fragile you are. How delicate. How easy to be shattered you are, how easy to shredded and ripped and pounded to dust. Oh hope, do not die. Live on. Live on in the misty mountains and in the clear rays of sun and in the hearts of your people. For without you, there is no strength.

Give flower to person in audience.

Will you hold this for me, 친구야?

So there it was. The Rabbit Kingdom.

And many bigger, hungry kingdoms would come to stare at the Rabbit Kingdom—and as they stared, thirst grew in their hearts and desire shone from their eyes. Thirst to take and desire to conquer.

[Fade Music]

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Kingdom Cobra and the Cobra people.

[Next Sound Cue]

Strong, clever, and very very hungry. Kingdom Cobra devoured the Rabbit Kingdom, forcing all rabbit ways out and pushing all cobra ways in. Rabbits, they said, are weak. Rabbits are stupid. Rabbits should be made extinct. Become a cobra and let your rabbit ways die. Or elsse.

And so the Rabbit Kingdom lived under the shadow and rule of Kingdom Cobra. And the Rabbit people were smothered, for those who refused the Cobra ways were crushed and disposed of. Only those who adapted and accepted them survived. (And yet of the surviving, there were those who remained, those with hope in their hearts, those who would still murmur to each other in the darkness: Be strong.)

[Music fades]

Go grab flower. Pick a petal?
 Oh hope—live on. Be strong.
 But hope is so frail. Why do you fade?

Seasons passed. Seasons changed. Quiet suffering. Quiet suffering. Many years went by.

Until one day, somewhere in what had once been the ear of the Rabbit Kingdom, a little boy named Chang was born.

[Next sound cue]

And inside Chang's beating heart and coursing through his veins, there was strength.
tiger form

draw stick figure of chang
 This is Chang.

Chang lived in a tiny village in the cold countryside with his parents. It was a simple life he led. All day long, he would play in the fields with his friends from the hut next door and catch grasshoppers to eat, to fill the ache in his empty stomach. And at night, when the moon came out—white and round and beautiful, Chang and his friends would sit outside their huts and gaze up and sing to the moon together.

달아 달아 밝은 달아
 이태백이 놀던 달아

2.저기 저기 저 달속에
 계수나무 박혔으니

3.옥도끼로 찍어내어
 금도끼로 다듬어서

4.초가삼간 집을 짓고
 양친 부모 모셔다가

5. 천년 만년 살고 지고

천년 만년 살고 지고

Chang loved singing to the moon. For when he sang, he forgot all about the cold and the ache in his empty stomach, and his heart would rise and swell with happiness.

When Chang was 7 years old, he said goodbye to his parents and his friends from the hut next door and was sent to live with his eldest brother Kang in the city. There, many wonderful things happened. He met his two little nephews Sun and San for the first time. He attended school and learned math and how to read and write in Cobranese. He was given shoes to wear and a bouncy rubber ball to play with. And the growling in his empty stomach went away.

Much later in his life, he would learn that these wonderful things were a result of his brother Kang working for the Cobra kingdom government. A result of his brother Kang forgetting the Rabbit ways and becoming a Cobra. But when you are 7, you don't know those kinds of things. You only know that wonderful things are happening because you have a bouncy rubber ball to play with and the ache in your empty stomach is gone. But sometimes, Chang would look out the window of his new home in the big city and gaze up at the beautiful moon. And he would miss his parents and his dear friends from the hut next door and chasing grasshoppers in the fields. And he would fall asleep whispering the moon song to himself.

달아 달아 밝은 달아

이태백이 놀던 달아

When Chang was 11 years old, a great and terrible war started. A war that involved many, many powerful kingdoms. The Cobra Kingdom, the Hound Kingdom (Germany), the Bear Kingdom (Russia), the Lion Kingdom (Great Britain), the Eagle Kingdom (United States). A bloody, bloody terrible war that would one day be remembered as The Second Great War of the Kingdoms. But Chang did not know all that. When you are 11, you don't know those kinds of things. You only know that terrible things are happening because your eldest brother Kang leaves home every morning with the weight of a thousand government worries on his head and comes back home every night drunk as a lord to push back those worries till morning.

When Chang was 14, his eldest brother Kang died in an accident. Chang was left to comfort his sister-in-law, his two nephews Sun and San, the War of the Kingdoms raged on, the Cobra Kingdom was devastated, the ache in his stomach returned, and fear filled Chang's heart. When you are 14, life can be tough.

A year later, the War of the Kingdoms finally ended. The Cobra Kingdom was defeated. They left the Rabbit Kingdom for good. The taste of freedom? The Rabbit Kingdom was cut into portions and allotted like a prize, very much like a real rabbit. The head was given to the Bear Kingdom, and the tail was given to the Eagle Kingdom. And so the Rabbit Kingdom was divided into the Rabbit Head Kingdom and the Rabbit Tail Kingdom.

Chang went to high school. There, Chang was taught to forget all Cobra and Rabbit ways, and become communist. Communism, he was taught, united all kingdoms. Communism would stop the ache in his stomach. But he didn't pay attention. Instead, he quietly taught himself English, the language of the Eagle Kingdom.

For Chang was 15 now, and when you're 15, you learn to know what you want and you make choices about your life and where you want to go. Cause Chang couldn't afford to count to ten, take it in, and feel like there was nothing to figure out. For he heard whispers of the Eagle Kingdom and the Rabbit Tail Kingdom, and how over there, the Eagle Kingdom gave the Rabbit people their freedom. Freedom to remember the old Rabbit ways, to think for themselves, to teach their own language in schools. And Chang realized that that is the way things should be. But he kept these thoughts to himself, for in the Rabbit Head Kingdom, you were not allowed to think for yourself.

When Chang was 20, the Rabbit Head Kingdom began to force all their young men to join the Kingdom army. Chang dropped out of college university and went back to his old village in the country side where his parents still lived to hide. There he met his elder second brother Shang. Shang was leader of a band of guerilla fighters, fighters against Communism. They lived in hiding in the misty mountains. Chang joined them, and there they talked of the South and of freedom.

A year later, the Rabbit Head Kingdom invaded the Rabbit Tail Kingdom, and the Rabbit Kingdom War began. Many kingdoms fought—the Eagle Kingdom, the Lion Kingdom, the Dragon Kingdom (China). The misty mountains grew thick with the blood of war. Shang and Chang made their decision to run. Shang said goodbye to his children and wife. Chang said goodbye to his parents, to his two nephews Sun and San. 16-year old San begged to be taken with them. Chang sternly said no. When you are 16, it is too dangerous to try and run away. We will send for you when you are older. Chang and Shang ran. They ran. And because Shang was leader of his band of guerilla fighters, they gained passage aboard an Eagle Kingdom cargo ship. They rode with no food or water, and after three days and nights, they landed in the South Rabbit Kingdom. On Freedom Ground. Chang was 21. [21]

Chang joined the army of the Rabbit Tail Kingdom. The fighting went up and down, up and down. Blood everywhere.

When Chang was 24, the Rabbit Kingdom War reached a stale mate. A line was drawn, dividing the Rabbit Head Kingdom and Rabbit Tail Kingdom into two separate entities. The line was drawn. No crossing the line.

Chang lived in the Rabbit Tail Kingdom. Seasons passed and changed. He became a highschool teacher. He married a beautiful strong woman with Tiger strength coursing in her veins. A little daughter was born, and then a few years later, a little son.

And when Chang was 42, he said goodbye to his brother Shang, took his wife and his little daughter and son, and came to the Eagle Kingdom. And he worked very very hard to give them a good and happy life.

And when Chang's little daughter grew up a little, she went to college and fell in love and got married to a fresh off the boat fob man, and in time, they were blessed by the heavens, and a crazy daughter child was born unto them.

[Gong sound] Part 2.

[Oppa Gangnam Style]

This is the part where I get to share with you what I did this past summer.

I had the privilege to go to Korea through engaged learning!

There, the food, the atmosphere, friends, the alcohol, the places, and the people welcomed me like I was home. I visited market places, reconnected with my parents' old friends, visited the National Korean War Museum and the National Cemetery. I didn't want to leave, and my heart burst with Korean pride.

I visited the DMZ on a day long tour. It was hour's journey bus ride from Seoul. I was the only Korean on the tour. We visited an old train station that used to go into Pyongyang, North Korean capital. We visited lines of fence that separated us from mine fields that were planted by the North. We visited Panmunjeom, where soldiers faced each other across the demarcation line of the border. I had to sign a document stating that I might die on the tour. And as I stood there looking over at the North Korean soldier on the other side, the weight of what it meant to be a Korean hit me for the first time in my life. The sorrow. The understanding of what my grandfather felt, of why he played his violin long into the night.

During during my interview sessions with him. He told me his greatest regret was leaving San his nephew behind.

I came back from Korea not knowing what to do with myself for a time.

I joined LiNK this semester—a national organization called Liberty in North Korea and planted here at SMU for the very first time this year by my friends. Liberty in North Korea raises funds for the rescue and safe passage of North Korean refugees who cross the Yalu and Tumen River and escape to China. It is very dangerous in China, as many of them are caught by the Chinese government and sent back to North Korea, and are either executed or put into concentration camps. 100% of any donation to LiNK goes straight to helping these people. It costs \$3000 to rescue one refugee and assist their resettlement once they are brought to either the States or to

South Korea. LiNK has rescued over 300 North Korean refugees from China and are continuing to reach more. If you would like to partner with LiNK in these rescues, there is a donation bucket at the door on your way out. Please do not feel pressured at all.

At the airport in Incheon, there were potted plants of mu-gung-hwa, the Korean national flower. I picked one and brought it back. I would like to read you the definition of this flower from google. The Korean name for the flower, mu-gung-hwa, combines two words, mu-gung, meaning immortal or everlasting, and hwa, meaning flower. Koreans have treasured the mu-gung-hwa as a heavenly flower since ancient times. The mu-gung-hwa blooms from early June through late October, and some two to three thousand bloom on a single plant, which is strong enough to survive even when cut or transplanted. Thus, the flower represents the long suffering strength of the nation. Koreans cherish and care for the national flower as it symbolizes the many glories the country has experienced and the trials and tribulations the people have overcome.

End.