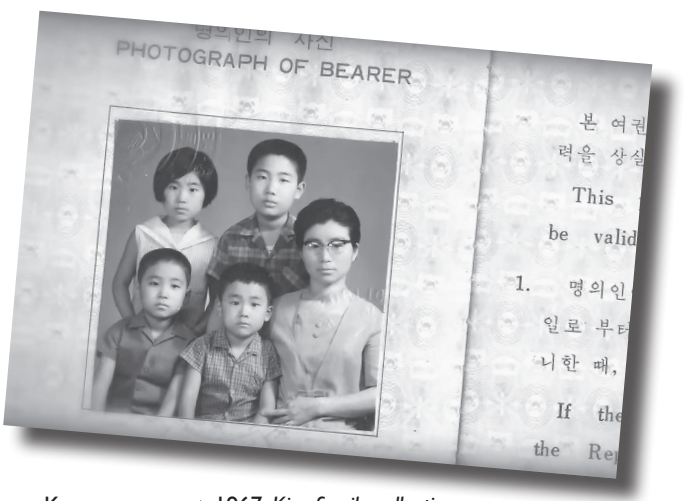

CINDY
RYU
THE
FORGOTTEN WAR
잊혀진 전쟁

The American Dream

Cindy Ryu remembers the jolt as the big jet's wheels touched down at SeaTac Airport. It was Christmas Eve, 1969. She was 12 years old, and Seattle was a world away from the Korea her family had left behind two years earlier. Cindy's name back then was Kim Sin Hi.

Greeted by smiling sponsors, Cindy, her parents and three brothers piled into a bright red Volkswagen Microbus and headed south on newly paved I-5. The road was so smooth Cindy felt like they were taking flight again.

King and Pierce Counties, where most of the Asians lived, went by in a blur. They were headed for a former railroad junction called "Gate." Once upon a time, it was the gateway to the coast. Cindy jokingly describes Gate as "a suburb of Rochester and Oakville," some 15 miles from the remarkably un-diverse metropolis of Centralia. Among its 10,000 residents, the 1970 Census enumerated one Filipino, two Japanese, four blacks, 21 Chinese, 47 Native Americans and 24 people categorized as "all other." Koreans apparently didn't count. Cindy's family was a minority within a minority. Imagine what it was like in Gate.*



Korean passport, 1967. *Kim family collection*

Today, State Representative Cindy Ryu lives in Shoreline with her husband, Cody. Together they owned a successful insurance agency for 26 years. While raising their three children, Cindy got her start in community service as a Sunday School teacher at United Presbyterian Church of Seattle. It

* The 2010 census found only 31 Koreans in Centralia. Washington's total population in 1970, when the Kims arrived, was 3.4 million, with 20,000 Japanese, 9,000 Chinese and 11,000 Filipinos—1,693 were listed as Koreans.

Represenative Cindy Ryu. *Ryu collection*

doesn't get any more American than that. As president of the Shoreline Chamber of Commerce, she helped create the city's Green Business Program. In 2008, while on the Shoreline City Council, Cindy became the first Korean-American woman to serve as mayor of a U.S. city. Elected to the House in 2010, she is the state's first female Korean-American legislator. Her emergence as an influential legislator symbolizes the clout of Washington's steadily growing Korean population.

KOREANS, MORE THAN 100,000* by latest estimates, now represent one percent of the state's 7.2 million people. But why did these proud and resilient people from a land once known as the "Hermit Kingdom" make their way to the upper left corner of the United States?

Between 1910 and 1953 Koreans endured brutal colonialism and a civil war that for a while threatened to become World War III. However, "as early as 1873, just two decades after Japan's own opening by foreign imperialism, the Japanese government discussed a plan to invade Korea," Frank Jacob wrote in his study of *The Korean Diaspora*. Next came the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. With President Theodore Roosevelt as the broker—winning the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts—Japan won a free hand for expansionism in Far East Asia and the Russians surrendered their hegemony. Japan officially annexed the Korean Peninsula in 1910.

Washington's first Koreans arrived at the turn of the 20th century via Hawaiian plantations. They were mostly agricultural laborers and cannery workers. In 1910, the U.S. Census found only one Korean in Seattle; by 1920 there were 37—mostly men congregating in the International District between their seasonal jobs. A few were political refugees or students.

Korean women started to make their way to the United States as "picture brides." Many were hoping to escape colonialism and familial piety, the Confucian mandate to honor elders and ancestors above all else. Hoping for lives full of adventure and education,

* Includes population numbers from the U.S. Census, Department of Homeland Security and the Korean Embassy in Washington, D.C.

they instead found drudgery in the workplace. And those who settled on farms were burdened by many children and endless chores. Here's how it worked: A matchmaker in Korea would coordinate a marriage between a woman there and a Korean man in the United States. Often he was much older. "Love" had nothing to do with it. Colonial Japan encouraged the practice as a way to build trust with Koreans abroad. Between 1910 and 1924, roughly a thousand women came to the United States as picture brides.

Meantime, life in Korea under Imperial Japan was demeaning. The Japanese closed newspapers, purged Korean educators and imported teachers to inculcate Korean children with the Japanese culture and language. The colonial bureaucrats attempted to obliterate every aspect of Korean culture. Family names and place names had to be changed to Japanese; the Korean language itself was forbidden. Opportunistic Japanese flooded into Korea, buying up land.

With their homeland under foreign rule, Koreans at home and abroad dreamed of Korean independence, just as today they dream of unification of the entire peninsula. Many Koreans fled to the U.S. in order to support and protect their families. They formed organizations to work toward independence. Then Japan stopped Korean emigration. It needed laborers and soldiers to aid in their empire building.

By 1924, immigration was halted in the U.S. as well when the "Oriental Exclusion Act" was passed by Congress.* The numbers of Asian immigrants dwindled, with Seattle's Korean population listed as 15 in the 1930 U.S. Census. Interestingly, when Japanese were interned in the United States during World War II, Koreans were put into the same category because of Japan's iron control over Korea. Some Koreans—like the Chinese—declared their independence and innocence by wearing buttons that proclaimed, "I am not a Jap." With Japan's surrender in 1945, Korea was at first divided into U.S. and Russian spheres. Before long, however, Korean communists led by "Supreme Leader" Kim Il-sung controlled the north, while the U.S.-backed a government south of the 38th parallel. It was led by Syngman Rhee, an exiled anti-communist who for decades had been waiting for this opportunity. Each government claimed legitimacy. Civil war was imminent.

ALTHOUGH FROM DIFFERENT LINES, both of Cindy's parents carry the surname Kim. They can trace their lineage back two millennia to 10th Century Korea. Pronounced "Keem" by Koreans, Kim is the most popular surname in Korea, at 22 percent of today's population. Cindy's parents' roots run deep in what is now North Korea, a land she has never set foot on.

Cindy's father, Kim Jae Il, was born in 1925 in Hwanghae-do Province, which now borders South Korea. His financially stable parents owned an orchard. As the eldest living

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* Congressman Albert Johnson, a Republican from Hoquiam, was the co-author of the patently racist act, and proud of it.

son, he was afforded a high school education, comparable to college in the United States.

Kim Seong Suk, Cindy's mother, was eight years younger than her spouse. Mrs. Kim—now Joan to her friends—was born in 1933 in P'yŏngan-namdo, the province of North Korea's current capital, Pyongyang. She was the daughter of a wealthy land owner who raised his children in the city so they could acquire an education.

Cindy's mother never knew a stable home in Korea. She was quite young when her father moved the family to Manchuria, leaving his eldest son to manage the large farm. Japan was gearing up for what would be World War II. Joan's father had three big worries. He feared his sons would be conscripted into the Japanese army, and that his daughters would be taken away to become "comfort women" for Japanese soldiers. He also wanted to ensure his children had access to education. His last worry was a practical matter: The Japanese occupiers confiscated all the brass in Korea to make ammunition. Those were the days before plastic and aluminum. Without brass pots and kettles, Korean families had no way to cook their food.

When Cindy's family left North Korea for Shenyang, a major Manchurian city, they weren't the Kims. They had been forced to choose a Japanese surname—in this case Kanemura. Her father picked it because Kane means Kim and mura is village in Japanese.

"The annexation of Korea and the Japanization forced many Koreans into exile," Frank Jacob wrote. "Due to this, more and more people left Korea. But they were not just forced; some were even encouraged to provide a reason for a more aggressive Japanese foreign policy in Manchuria, because they would not be just settlers, but Japanese citizens, for whose sake Japan was able to intervene in China. Due to this, between 1932 and 1940 around 732,000 Koreans left for the Northern state of Manchukuo, where the number reached 1,400,000 in 1940.* By 1945 over 2,160,000 were living in Manchuria."

Ever resourceful, Cindy's grandfather was able to develop rice paddies to support his family and provide jobs for other Korean emigres. The Koreans in Manchuria "introduced paddy farming in their new area of residence and monopolized the rice trade in a very short time. Having belonged to a traditional agricultural society in former times, the settlers were able to use their broad knowledge of farming to produce a larger amount of rice, which made them prosperous."

Joan Kim's earliest memory is of losing her mother to tuberculosis in Manchuria. Joan was 6½. Her older sister, 10 years her senior, watched over her until a kind stepmother entered the picture. But there was a year of grieving.

Joan and her siblings attended school in Shenyang, where they were not a minority. There were 2,000 other Korean students, she remembers, emphasizing that her family took education seriously. They never got into mischief. "Even in Shenyang, however, they

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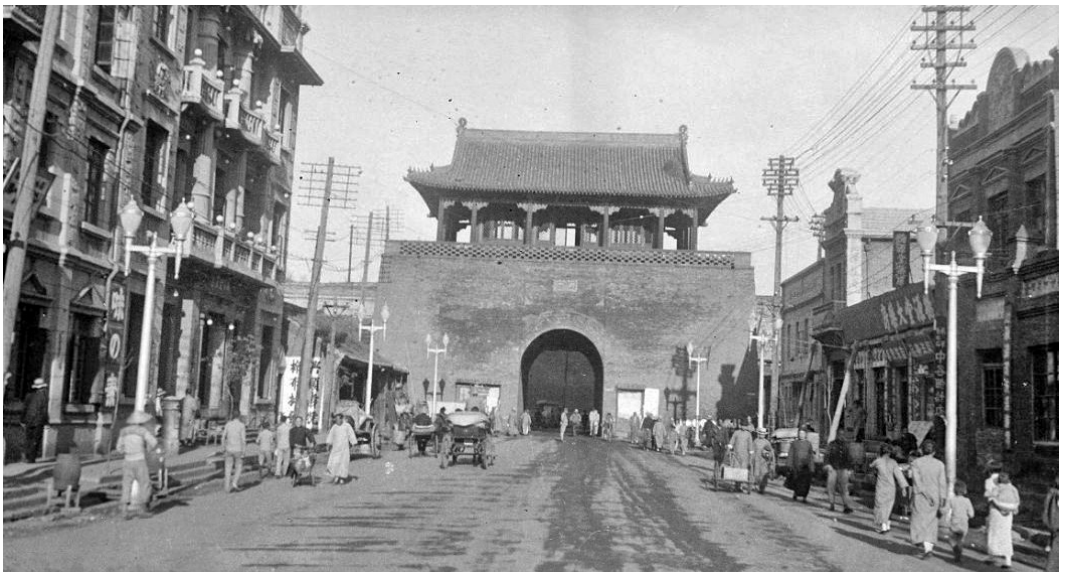
* Manchukuo is the Japanese name for what is known as Manchuria. Both names represent imperialism, and are not how their original inhabitants, the Manchus, referred to this land.



The gate to the walled city of Shenyang, Manchuria (formerly Mukden, the Manchu capital) in the 1930s.

had to speak Japanese," Cindy said, translating for her mother. "They were required to turn each other in when they spoke a word of Korean. So each child had a card, and when a neighboring child heard a Korean word come out then they could take the card away. And they would be punished because they did not have a card. It's a way of ethno-genocide."

At war's end, Koreans had a brief moment of hope for independence. "As soon as her dad heard the news that Korea was free, he started drawing the Korean flag," Cindy says. "They were not allowed to hang onto anything Korean, even their name, so never mind the Korean flag. He started drawing it at his home so he could wave it. All the neighbors came to their house and started to draw the Korean flag to wave in the streets."

Joan Kim was 12. It was the first time she witnessed her native flag being flown.

THE KIMS—family name restored—were finally able to return to their homeland in December 1945. But they wouldn't stay in North Korea long. As the communists moved in, they started confiscating land "for the good of the state" and purging nonconformists. Joan's family was forced to surrender their farm. Her dad gathered the children who were still at home and explained that they must leave.

He hired a human smuggler. One dark February night in 1947, the Kims snuck across the border. Hands clasped over children's mouths. Even a cough could get you shot. They left behind Joan's now-married older sister, bound by tradition to stay with her husband's family. That was the last time the sisters would ever see each other.

An old friend of her father's met them when they arrived in Seoul. "They were childhood friends," Cindy says. "Back then, my grandfather's family had land, but the friend's family had no land. There was no reason for them to stay in North Korea, so they left to go to Taegu," a city some 200 miles south of Seoul. They were part of South Korea's early industrialization. "They had started a factory and he was doing *really* well by then. So their fortunes had completely reversed." Cindy's grandfather had been a generous man, helping the poor when he was a land owner. Now he was landless. But his old friend had a long memory. "He invited my grandfather to join them."

In Taegu, the friend purchased an orchard for Cindy's grandfather to manage. Though the dialects and customs in South Korea were slightly different, everything was in flux in that postwar era. Compared to her peers, Joan didn't notice anything different about her childhood. Her older brother attended the military academy and became a major for the South Korean Army. Joan went to school off and on until June 25, 1950—a day that will live in infamy among South Koreans across the globe.

Armed with the latest Soviet tanks and backed by heavy artillery, the North Korean Army surged across the 38th parallel just before dawn. The communists' intentions were clear: They were going to soak the peninsula in red as they pushed the enemy and its capitalist allies back to Pusan, the port city at the bottom of the peninsula. It was there that the Kims and hundreds of thousands of other civilians fled for their lives.

June 25th is South Korea's 9/11. "We just call it by '625,' " Cindy says. "You do not get married on that day; you do not have parties on that day—even now, 65 years later." She recalls that the South Korean Army was heavily outmanned and under-equipped:

> All they had were rifles—single-shot rifles. No cannons, nothing. The young soldiers of the South Korean army that were defending the last line before they jumped into the water, basically, were the children of un-landed people for thousands of years. They had *just* become land owners, receiving land from President Rhee through the land reform program. So they had personal as well as national pride in defending the land. They would have to fight until the bitter end. The young men were extremely brave in spite of not having the right equipment. That's the Battle of Nakdong River.

Then came General Douglas MacArthur. The legendary hero of the South Pacific War became commander of all the United Nations forces in Korea. He was the architect of the daring amphibious landing at Inchon that turned the tide of war that September, eventually pushing the communists all the way to the Chinese border. Joan calls MacArthur "the top." At Inchon, a towering statue of the five-star general rises to the heavens.

The communists wouldn't stay contained up north for long. Seoul would switch

hands four times over the course of the Korean War that raged until July 1953. "It is estimated that at least two million civilians were killed in the course of the war, a higher civilian death ratio than that of either World War II or the Vietnam War. By 1951, five million Koreans had become displaced refugees, as desperate families fled the shifting front line. US bombing raids destroyed almost all of the major cities and agriculture-producing areas in North Korea."

Left, Jae and Joan as newlyweds, with Joan's father and siblings at the family home in Pusan after the Korean War. *Kim family collection*

CINDY'S FATHER, Kim Jae Il, was also in Manchuria during those tumultuous years of Japanese occupation. After high school, he found a factory job to escape being conscripted into the Japanese Army. Jae Il had been educated strictly in Japanese schools. He spoke Japanese better than Korean. He was living in the south as he worked on a graduate degree in fisheries when the Korean War erupted. Jae Il was immediately drafted into the South Korean Army.

Jae Il's mother and sister, Song, had spoken to Joan about Jae. As soon as he returned from the war they were introduced at church. It was an arranged meeting, not an arranged marriage, the Kims emphasize. They had a choice.

The Kims went on to have four children who arrived every two years, starting in 1955: Sin Il, Sin Hi (Cindy), Gun Sam (now "Sam") and Sun Gil. Postwar Seoul was far from the modern city we know today. Cindy remembers her growing-up years:

> The residential areas were pretty much intact. They may have been ransacked going and coming, or even by neighbors. But there were still older homes and single-family homes and neighborhoods. The neighborhood I lived in is called Mapo. When you go to downtown Seoul you will still see the direction to Mapo. It was in the suburb, but it was still Seoul proper. Now, it's smack in the middle—it's so, so busy, with a whole bunch of freeways going by it.
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> …You were lucky if you had a spout in your yard that was for the cooking and the washing, because even 10 years before it was go

Cindy, front, with her mother and brothers in Seoul, 1962. *Kim family collection*

to the river. I think we had a partial sewer so the grey water could go down but the human waste had to go separate in an outdoor closet ["outhouse"]. They had a system of regular collectors who would dump waste outside of the city. Now we celebrate the bathroom culture!

We had communal "spas," but in those days it was the communal bath (mogyoktang). So everybody would pay a few Korean won and the whole family goes in. The women go in here, the men go in there. And you scrub, and your mom scrubs you. It was within our generation."

IN THE 1960S, Cindy's father moved to Brunei, a nation on the island of Borneo, to support his family as a migrant worker. As an officer during the war, he supervised the engineers; building roads and bridges, running heavy equipment and doing welding and mechanical jobs. Cindy's mother stayed in Korea with the children. But, after three years, she knew this was no way to live as a family. Joan Kim packed up her four children and took the long journey to be with her husband. Cindy was nine.

While living in Brunei, the Kims were exposed to many different cultures. The Malays made up the majority of the population, but there were also Chinese, Indians, Australians, British and a smattering of Koreans. "It was a tropical rainforest. The papaya tree had fruit that was delicious. It was really paradise." After weighing their options, the Kims sent their children to a private Anglican School to be educated in English. Joan took in sewing to supplement their income. The Kims always made it clear that the parents were there

Cindy, front row, second from right, in a choir directed by her older brother, Sinil, while they attended school in Brunei. *Kim family collection*

Cindy's mother, Joan, had this studio portrait taken so her husband could see how his children were growing as he worked overseas in Brunei. *Kim family collection*

to work and the children were there to learn. Cindy, as the lone girl, was never excluded. "In Korea in those days women were not educated. Even my generation, if they had limited resources it would be the first son, and then all the other sons and then maybe the girls. But, my parents always said *all* of you."

Two years later, however, their visas expired. "The only place we could go together on the same visa, on the same passport, was the Philippines," Cindy remembers. "So that's where we landed while we were waiting for a visa to enter the U.S.A. And before we ran out of money and our welcome was wearing thin in Manila, we were able to immigrate to the United States. But it wasn't a done deal so I'm sure my parents were scared to death."

CINDY'S AUNT SONG, who had introduced her parents, orchestrated the Kim family's move to America. "She was working as a secretary on the Army base in Korea where she met Mr. Zobrist, who eventually became Colonel Zobrist. She was the more active and more engaged, practical, pragmatic aunt. She's the one who made sure everybody who could, could come to the United States, get a fresh start, but it was up to us to make our own way."

Cindy's aunt made sure the Kims had a connection and asked her neighbors to sponsor them. That's how they were introduced to the Johnsons, a benevolent Mormon family who lived at Gate, of all places.

"Korean Americans have been virtually unknown in the United States for most of this (20th) century … finally it seemed that each airliner arriving from Seoul brought another immigrant family," wrote Brian Lehrer in *The Korean Americans*.

The Johnsons showed up at the airport with the new VW van they had purchased for the occasion. They welcomed the wide-eyed Korean family of six into their already full home for six weeks. In addition to their own brood, the Johnsons had taken in foster kids.

Joan's first impression was that "Americans are friendly and it's a good place. Looking back, they truly loved us. They had never met us before—total strangers. We lived in that neighborhood, in another house, for about three years because they treated us so well and probably spoke well of us."

The new customs took some getting used to. Cindy's youngest brother, Sun Gil, was given a piece of cake that he promptly rejected. Mrs. Johnson was surprised. "She thought every kid would love cake," Cindy remembers, but her 8-year-old brother blurted, "You used your fingers. Dirty! My mom always washes her hands before she gives me food and you didn't wash your hands."

All these years later, Sun Gil was laughing and nodding as Cindy related one of the family's favorite stories. Their mom *was* always fastidious. "That's why I became a microbiology major, and that's why you're the toilet guy," Cindy said. Her brother smiled. He now works for the Gates Foundation as the Program Officer of Transformative Technologies—Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. "He's setting the standards for the world. How many years after the Romans?" Cindy says, her pride evident. Thousands, Sun Gil said. "Half of the population in the world has no access to improved sanitation systems," he noted. "We must support radically new sanitation technologies." Maybe he too remembers the outhouse at Mapo.

CINDY WAS AN EXTREMELY SHY sixth grader at Rochester Elementary School, where she would much rather read than talk. She found community at the Nazarene Church where she enjoyed singing in the choir. During her high school years, Cindy helped organize weekly church services at a local nursing home.

Making friends with other girls was not difficult. "They would invite me to their home. I may have invited them to our home, but our mom was pretty private and I knew in order to have friends over you had to have snacks ready and so on. I was not a good hostess. It was very one-sided. Any time they asked me to come over I was there. They really took me under their wings and tried to help me along and befriend me. One of them actually became my constituent."

Back in Korea, generations of people were homeless as their soil was overtaken by

foreign interests. After living in flux their entire lives, the Kim family finally had a place to call home in 1973 when they bought their first house in Centralia. Some Koreans moved to other states but the Kims were staying put in Lewis County.

"I didn't face discrimination but I knew I was quite different," Cindy remembers. In junior high and high school, the minorities were Cindy, her younger brother Sam, a Chinese girl and a Native American girl out of 800. Sun Gil adds, "I think the only Korean family that was not related to an American military person was in Chehalis. And then I remember there was one family that was from Hawaii—also Kims. I think in Centralia we were the only fully Korean family."

The children spent their summers picking blueberries at Drew's Blueberry Farm on the Black River. One year Cindy was elected Blueberry Queen, a real honor. A favorite site for the family was the Centralia Library where they were involved with events like the International Story Telling Festival. "We were at the library all the time. My dad definitely believed in the library because it was free, and it was like wow, look at the treasure trove. I would borrow the platters [records] to play all the music. My favorite was John Philip Sousa marching band music. The other kids would not rent it out so we were the ones that would check them out."

Cindy's father went to work at the Centralia Steam Plant for the next 21 years. His coworkers all wanted to know, "How can you have all four kids get into UW, and succeed?" With a smile, he always said it was the kimchi. Ironically, when Cindy's parents had discussions they didn't want their children to understand they would speak in Japanese. In fact, Jae Il ended up teaching Japanese to students at Centralia Community College.

Jae Kim's naturalization papers. "My dad became an American by choice."
Kim family collection

THE KIMS BEGAN PETITIONING for naturalization. And in 1975 at the age of 17 the future state representative became a United States citizen. She chose her own new name. "Cindy" sounded a lot like her Korean name, Sin Hi, which she combined to Sinhi as her middle name.

"My junior year English teacher was great because she would ask questions instead of just teaching us. She would actually have conversations with us, and that's what I needed. I needed that skill set, which was really timely, but I also needed somebody who would not straight teach English but also the rhetoric side of it—even asking questions like, 'Do you dream in English or do you dream in Kore-

The Kim family in America in the late-1970s: Cindy, Sun Gil, Sin Il and Sam, with their parents, Joan and Jae. *Kim family collection*

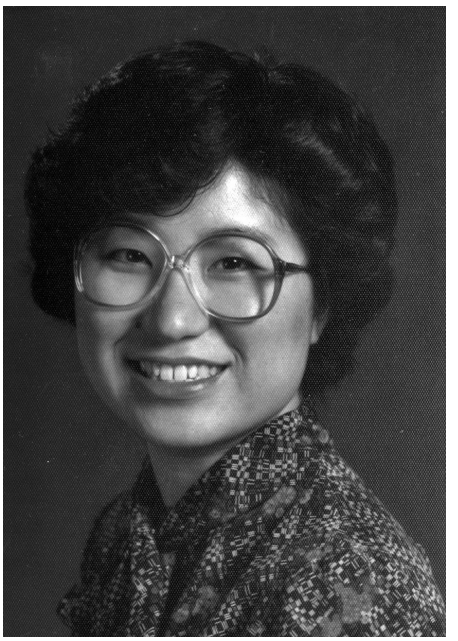
an?' And I couldn't answer her. For *years* I couldn't answer her. And then later on I think I did actually tell her, 'I dream in pictures.' Because I'm so much more position and vision oriented, so I don't talk much in my dreams but I remember vividly where we were."

Cindy Sinhi Kim graduated from Centralia High School in 1976. The United States was celebrating its bicentennial, so the graduates wore red and blue gowns instead of orange and black, the school colors. For Cindy, the symbolism was even more compelling. She was an American now. One of the top 10, she received the Centralia-Chehalis Soroptimist Club youth citizenship award, a scholarship to the University of Washington and departmental honors in science. Her class voted her "Girl most likely to succeed." That came as a surprise to her. But she would surely bring her classmates prophecy to fruition.

Cindy followed her older brother Sinil to the University. He had skipped a grade in high school, remarkable for a recent immigrant for whom English was a second language. Sinil was now advancing to medical school. Since education was so important to their family, Cindy's parents helped pay her way. But she always worked as a college student, mostly as a medical transcriptionist. Cindy graduated with her bachelor's degree in microbiology.

She was eager to fulfill her childhood dream of becoming a medical missionary like her hero Albert Schweitzer—the Nobel Peace Prize winner. After a couple tries, however,

she wasn't able to gain admission. Cindy switched gears and went back to get a Master's in Business Administration. Still very shy, she knew she had to shed her shell if she was going to be a business leader. Cindy joined the Toastmasters—a club to boost public speaking skills. Now, thinking back to the days when she was nervous to speak her mind, she laughs. That's not the case any more.



Kim family collection

As Cindy was approaching 25, her mother made it clear it was time to get married. As was true with their parents, Cindy and some of her siblings also had "arranged meetings," not arranged marriages. Many of her Korean friends were sent back to Korea to find spouses. They would meet with a matchmaker, either a family friend or a hired consultant. Cindy had a trip planned but was hopeful of finding a Korean husband in the states. She had seen the complications that came with bringing home a spouse from a foreign land. Besides the language barrier and cultural norms, there were everyday challenges. "You had to be a driving instructor since most Koreans did not own cars in the 1980s."

Lucky for her, as she was playing piano at a tiny Korean Methodist church in Seattle the minister said he knew of a young man she should meet. It wasn't much of a first impression. He had a bowl haircut and an ill-fitting jacket. His name was Ryu Chang Myung, Americanized to Cody Ryu. By Date Two, Cindy was proposing. This tells you something important you need to know about Cindy. Thirty-five years and three children later, Cody and Cindy are a match made in Heaven. Their Christian faith is a huge part of their lives.

UNFORTUNATLEY, EVEN WITH AN MBA, "in 1983, all the doors were shut. So I was happy to get $1,100 a month. I was happy to answer the phone. That was a blessing. For six months I had to talk all day long. I got over being shy."

Cindy landed a job with the City of Seattle's Department of Construction and Land Use. She really enjoyed the work, thinking she'd be a 30-year employee. Her husband was starting his own Allstate Insurance Agency. As is customary with Korean families, they were very close to Cody's parents, even living in their basement for a time. But that proved stressful. Cody was busy at the agency. Cindy was a full-time working mom with a commute. They'd just had a second child. She was burned out. The couple decided it would be best for Cindy to come work with Cody at the insurance agency. That was a life-changing

decision. With Cody as the salesman and Cindy as the operations manager, they made a great team.

In her book on the lifestyles of Korean Americans, Tamra Orr wrote, "Over two-thirds of the women in Korea do not have any type of job outside the home. In the U.S., on the other hand, more than 70 percent of the married Korean women work outside the home…"

Cindy and Cody Ryu enjoying a hike. *Ryu collection*

"My mom says she never told me, 'You also need money, not just love,' " Cindy remembers. "Maybe it was a series of conversations but I remember thinking, 'I'm going to get married for love, not for convenience.' Dreamy Cindy, right? With my nose in the books. What's the number one cause for divorces? Fighting about money. So what I learned was that money is just a tool that we figured out. And money is what I can use to send missionaries; money is what I can use to help support the church; money is what I can use to help my kids. So it buys you options."

After 26 years of hard work, they were able to sell their insurance agency and go on to their other life's passions. Cindy entered politics full time as a way to make a difference in her community. Cody took a different path. His family had been founding members of the United Presbyterian Church of Seattle, and over the years his faith grew until he decided it was his calling to receive a Master's in Divinity. Cody is now a pastor at the Korean Presbyterian Church in Fairbanks, Alaska, while Cindy serves in Olympia.

Their three children, Candice Hae Sun, Christine Hae Young and Cody Hyun Geun, have had to navigate what it means to be Korean American in 21st Century America. Because she arrived in America as a 12-year-old, "I'm considered 1½-generation immigrant," Cindy says, explaining that it's like the Japanese system. The Issei are the immigrants; the Nisei are the first generation born in America, and the Sansei are the grandchildren of the immigrants. "Americans don't count the immigrants as the first generation. They count the first generation born here. We have the motherland perspective: First generation in America, that's my husband because he grew up in Korea. I'm '1½' because I only spent part of my childhood in Korea, probably closer to '1¾.' So my children aren't really second-generation. They're more like 2½ generations. They were having a difficult time, not

Enjoying a Korean meal with her children, left to right: Cody, son-in-law, Teague, Candice and Christine.
Ryu collection

with the kids but with the kids' Korean parents: 'Why don't you speak Korean? Are you a lesser Korean because you don't speak Korean?' So they had that challenge. But they are trying to learn Korean now. Even my white American son-in-law is trying to learn Korean one word a day because their kids will be half-Korean."

Surprisingly, in 1991, Cindy's mother was able to visit North Korea as part of a tourism effort promoted by the north to generate tourist dollars. Mrs. Kim hadn't heard a word from her siblings, two brothers and a sister, in almost 45 years. In particular, she was eager to finally reconnect with her beloved older sister. First, she tracked down one of the brothers to verify she had the correct family. Then she boarded a plane with 35 other Americans and landed in Beijing, China. From there, they took an old North Korean Air propeller plane to Pyongyang. The tourists were sent to specific locations, including the iconic Mount Kŭmgangsan, "The Diamond Mountain"—a centuries-old pilgrimage destination for Koreans that appears in many songs and artwork.

"They kept the visitors touring instead of introducing the families to them," Cindy said, translating for her mother. "They were remodeling and cleaning up the host family homes" to make a better impression. "She ended up in her nephew's house because her brother's house was too old. They could not remodel it. It's *really* clean, and nice. So she assumed that's how they lived. 'Wow,' my mother said, 'you have a really nice home.' But my relatives were very honest people. 'Because you're coming it took me three whole days to repaper the whole house,' my cousin told my mother. 'I am really tired.' "

The Kim family celebrating mom's 80th birthday. All of Jae and Joan's 11 grandchildren are college graduates. *Kim family collection*

So it was all for show.

Cindy's brother, Sun Gil, says, "There's one picture of my mom sitting around a big round table. They sit on the floor, and there's just piles of food everywhere. The amazing thing for me to see was that they had all this food and Korean beer. My mom is not a fat lady, but when you look at her versus my cousins she looks very big, compared to how skinny everyone else was. So it was clear they were not eating well."

Mrs. Kim had spent so little of her childhood in North Korea that it felt foreign to her. Sadly, she learned that her sister had already passed away, but she was able to visit with her two brothers. Joan's wish is that one day North and South Korea will be reunited so her children can know their cousins in the north. Right now, the only way to communicate is through letters, which don't always make it to the recipients.

FOR KOREANS, every birthday is special. Some more so. A child's first birthday is doubly happy because in days gone by many children died in infancy. Likewise the 60th birthday symbolizes the wisdom of age. Lately 80 is the new 60 as people live longer. Cindy turns 60 in 2017. She seems much younger. Cindy is active in the Korean community in Washington State and globally. She makes sure to return to South Korea at least every other year. Her

Running for the House of Representatives. *Ryu collection*

children have visited on their own as part of group tours, thinking it important to learn about their ancestral land through their own eyes and perspectives. Cindy proudly chairs the Overseas World Korean Political Council, where Korean politicians from all over the globe gather to share ideas. "It's that comradery, that diaspora that we all experienced either in our lifetime or previous generations, and yet here we are able to come together. It's just really precious."

Cindy snaps a selfie with a Korean War veteran who was awarded the Korean Ambassador for Peace medal. *Ryu collection*

As a four-term member of the Washington State House of Representatives, Cindy is honored to represent her 32nd District constituents, including many Korean Americans. A Democrat, she won each election by a landslide. Cindy leads the Community Development, Housing and Tribal Affairs Committee—overseeing tourism, veterans and emergency preparedness. She serves on two other House committees: Commerce and Gaming, and Capital Budget, and heads the Members of Color Caucus.

In 2011, Cindy was appointed

In 2016, Cindy was awarded the Grand Order of Honor presidential medal from the Republic of Korea. *Ryu collection*

to the special joint House and Senate committee overseeing trade policy for the Washington State Legislature. Washington now ranks third in the nation for exports. "Rep. Ryu is opening people's eyes to new global economic opportunities that allow even the smallest businesses to create jobs tied to international trade," Speaker Frank Chopp said. "Her leadership for small business will be a valuable addition to the trade policy committee."

Cindy strongly advocates for small business, public schools, public transportation, environmental and consumer protection and public safety. She consistently votes against payday loan bills because she believes they are predatory.

"There's a tiny little story that I tell the fifth graders who come to visit," Cindy says. "I say, 'I have three very accomplished brothers.' I ask the kids, 'Who wants to be a politician when you grow up?' No hands go up usually. Maybe one half-way, but the parents are not encouraging them to be politicians. So I tell them my brothers are very accomplished. One's a doctor, one's a chief information officer for Clark County and one is working for the Gates Foundation. And here I am. I earn the least. But guess what? My brothers have to obey the laws that I make!"

Washington's Korean American population is over 100,000, and more than 3,000 businesses are operated by Koreans. "My ethnicity helps in Washington State," Cindy says. "Asians, and specifically Koreans are assumed to be smart and hard workers." But, that doesn't mean it's easy to get into public office, she says. "In both the Democratic and Republican parties in Washington State, persons of color mostly do not participate at the grassroots, local or state levels. Even with its history with an Asian governor, politics here is still a white person's world.

"As an adult, I've been told 'Go back to where you came from'—yes, in PC King County," Cindy says. "Just because I'm getting in touch with my Koreanness does not mean I'm less of an American. Guess what? By becoming a better Korean I'm actually becoming a better American because people used to be given the false choice: 'Are you Korean or

American? Where is your allegiance?' They're not exclusionary. The American experience is the melting pot. We are a nation of immigrants. Even the Native Americans, they emigrated here from Asia, even if it was some 15,000 years ago.

"We are all immigrants."

Lori Larson