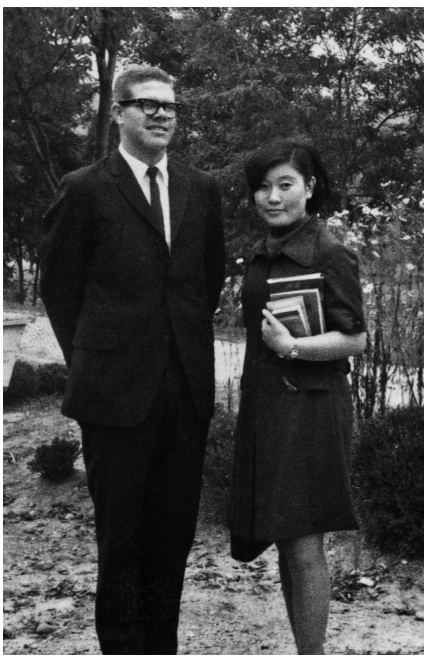
MOONBEAM KUPKA

Moonbeam & Mike

One girl in the visiting church choir caught the lieutenant's eye. Her classic Korean face was like a lovely reflection from an ancient gene pool. Her hair was as black and shiny as a raven's wing. Afterward, she noticed him too. They exchanged quick smiles, hers demure, his reassuring. It was 1968. Michael Kupka introduced himself to Moon Bong Sook with careful attention to Korean etiquette. She was a 22-year-old university student from Seoul, an hour from his U.S. Army detachment.

Moon Bong Sook had lively eyes and a hearty Korean laugh she found difficult to restrain. The pastor warned the girls to stay away from American soldiers. But he was an officer—a tall, sandy-haired Lutheran from Minnesota with perfect manners. When she thrashed him in a game of Ping-Pong he raised his arms in surrender. On one of their secret dates, they saw *Doctor Zhivago*. A luminous full moon greeted them as they left the theater.



Mike and Moonbeam when they first met in 1968. *Kupka collection*

"Oh, look at the moonbeam!" she said.

"It's like you," he said. "I'm going to call you Moonbeam."

This is a love story and a war story rolled into one. Most of our earliest memories are just fragments from childhood's big moments—the puppy who mauled the birthday party cake, the Spiderman or Barbie doll under the Christmas tree. Moonbeam Kupka's first memories are chillingly vivid: streams of frightened refugees; tanks rumbling through the night; bombs raining from the sky; the cries of wounded soldiers and terrified children. That was the summer of 1950. "I was only 4, but I remember," Moonbeam says emphatically. "Those memories never fade. They keep haunting you. So what you do is count your blessings, make yourself busy and pray 'Never again.' "

The missile-rattling by North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un underscores her anxiety. Moonbeam has a son in uniform and brothers and sisters in Seoul, as well as long-lost relatives still trapped in the north. "How does one commemorate a war that technically is not over?" Sheila Miyoshi Jager writes in her acclaimed 2013 book, *Brothers at War, The Unending Conflict in Korea.* "While the Korean War, at least for Americans, 'ended' in 1953, the meaning and memories of the war have not been brought to closure in Korean society because of the permanent division of the peninsula."

"Exactly," says Moonbeam.

The achingly beautiful "Unification Song" is still often sung at closing time in Seoul's taverns and bars, though some, even its composer, fear it has become "a symbol of false hope."

In retirement, Moonbeam and Mike Kupka live in an immaculate home high on an evergreen hillside overlooking Grays Harbor. They produced three little Moons who grew up to be highly successful blends of Moonbeam's animated Korean persistence and Mike's creative yet calm Czech/Scandinavian DNA. Their firstborn, Erik, is an attorney in Aberdeen; Lisa, the middle child, is a CEO in Dallas, and Johnathon is an Army Special Forces lieutenant colonel twice stationed in Korea. When Johnny was reconnoitering his childhood neighborhood with a paintball rifle 30 years ago it was easy to imagine him as a soldier, just not with a Ph.D. in political science.

MOONBEAM was born in Pyongyang, now the North Korean capital, on the sixth day of spring 1946. An impressive bound volume traces her lineage to 1399 in endless rows of Chinese and Korean characters. Her paternal ancestors were scholars, educators and regional governors. Her mother's family had been land-holding nobility for generations.

Moonbeam's parents were married at 16 in a classic arranged marriage, virtual strangers on their wedding day. The new Mrs. Moon quickly discovered that her husband's mother, the lady of the house, was bossy. "When my mother was growing up as an only daughter with five brothers, she was just like a princess," Moonbeam says, "not doing much domestically because they had so many maids. She learned to sew and do embroidery—make beautiful things. Until my parents left North Korea she never even cooked."

After the Japanese annexed Korea in 1910, Moonbeam's politically agile great-grandfather and grandparents managed to hold onto the secondary schools they operated, as well as much of their land. However, as World War II progressed the Japanese colonial regime was increasingly brutal.

At war's end, the Korean peninsula was divided at its waist—the 38th parallel—with the Russians occupying the north, the U.S. the south. Stalin had declared war on Japan in the nick of time, giving the Soviets an important sphere of influence in postwar Korea. The North became a structured Soviet-style state; the South lapsed into political volatility.

Moonbeam's paternal grandfather early on sensed the inevitability of civil war. The North Korean communists—with Russian-speaking "Soviet Koreans" at the forefront—began instituting "land reforms" to confiscate private property. "They took inventory of my family's properties and said, 'You cannot have this much wealth. You must become communists.' In 1946, my grandfather told my father and his siblings, 'You kids better move south.' So my mother and my father and three kids—I was exactly three months old—moved from Pyongyang to Seoul on foot and by ox wagon. My father lost contact with all his brothers and sisters. Later we learned they also escaped to the south."

With her toddler brother, Yoon Sup, during the Korean War. *Kupka collection*

Growing up, Moonbeam often heard what happened on that perilous 150-mile trip:

> My mother said I was the family's protection because she was carrying me on her back with all of our blankets. Inside was hidden all of her valuables. Then as now, the monies are different in North Korea and South Korea so they had to carry gold or silver to exchange for food and other services.
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> We were trying to hide from the communist soldiers. My mother said that when they left Pyongyang my grandmother told her, "If she's too much trouble just throw her in the river!" My mother told me, "A few times I thought about it because you were making dangerous trouble for the family with your crying." So when I was growing up and sometimes not obeying my parents, my mother and dad teasingly would say, "We shoulda thrown her in the river when we had a chance!" Everyone would laugh, but it wasn't funny at all to me because I knew that in 1946 they were very serious. The red army soldiers might have shot my parents if they'd heard me crying. It was survival. They were escaping. And I was just another girl anyway. It seems unthinkable now.

The U.S.-backed Republic of Korea was established on August 17, 1948, with Syngman Rhee, a crafty old nationalist, as its president. Three weeks later, the Soviet-sponsored Democratic People's Republic of Korea was born. Its president was Kim Il-sung, an enterprising young Stalinist who had emerged as a leader of the anti-Japanese guerrillas before earning a commission in the Soviet Army.

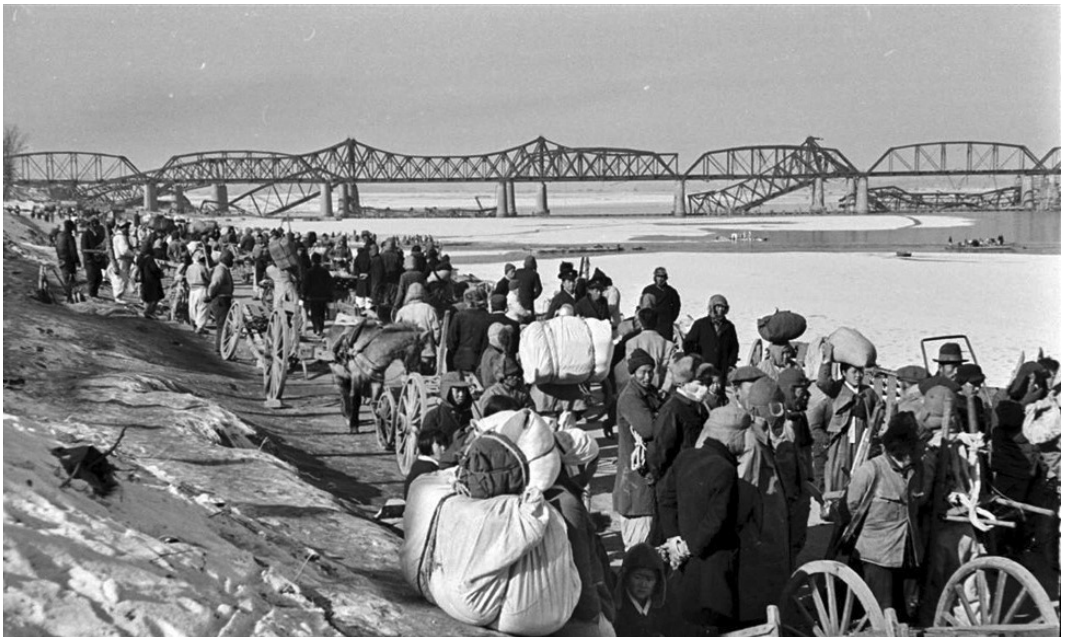
The U.S. and the United Nations resolved that the ROK was Korea's sole legal government. Kim, armed with Russian weaponry and a bevy of skilled Soviet advisers, had other designs. He believed his troops would be welcomed as liberators in a short-lived war. And Stalin believed the Americans, having withdrawn their troops in 1949, would not intervene. Sheila Miyoshi Jager calls the Korean War "a series of miscalculations." It became a deadly game of geopolitical chicken when General MacArthur underestimated the Chinese.

JUST BEFORE DAWN on June 25, 1950, an estimated 90,000 well-trained North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel in carefully coordinated strategic thrusts. Though many ROK soldiers fought "with suicidal determination," the withering artillery fire and onslaught of powerful Soviet T-34 tanks caused many to flee in "a state of terror." The Truman administration—accused by Republicans of being soft on communism—swiftly committed American troops to come to Rhee's rescue. Other U.N. members sent soldiers as well, including Great Britain, Canada, France and the Philippines.

Moonbeam remembers the fear and urgency in the grownups' voices as the children were told to gather up belongings:

> On June 28 my mother's brother told her, "Sis, you better get out right away or you're going to die because the communists are already entering Seoul." I vividly remember walking over the Han River Bridge and hearing the loud noises of war all around us. At the time there was only one bridge over the Han. Here I am a little girl and everybody is carrying things, running and shouting. My mother has a baby on her back. And it's so hot! My feet are hurting and I'm crying, "I cannot walk!" And my dad says, "OK, you can stay there and you can die!" At least he carried my little backpack. I was so hot and tired. I remember being so afraid.

The south bank of the Han was littered with mangled bodies. "A milling, screaming mass of humanity" choked the roads. That first day of fleeing, the Moon family made it halfway to Suwon, some 20 miles south of Seoul. When they stopped to rest, a passing platoon of American GIs gave them some soda crackers. "That's all we had: soda crackers and water," Moonbeam says. "Now every time I'm eating a soda cracker I remember that day.



Thousands of refugees fleeing Seoul line the banks of the Han River after the invading North Koreans blew up the only road bridge. *National Archives*

It seemed like there were thousands and thousands of refugees. We couldn't stop. We had to keep walking." Once, when they heard machine guns chattering and spotted a clump of communist soldiers heading their way, they scrambled into a farmer's field.

> In June, the tomato plants are already getting tall, so we're hiding between the tomato plants. I could see bandaged, wounded soldiers being carried away. My dad kept saying, "Head down! Head down!" I don't remember how long we were hiding there, but we were hungry again. So my dad said, "Eat these green tomatoes!" They weren't ripe. Hard as rocks. I can still taste those green tomatoes in the back of my mouth. It makes my tongue crinkle. I don't know how many I ate. But when you are hungry you can eat just about anything. When the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes* came out I thought that was nuts. I'm never eating green tomatoes again!

When they reached Suwon, refugees were frantically trying to stuff themselves into an already overloaded train bound for Taegu, 130 miles southeast. "No more room inside," Moonbeam remembers, "but if we waited for the next train, it might be too late to escape from the communists. We climbed up on the roof of the train car. There was a

Refugees clamber aboard a train heading south as the North Koreans advance. *Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS*

rope you could hold onto because the roof was sloped. And if you're sliding down and off it's, 'Oh well, can't help them. That's too bad!' "

As the train chugged into a tunnel, Moonbeam's family was holding on for dear life, cinders stinging their faces and singeing their clothes. When they emerged, Moonbeam looked up to see her father's face black with soot. "All you see was his shining eyes. I realized we all looked that way. You'd wipe off your face, then there'd be another tunnel."

Finally they made their way to the strategic port city of Pusan, where the Americans and their U.N. allies were establishing a defensive perimeter. Issued Army tents, the refugees set up camp at Haeundae, which is now a popular beachfront vacation spot. The summer of 1950 was no picnic. "At first, the only thing we had to eat was what we could catch from the sea, using bamboo sticks or our hands. It was fish, small crabs and seaweed."

U.N. soldiers arrived by the boatload. Pusan acquired a commissary, medical facilities and a bustling supply depot. The famished refugees opened boxes of C-rations to discover tins and packets filled with strange food. Moonbeam was astounded by the powdered milk. She choked down her first oatmeal. "When we finally got SPAM, holy cow, it was a luxury."

Hundreds of children—orphaned or otherwise separated from their parents—

scrounged the hills around Pusan. Many were "adopted" by U.S. Marines, who were suckers for the ragamuffin kids.

Orphaned children on a hillside near Pusan.
Seattle Times photo

THE MOONS spent the next three months in the relative safety of the Pusan Perimeter. General MacArthur, the U.N. forces commander, hatched an audacious amphibious landing at Inchon that turned the tide of war—for the time being at least. Moonbeam can't remember details such as these, just the anxiety:

> Especially during this hard time when the war was going on all around us, I must say I always remember and appreciate my parents. My mom and dad were strong and did their very best to keep the family together. We were most fortunate not to have harm come to any of us. So many of my friends lost family members and I saw so many wounded people. We didn't have much but we had each other. My mother was very resilient. She was slowly selling her jewelry to help us survive. I remember thinking my mother must have had a prestigious family, because her jewelry was very wonderful.

Moonbeam still chafes, however, at the patriarchal norms that governed her childhood. The expectation of absolute filial piety would create a heartbreaking chasm between her and her father for decades. The social status of South Korean women today is dramatically elevated from those classic Confucian attitudes, but the country "still has a long way to go before it can shed its image and alter its reality as a male-dominated society," a female professor told *The Korea Times* in 2012. When Moonbeam was growing up, her place in the hierarchy was very clear:

> My first younger brother was three months old when the war started. Before he was born, we had found a house in Seoul and my mother was so proud and happy about her first son. We put him on a little swing set in the bedroom. Here I am as a 4-year-old and I wanted

to ride with my brother. And my mother said, "No, you can't. That's only for him."

During the war, white rice was hard to get. And it was very precious after the war. Very seldom you could get it. My dad and my brothers got the white rice and I got whatever I was going to get. When we cooked fishes I always got the tail. And when we had chicken I got the gizzards and necks. I never got the white meat because it's always about father and the boys first.

My mother and dad were poor after we came south but they have so much ego and pride over what they had in the north, my mother always said, "One of these days when we go back north you won't have to work because we left so much gold, pigs and cows there." That was my parents' dream, but that was not going to happen. Now it's been over 70 years. My father always said, "Poor isn't a sin! It's just an inconvenience for a short time." And my mother often said, "Work like a slave and live like a king."

BY LATE SEPTEMBER 1950, Seoul was back in U.N. hands and the allies were advancing on Pyongyang, the North Korean capital. The Moons made their way back to Seoul and discovered their old neighborhood had been reduced to rubble. They weren't even sure which mound was theirs. Before they fled, Moonbeam's father had buried their valuables, including her mother's sewing machine. "If I can find it then we know that's our place," he declared. After hours of poking, he found the spot. That's where they pitched their tent.

Moonbeam's father made plans to build a new house, confident that MacArthur would mop up the communists by year's end. *"Guess what?"* Moonbeam exclaims, all but rolling her eyes at the twists and turns of her childhood. "Then came the Winter War! Thousands of Chinese soldiers with white sheets over their heads came out of their hiding places in the hills across the Yalu River and overpowered the Americans and South Koreans. It was 40 degrees below zero in the mountains around the Chosin Reservoir."

The Marines staged a miraculous withdrawal, guarding an escape route for the other U.N. soldiers.

Seoul was evacuated and the Moons had to run for their lives all over again, this time in the dead of winter. Moonbeam's uncle, a physician with the South Korean Army, arranged for them to hitch a ride on an ambulance. Moonbeam is haunted by the faces of maimed and dying soldiers.

Her father decided they would be safe at Chungju, a city in the mountains of central South Korea. By the spring of 1951 the American 8th Army had recaptured Seoul. Still, Moonbeam's father said there was no point in going back because they no longer had a house. "He tried to find a job while my mother sold things. We settled in. Everyone listened to the

radio for what was going on with the war. It was back and forth, but we stayed put." Seoul changed hands four times during the war.

A year later, 6-year-old Moonbeam awoke to a commotion. A pair of South Korean MP's had arrived to take her father off to the army. The Republic of Korea was conscripting all men under 40. They had caught up with Moon Sang Jum.

A woman and her children on the move during the war. Seoul changed hands four times. *National Archives*

> Here was my mother, three months pregnant with my second youngest brother. And they just took my dad away. We went to the Army campground to make him a meal, and here were all these men—maybe a thousand—sitting there waiting for their orders. Then he was gone. We knew nothing about where he was going. Two or three months later, we received a letter. "I'm doing fine," he said. "Take care of the kids. I'm sorry for all of the burden on you." My mother sent him a picture of me standing next to my youngest brother. He never got it. All we ever had from him was that one letter.
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> He had been a teacher, but in a war what are they going to do with a teacher? They said they were going to train him to shoot guns. But one day they asked, "Anybody know how to cook?" My dad raised his hand. Probably saved his life.

DAYS AFTER giving birth to her fifth child, Moonbeam's mother took to selling dried fish on the streets. Moonbeam carried her baby brother on her back to a nursemaid. "It was tough on all of us. My mom was a very tough lady with lots of common sense—and very smart, even though she wasn't formally educated."

> One cold winter morning (in 1953) when I was a first grader, somebody was knocking at our door. Here's a bearded old man in shag-

> gy clothes. "Hello!" he said. And my mom is screaming. It was my dad! We were all crying, and my dad was holding everyone. It's so hard to explain the emotion. Then we heard our neighbors crying because they had received a body. The husband had been killed. The same day the MP's took away my father they also took away six neighbor men. Five of them died in the war. My father and another neighbor were the only ones who came home alive.
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> My father soon learned how resourceful my mother had been. If she got $10 by selling some jewelry, she would go buy as much dried fish as she could, then sell it for $12.
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> When my father came back from the war, my mother had pretty much saved money. A good thing, too, because my father cannot find any teaching jobs. So many bright people without jobs. In Chungju we are treated like refugees. We had to pay cash to rent a house. No credit for refugees.

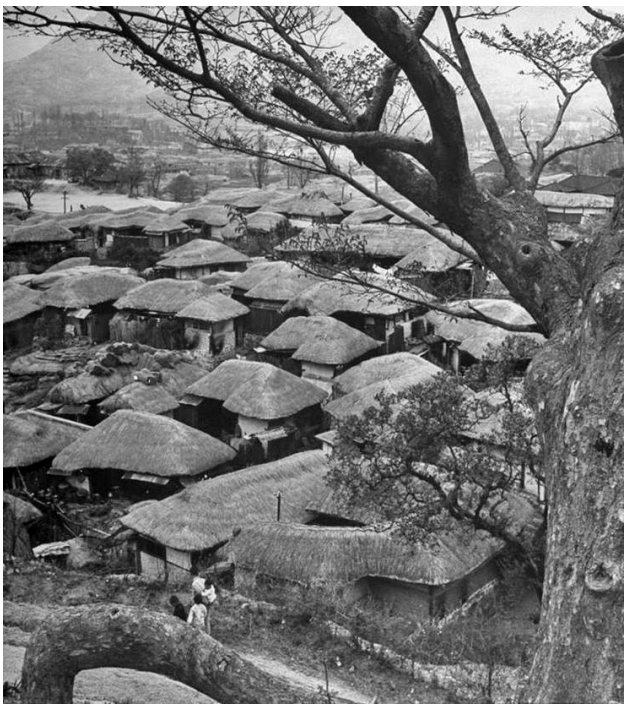
The armistice was signed that summer. "For Koreans, there has been no peace," Moonbeam says, sadness in her voice. "Just a truce, a country divided," with a hair-trigger, junior dictator ruling the north, threatening to rain missiles on Seoul—maybe even Tokyo and Seattle if his ICBM development continues apace and he is provoked by the West.

Post-war Korea on both sides of the 38th parallel was in ruins, infrastructure shattered. Total casualties—dead, wounded and MIA—were estimated at 5 million. Half of that total was civilians. Many South Korean prisoners of war were never repatriated. They became "virtual slaves" in the north. Moonbeam's grandparents in the north were never heard from during the war or after the armistice. "I'm sure they had a lot of punishments because all four of their children went south," she says. "When my father told us, 'Your grandparents were probably the first to be gone,' he meant it was likely they had been killed by the communists."

There were atrocities on both sides. Syngman Rhee's regime was as authoritarian as Kim's. South Korean security forces conducted mass executions of alleged communists and collaborators.

MOONBEAM'S FATHER decided it was fruitless to keep pursuing work as an educator. He opened a fabric store. Moonbeam remembers her mother sewing by candle light because there was still no electricity.

> When I was in third or fourth grade my mom always took me along when she was doing business to check the figures and make sure they were added up correctly. She had never been to school, so she



A cluster of traditional-style Korean houses with rice-straw roofs. *National Archives*

could not subtract or add. Girls in Korea during my mother's time were not formally educated, especially those from wealthy families, the thinking being that if a girl is educated they make trouble. My mother had very interesting handwriting because she had snuck behind the school and absorbed some of the lessons. She was a remarkable person. "You must go to school and learn," she would say. "Don't be like me."

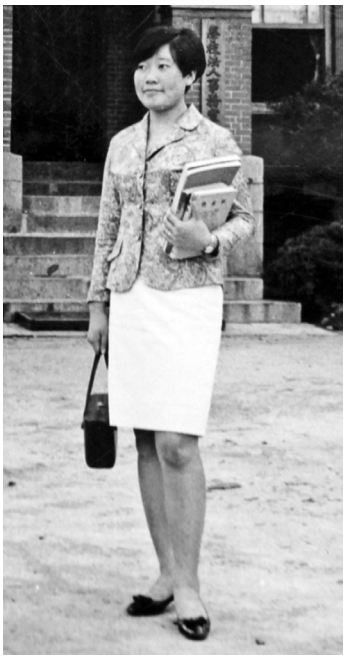
My dad was really not a business person. He liked to read a book and do calligraphy paintings, but that doesn't bring home the rice! My mother did a lot of the business. My father was too proud to do labor work. He was a very traditional Korean man of his generation. His lessons were about manners. "You must always be a humble person," he would say. "Look at the rice. When the rice is growing it's like this." He would gesture upright with his hand. "When it's ready to be harvested it's bowing down. Just like a humble person with bowed head. Respectful. But the ones who are always straight up like the rice stalk are stuck up and disrespectful. Straight up rice is not ripe and cannot be eaten."

I told my kids when I'm raising them, "You don't do bragging now. What you do is work hard and then later it will show by your actions."

By 1958, Moonbeam's mother had squirreled away enough money to buy them a traditional-style Korean house in Chungju. It had a rice-straw roof and two bedrooms, but no running water. A year later, the government exercised eminent-domain over the neighborhood and forced 30 families to move.

As compensation they gave us land on top of a hill. The mayor didn't know how to read or write, so he came to my father for help. He helped survey the land and establish 30 plots for new houses. The mayor was appreciative: "Since you worked on this, which land would you like to build your house on?" My dad picked a view property next to the mayor's. The government gave us material, and the family pitched in to build a house. Some of the walls were prefabricated. When I go to Home Depot and see the little sheds out front that's what I think of. Tiny two-bedroom house, little kitchen. Probably about 300 square feet with a small yard. My dad was trying to save money, so we're building it. When I come home from school at 2 o'clock, my dad is saying, "Give me a nail! Give me a hammer! OK, hold this board."

When it's done, we still have to get well water about two or three blocks away and bring it home in buckets. All the laundry is done in a creek. I remember going up and down that hill.



As a student dietician at Seoul's Konkuk University. *Kupka collection*

THE MOONS moved back to Seoul in 1962 when one of Moonbeam's uncles hired her father to work at his thriving textile company. By the time she was in junior high all the Moons who had escaped from the north were reunited in and around the emerging South Korean metropolis.

Moonbeam graduated from a Baptist Mission high school in 1965 and was accepted at Seoul's Konkuk University, where she studied to be a dietician. The private school near the Han River now has nearly 16,000 students and its own Metro station.

She met Michael Kupka, a U.S. Army combat engineer, during her junior year. Kupka was assigned to a Korean Military Advisory Group, working with ROK units along the demilitarized zone. It was fitting that they would meet at church. Their Christian faith is a crucial part of their lives. They exchanged letters. The young lieutenant asked if she could show him around her campus the next time he visited Seoul. Moonbeam said OK with some trepidation. What if her parents found out? "One day he sent me a letter that said he was coming to Seoul and would I like to meet him at the 8th Army Officers Club for lunch. He said he would send a Jeep to pick me up. I couldn't have him park in front of my house or my mother would kill me!"

They managed to keep their secret. Afterward, however, there was a complication: Kupka was transferred to the east side of the peninsula, seven hours from Seoul on narrow roads. They didn't see one another for several months. He promised to attend her graduation, set for February of 1969. Moonbeam's mother, meantime, was busy visiting matchmakers to line up a suitable husband for her college-educated daughter.

Graduation day in 1969. *Kupka collection*

> One time I came home and was reading one of Mike's letters when my mother says, "This Saturday at 2 o'clock at such and such teahouse, we gotta go!" So we went to see the match-maker to meet one of my prospective husbands. There was this guy. His mother. My mother. My dad. And the matchmaker. It's yada, yada, yada. Then they leave us and the guy says, "Would you like to go to the other teahouse?" If he's interested in me, he says, "Would you see me next week?" That's the way it goes. I was not interested in him. When I came home, my mother anxiously says, "How was it? What did you think of him?" I say, "Mother, no!"

A snowstorm kept Mike Kupka from Moonbeam's graduation. They were unable to see one another before he departed for the states that April.

As Moonbeam settled in to her new job as a hospital dietician, letters from Minnesota were arriving practically every day. Her mother was suspicious. "Mom, it's my pen pal friend," Moonbeam said, still dodging the matchmaker. Mike's mother was doing some long-distance matchmaking of her own.

> She sent me a package with a lovely gift: a broach that had belonged to her grandmother who came from Norway. "I want you to keep it," she wrote. Wait a minute, I thought to myself. This is getting serious. Then Mike sent a letter saying, "I would like to marry you." Oh my! Then in August, he's coming back for a visit. So then I'm thinking, "How am I going to tell my parents all this?"

When Mike arrived in Seoul, Moonbeam revealed that their courtship was still a secret. He remembers his pulse racing as the color drained from his face.

"You haven't told your parents?!"

"No," she sputtered, "but tomorrow I will bring you to meet them and they will ask you some questions."

"Really?"

Moonbeam broke the news that night. Her father at first couldn't believe his ears.

"What did you say?"

"I met this person. He's an American. A very nice man. We've been corresponding since I was a junior in college. I'd like to go to the United States."

"What for?"

"So I can marry him."

Her father was furious. "I cannot believe that I raised this girl, gave her an education and now you are going to marry an American!"

Mike and Moonbeam on their wedding day in 1969. *Kupka collection*

"Dad, I'm sorry. Tomorrow you're going to meet a very fine gentleman, and if you think he's not good enough for me, then I will not marry him."

Did she mean it?

"Well, yes and no. I already made up my mind that I wanted to live with Mike for the rest of my life. But deep inside I knew what I was supposed to do. I was supposed to obey my parents and honor and respect them always."

The introductions were made over lunch at a big restaurant. "All the Americans are divorcing!" her father said. "How serious are you about my daughter and can you take care of her? Marriage isn't like playing with toys. When you are tired of the toy are you going to get a new one? How can I believe you that this won't happen?"

Mike remained calm, respectful and reassuring.

Moonbeam's father was still livid when they returned home. "Sit down!" he commanded. "I never thought this would happen. I educate my daughter and then she's going to marry a Yankee. However, he is a very fine gentleman.

"You really want to marry him? Do you really love him?"

"Yes."

"In that case, I'm going to disown you. You make a decision: You choose us or him."

She chose him, and was cold-shouldered for the next 30 years.

Moonbeam, standing second from right, visits her family in Korea in the 1970s. *Kupka collection*

"Mike left two or three days later. I had said yes to his proposal, but I hadn't told my dad. I developed my own plan. I had to get a visa and come to America. My brother said, 'You are the gutsiest sister I've ever known.'

"I came to Grays Harbor with $80 and a little suitcase. Mike was now a forester for the government. With his family's blessings, we went back to Minneapolis and were married in his childhood church. I didn't really know what Mike is going to be like as a husband, but I knew what my heart was telling me. I knew he was very patient. Very kind. A gentleman. He didn't even hold my hand when we were dating, especially in my neighborhood. He understood Korean customs. And his mother explained what a loving son he was—and is. I made a good choice, as difficult as it was."

"And I did, too," Mike says, reaching across the sofa to take her hand.

When the grandchildren began arriving, Moonbeam's father visited America three times. The boys were handsome, the granddaughter darling, her oval face the most Korean of the three. "Moon" was the middle name of each. When grandpa surveyed the Kupkas' comfortable home he noted that his masterful rice-paper calligraphy scrolls were prominently displayed. It was easy to see that his Yankee son-in-law, a senior forester with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, was a good provider. Moreover, his daughter had developed business investments of her own. She served him delicious beef bulgogi, mandu dumplings and

The Kupkas: Erik, Johnathon, Moonbeam, Mike and Lisa. *Kupka collection*

kimchee. Her white rice was flawlessly cooked.

"It was all polite, but he still wasn't happy with me," Moonbeam says.

JOHNATHON MOON KUPKA, then an Army lieutenant, arrived for his first tour of duty in South Korea in 1998. His grandfather's health was declining. Mr. Moon desperately wanted to see North Korea again. "That was his dream—for both my mother and dad," Moonbeam says. "It was their homeland. My mother, my dad, my brother and my sister-in-law all went to see Johnny at the DMZ. My dad was in a wheelchair, and Johnny was pushing him along at Panmunjom's Freedom House. They looked across to North Korea. That was the closest dad and mom were able to go to their homeland before they passed away."

Five months later, Moonbeam got the call to come quickly to Seoul. Her father was dying.

> My mother said, "He hasn't opened his eyes for over a week. No responding, so don't expect him to open his eyes." I said I'd like a little moment with my dad, so everybody went out of the room. I was holding

his hand and telling him I was sorry for our troubles. He didn't open his eyes but he was squeezing my hand. Next day, our family went to visit him at the hospital. Johnny held his grandfather's foot and said, "Hey grandpa!" My dad opened his eyes, looked at Johnny and had a smile. He made a hand salute for Johnny. Then he said, "Thank you"—in English.

Everyone in the hospital room was stunned. It was hello and goodbye—a reconciliation tinged with sadness, but a reconciliation nevertheless.

"Today, practically every other house in Seoul has a couple (of mixed ethnicity), but not back then," Moonbeam remembers, noting that those matchmaker marriages often end in divorce. She and Mike are closing in on half a century of happiness. "Marriage means you work hard at it and give back 150 percent." she says. "We both are not disappointed."

Koreans are characteristically strong, stubborn and resilient. They also have long memories. "I'll tell you what," Moonbeam says. "If you make me mad you'd better be sure you're stronger than I am!"

She leaned forward and laughed, but she wasn't joking.

The Kupkas at the Korean War Memorial on the Capitol Campus. *Ben Helle photo*

John C. Hughes