Interview with Maija Rhee Devine

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Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, August 29, 2013. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm in the Library today, sitting across the table from Maija Devine. But that's not your full name, is it?

Devine: Maija Rhee Devine.

DePue: Okay

Devine: R-h-e-e.

DePue: And you pronounce that Rë?

Devine: Rhee. But the Korean pronunciation for this middle name, my maiden name, some people Romanize it as R-h-e-e. Some people Romanize it as L-e-e. Some Y-i. But it's all same name, E, in Korean. E.

DePue: But you didn't say "E." You said "Rhee."

Devine: I said "Rhee" because we Romanize it in different ways. Our family, birth side, decided to Romanize it as R-h-e-e. So, the American pronunciation for that would be "Rhee," instead of "E."

DePue: Well, we're going to learn a lot more about the Korean culture, because you were born in, not Korea, but Manchuria, grew up in Korea during the war. So, we're going to be talking a little bit about military history, about your experiences during the war, and a lot about your own experiences as an immigrant. We'll have a chance to hear from somebody who is an expert on these things, because you grew up in that culture, and this is just a small taste of it; just this discussion about the name gets to be an interesting situation. So, let's start with asking you a very straightforward question of when and where you were born.

Devine: Okay. My understanding is…I say this because I don't have the family registry to prove it. It may take a lot of work to dig that up. But my understanding is my birth family mother and father lived in Manchuria in 1943, when I was born. So, the reason they were in Manchuria, rather than…I think their original home was somewhere in North Korea. I can find out exactly what their hometown was.

DePue: As I recall, the last time, you said it was somewhere close to Pyongyang?...

Devine: Yes, uh huh.

DePue: …which is the capital, then and now.

Devine: Right, right. Whether it was Pyongyang or near there, I have to find out for you. So, I was born in Manchuria, because that was during the Japanese occupation period. My father was an "intellectual," people who rebelled against Japanese occupation, and he lost his job as a high school teacher. He and some colleagues went up to Manchuria and lived there as refugees, engaged in anti-Japanese activism. And later, my biological father became a lawyer. I understand he got a law degree in Japan and became one of the leading lawyers in South Korea. He was military officer, prosecuting attorney, for the United States Army, and his job was to seek out communist agitators and sympathizers and try them and take legal action against them. So, many times they were executed. Many were jailed.

DePue: Would this have been after the Korean War?

Devine: This is during the Korean War. He was military attorney. And afterwards, at least a couple of decades afterwards, he continued to be a military attorney, prosecuting attorney. Later he returned to civilian life, and he opened a law office, right in Myeong-dong, which is like Sax Fifth Avenue in New York.

DePue: What's the name of it again?

Devine: What? Myeong-dong?

DePue: Myeong-dong?

Devine: Um-hmm. Myeong-dong. M-y-e-o-n-g dash d-o-n-g. "Dong" means neighborhood, "Myeong" is the name of the neighborhood. This is the central commercial area of Seoul.

DePue: Okay.

Devine: Yeah, and there is a huge landmark, is the cathedral, Myeong-dong Cathedral. It's still—

DePue: You mean like in a Catholic—

Devine: —Catholic cathedral. Um hmm, and his law office was straight across from that cathedral.

DePue: I'm curious. You said he was in Manchuria. Do you think he went there around 1940 or in that neighborhood?

Devine: I think so, yes.

DePue: So, he's leaving Japan-occupied Korea to go to Manchuria. But was he in an area that was controlled by the Nationalists or the communists in Manchuria? Or do you know? It might be something you don't know.

Devine: I think it was a very fluid situation there. I think there were communists there and nationalists there, too.

DePue: Well, I guess my curiosity is, he would have been exposed to both of those very different social and economic systems.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: Do you know how strongly? This is kind of an unfair question. The part we haven't got to yet is, you don't know this man very well, because this isn't the father that you grew up with.

Devine: Right, right.

DePue: But, do you know how strong his feelings were against communists? Was this something…

Devine: Oh, he was definitely, totally, a hundred percent anti-communist.

DePue: What was it about the communist message and the communist ideology that he was so vehemently opposed to? Do you know?

Devine: Most South and North Koreans opposed to communism. Some of them, intellectually, they might have seen, in communist ideals, the communist idealism, the paradise where everybody shares everything equally. That's a wonderful philosophy, but in practice, communists had complete control over

private, regular citizens. So, there was no privacy whatsoever, no freedom of speech. Everything was controlled. I think intellectuals in South Korea and North Korea, at that time, they were very split. Intellectually, they could understand good things about communism. Yet, in practice, the having, just completely taking away private citizens' privacy and the state being in complete, total control of every aspect of citizenship, just didn't work for them. They just couldn't live with that system.

DePue: Okay. I'll let you pick up with your own personal experience and what happened to you after you were born in 1943…what you know, the story you know about.

Devine: What do I know about what?

DePue: What happened to you as a baby.

Devine: Oh, what happened to me. I didn't know what happened to me, until after I graduated from college. Until I graduated from college, I thought I was born in Seoul to a working-class family. My father was a truck driver, who was totally illiterate, never been to school. My mother had second or third-grade education, and, after they got married, my mother taught my father how to read. So, I grew up believing that these were my parents, the working-class truck driver family. And, until after I graduated from college, that's the life I led.

But, when I was getting ready to come to United States, because I graduated from Sogang University—it's a Jesuit university—the man who was a go-between for the adoption told me that I was adopted, and my biological father actually was a lawyer, having this posh law office, right across from Myeong-dong Cathedral, in the middle of the most glitzy commercial district in Seoul.

DePue: We're going to talk quite a bit more about the process of discovering all of this. But what have you learned since about what had actually happened after your birth?

Devine: Okay. What apparently happened is, I was born in Manchuria as a twin, with a boy, in lunar April 14th or so. Later, after I was adopted, I was given May 16 as my birthday. That's not lunar calendar, but the other, solar.

DePue: Which do you celebrate today? The May one?

Devine: May 16, that's what I celebrate. But, apparently, in lunar calendar we were born in April 14th or something. My twin brother still observes his birthday on lunar calendar. Anyway, I was born. At that time, under Japanese occupation, Koreans were given food rations, and when children were born I'm sure they gave a little baby food ration too, powdered milk. But I don't know if they doubled it, just because a family had twins, or not.

My father, because he lost his teaching job in Seoul, and he was living a political refugee life, I don't think he had really an identifiable source of income at that time. He was just boarding with some friends, and they were sharing food. So, they were on a subsistence level, and, when I was born with a twin, they were extremely poor.

So, there were several reasons why they gave me away. One, they were poor, couldn't afford to feed both babies. Two, there were some folk beliefs that, if twin boy and girl were raised together, the girl baby would drain away all the luck that was going to the boy baby. So, they gave the girl away in order for all the luck that the boy would have would come to him. That's one of the folk beliefs, I understand. Another is, they believed that, if they were raised together, they might become incestuous. That's another theory, according to my older brother. Although, later my birth mother said, "Oh, this man, my birth father's best friend, he offered to take you away to Seoul, which is warmer climate." Besides, I was the sickly of the two twins. So, she allowed him to take me, temporarily, to South to get me to recover from the illness. She expected him to bring me back in one month.

DePue: Is "Maija Rhee" then, "Rhee," is that your birth name?

Devine: No. My birth name, I think it was *Hwa Soon, Hwa Soon Rhee*. So, my birth mother allowed me to be taken away. But my older brother's memory is, my birth mother knew this baby was never coming back. She packed a lot of things…Well, everything that belonged to me, she gave away with the baby. But anyway…So, there's different theories on this.

DePue: Did your twin brother know that he had a twin?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: They had told him that.

Devine: Yes. He grew up knowing somewhere there was a twin sister. All the boys…I have a one younger brother, too, three years younger. He knew that I existed, too. My older brother knew where I was living, and he came to visit me.

DePue: And the younger brother is a biological brother, as well.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: Correct?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: This is all going to get complicated (laughs) pretty soon, isn't it?

Devine: Yes. I have three, hundred percent biological brothers, one of them being a twin. So, that's what happened. My biological father's best friend brought me down to Seoul, where his nephew and his wife lived. His nephew and wife had no children, even though they had been married, like, ten or fifteen years, ten years. So, the man gave me to the nephew and his wife, childless couple. They were more than happy to take me in, even though they would have preferred to have a boy. But nobody would give away boy babies, and so they were just happy to have—even if it's a girl—they were happy to have a child.

DePue: This would all have occurred in 1943?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: In the midst of the Second World War, no less.

Devine: Yes. I understand that, after I came to the adoptive family's home, I had my hundredth-day celebration, which is a big deal in Korea. Many babies didn't live to be hundred days old, so when a baby reaches 100 days, then they had huge celebration, with all the families and relatives getting together. I hear that my hundredth-day celebration was done in Seoul, thrown by the adoptive parents.

DePue: Now, Seoul is already, in 1943, a very big city. But I've got to believe that, essentially you're living in a small neighborhood where everybody knows everybody else's business.

Devine: Yes, right.

DePue: Didn't all the neighbors know that you were adopted?

Devine: Yes, they did. Yes, of course they did. But, the adoption practice at that time, and for the next several decades too, was "never tell the child that she or he was adopted." Mostly, adoptions were done among family members, like, if they, a brother, younger brother, had five sons, but older brother had no son, then the older brother would adopt the younger brother's, one of the kids. So, in that case, they all know who was adopted.

Maija Rhee, as a baby, taken shortly after her adoption in 1950.

But, if a child was just dropped at a doorstep of some strangers, then they never told that child that that child was dropped at their doorstep. They just took the child in and raised them as their own, never telling the child, because they believed that, if the child discovered that she or he was abandoned by birth family, it would be emotional trauma that the

child would never be able to overcome. The child would become a juvenile delinquent or worse, which would be killing, committing suicide. So, they really, seriously believed this, and they did not tell the adopted children.

So, that's why my parents had never told. The neighbors knew I was adopted, but they would not tell me, because they were afraid I would become an emotional basket case. They would not want that happening to me.

DePue: Would they also keep that from their own children?

Devine: They try. They try. But sometimes it leaked.

DePue: I was going to say, human nature…The Korean culture can't be that different.

Devine: Right.

DePue: Human nature would—

Devine: Yeah. So, in my novel, *The Voices of Heaven*, I explain these things. I have neighbor children, you know, try to tell me, the Mi-na character, based on my story—Mi-na is the daughter character in my novel—and Mi-na nearly finds out about her adoption, because neighborhood children say something. So, Mi-na rushes in and confronts the grandmother and mother. You know, mother just laughs, and Mi-na gets mad, "Mom, how can you laugh?" And mother says, "Look at your forehead. It's exactly like your grandmother's and your father. Look at your nose. It's mine. Look at your eyes. That's your dad's." All these things, she would point those out and say, "The children are just saying things."

DePue: Did you have any experiences like this yourself?

Devine: Yes. Yes. I put my personal experiences in my novel, yes. This is a largely autobiographical work.

DePue: Who gave you the new name, then?

Devine: My adoptive parents.

DePue: Now, I understand that part of the culture in Korea is that the grandfather gets to name the grandchildren.

Devine: Right. In this case, there was no grandfather. I don't know if grandmother would have given the name or not. But this is during the Japanese occupation, and Japanese forced all Koreans to change their names to Japanese-style names. They forbade Koreans to use any Korean language, written or oral. In schools, children were forbidden to use Korean language. So, Koreans changed their last names to Japanese last names and first names too. So, that's why my name, "Maija," was chosen. It's a Japanese name. In Japanese it's

Woomaeko. *Woomaeko* means "plum blossoms." And in Korean, it translates to Maija. *Mai* is a Chinese character, meaning "plum blossom." *Ja [cha]* is the ending for a girl's name. In Japanese, it's *Ko*, *Woomaeko*, *Mijiko*, *Sashiko*. *Ko* ending is equivalent of Korean *ja*, meaning "it's a girl's name."

DePue: You're saying *ja*. That sounds like *ch*, but you spell it *ja*?

Devine: Uh huh.

DePue: Now, you also said first name and last name. That's a point of confusion for us Westerners, as well, wasn't it? Because, I think, you westernize that. When you said "last name" you meant the family name. Isn't that the first name that would be seen, if you were to write out a Korean name, the family name?

Devine: Yes. Koreans write the last name first, and then, first name next. So, mine would be "Rhee Maija" or "E Maija." Korean pronunciation of my last name is "E," and my first name is "Maija." So it's "E Maija."

DePue: So, your adopted father's family name is also Rhee?

Devine: Yes. It just happened that they had same family name. I Romanized it R-h-e-e.

DePue: Okay. There's only a handful of family names, as I understand, in Korea, are there not?

Devine: Yes, that's true. Only, maybe, fifteen or sixteen last names, yeah. But, even among people with the last name Yi or Rhee or Lee, there are several Rhees, depending on the ancestral hometowns. My ancestors came from Chun Ju. So, mine is Chun Ju Rhee. Chun Ju Rhee is supposed to be very prominent family line, going up to King Sejong. It's a royal line, and, at one point, my older brother did some genealogy work. He went up through the kings and tried to trace that. So, yeah, that royal king line, Rhee, spell their last name R-h-e-e, like Rhee Syngman, Syngman Rhee; it's R-h-e-e. It's not Lee; it's not E.

DePue: But all of that is what you've said several times. This is when you get around to the point of Romanizing it. Obviously, Koreans don't write with the same alphabet we do.

Devine: Right.

DePue: I know this much about Koreans, you're proud of your written language, are you not?

Devine: Oh, my, yes, yes. One of the things that I try to do in my novel is try to portray Koreans and their culture and their history and their language. They are people, as distinct from Chinese and Japanese. We, apparently, Koreans, saw ourselves as distinctly different from Chinese and Japanese. Otherwise, all these fortresses that they set up—miles and miles of fortresses and walls to

battle against Chinese invasions for 3,000 years and Japanese for 2,000 years—would not have happened, if they thought, "Oh, they're similar enough to Chinese, so they could easily just call themselves Chinese and just give up and become Chinese." They could have done that, but they didn't. One of the things that Koreans identify themselves as Koreans for, is their language. They didn't have their own language for at least 2,500 years of early history. They used Chinese language.

DePue: They used Chinese characters?

Devine: Yes. They had their own oral language that was different from Chinese. But they used the written Chinese language in their official documents and communication, written communication. So, for 2,500 years, 2,200 years, they used Chinese characters. But they had oral language that was different. So, during King Sejong's term, which was in 1442, King Sejong said, "We've got to have a better system. We have to have the verbal language matching the written language." So, he gathered top linguistic scholars, and they came up with this language, alphabetical. It's totally different from Chinese. Chinese is pictorial, not at all alphabetical. But Korean is alphabetical, and according—

DePue: Meaning that you can sound out the words by—

Devine: Yes. We have ten vowels and fourteen consonants. Where did this come from? According to linguistic scholars, Korean language belongs to Ural-Altaic language group. In that language group, there are languages like Finnish and Hungarian. So, Korean language is closest to Hungarian and Finnish.

DePue: The written language or the oral language?

Devine: Ah! It's the same thing. Oral language matches the written language. That's the beauty of Korean language. So, for 2,500 years, they had two languages, one separate written language and then, one oral language that didn't match. But King Sejong's Hangul—

DePue: Hangul?

Devine: Hangul, h-a-n-g-u-l.

DePue: Which is the written language?

Devine: Yes, written and oral language. It's one and the same. We pronounce it exactly the way it's written.

DePue: Well, I think Americans would say that you speak Korean. They wouldn't say that you speak Hangul.

Devine: Hangul is just a Korean vocabulary word for Korean language.

DePue: Now, the Japanese had been occupiers of Korea, oh, since the early 1900s. And you said that essentially it sounds like…

Devine: Nineteen ten. Nineteen ten is when they officially annexed Korea.

DePue: …they were trying to destroy the Korean language. What was spoken when you were growing up?

Devine: Korean, yeah.

DePue: Was there Japanese spoken, as well?

Devine: Many people picked it up, during the Japanese occupation. So, yes, many Koreans had…They were bilingual, Japanese and Korean. Actually they knew how to write Chinese written characters, so we had three languages. And newspapers too. Newspapers, I would say, in the old time, in 1940s and '50s, 70% of the newspaper showed Chinese characters. Just, maybe, 30% would be in Korean.

But, anyway, your question about Japanese trying to wipe out Korean language. When King Sejong created this Korean Hangul, the scholars, who were already totally fluent in written Chinese, they rebelled. They said, "Oh, this is stupid language. It's got ten vowels and fourteen consonants, and this is too simple for us." So, the scholar ministers, they didn't use Korean written language. The verbal language, they continued to use Korean. But written language was strictly Chinese for hundreds of years, throughout Yi Dynasty, which lasted 600 years. The final, royal dynasty, Yi Dynasty…See that Yi is the same as my last name, R-h-e-e, but history books spell it as Y-i, yeah, anyway.

DePue: Well, this whole thing, the holding on to the Chinese written language, strikes me as very elitist in nature.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: This is one way that they can preserve their power.

Devine: Yes, exactly. So, the high-class people, educated class, resisted the Korean language, until Japanese came in, and they tried to wipe it out. Okay. They said, "No Korean's to be used in written" and verbal, oral, language too. They said, "You all start speaking Japanese and write Japanese." This is when the Korean elitist people—upper class, educated, officials and ministers, that level of people—said, "Wait a minute. This is our language. You can't come and wipe out our language."

So, that became the hugest impetus for renaissance of Korean language. The Korean language revival happened because of this Japanese push to wipe it out. So, the educated, elitist people, began to write novels in

Korean, and they pushed a movement in the newspaper to use Korean language only. All these happened because of this.

DePue: Are you suggesting, Maija, that there's an aspect of stubbornness and contrariness among the Korean people?

Devine: That's right. (both laugh) I tell you, they're very, very tough and difficult and ornery people. (laughs)

DePue: Except for you, perhaps?

Devine: (laughs) No, I admit, I am very ornery too. My husband will agree. (laughs)

DePue: Well, this is probably a good time to factor religion into this discussion, as well.

Devine: Okay.

DePue: What was your biological…Well, I guess that's irrelevant, because you were already adopted by the time you began to get any kind of religious instruction.

Devine: Right.

DePue: So, your adopted parents: what was their religion?

Devine: They believed in Buddhism. And my mother's aunt on the father's side—

DePue: Wait a minute.

Devine: …paternal aunt.

DePue: Okay.

Devine: Her paternal aunt was a shaman. Shaman, sorceress.

DePue: You're confusing me here, because you said, you're father's sister, or your mother's?

Devine: No. Mother's father's sister.

DePue: Okay, so your—

Devine: Mother's aunt.

DePue: We would say, great aunt.

Devine: My great aunt, but my mother's aunt.

DePue: Okay.

Devine: Was a shaman.

DePue: Which means what?

Devine: The Korean name for that is Mudang, M-u-d-a-n-g. Mudung is a sorceress. This is a religious person, like in Native American tradition here in United States. It's like a medicine man. The person held healing ceremonies, held ceremonies to better the fortunes of families, you know, all kinds of purposes. This shaman performed rites, rituals, religious rituals and had a whole set of clients, who came to her for these rituals.

DePue: Can you be both Buddhist and believe in some of the shaman rituals?

Devine: Oh yes, yes. Actually yes, yes. You could do both. And lots of times, shaman would send the families of deceased members to Buddhist temples to pay to maybe have an ancestral shrine set up there, in the Buddhist temple and go there. So, yeah.

DePue: Some of these cultural things, like it would be bad for twin brother and sister to grow up together, would that be an aspect of shamanism, or is that just kind of in the culture, or is it something religious based?

Devine: I think it's folk belief.

DePue: Which is different from your understanding from being with the shaman?

Devine: Yes. Yes. Folk belief is a loose group of beliefs that Koreans, over 3,000 year history, developed. That may or may not be directly related to any religion like Buddhism or Taoism. Taoism is another mainstream religion in Korea. Another mainstream religion in Korea was yin and yang and Five-Elements school.

DePue: That's a new one to me.

Devine: Yes, that's a Chinese-originated philosophy. Yin and yang and Five—

DePue: The yin and the yang?

Devine: Yes. Yin and yang and Five-Elements school. Five elements are like water, fire, wind, wood. What's the fifth one? So, there are five elements that govern everything. All phenomena happening in the universe are governed by these five elements and their interactions and yin and yang. So, that's that philosophy, and that's very big in Korea, too. So, I would say Buddhism, Taoism, next in importance, yin and yang and Five-Elements school. Yin and yang: feng shui, derived from yin and yang and Five-Elements school. You're familiar with feng shui?

DePue: S-h-u-i. Well that's something we've begun to hear recently, but that doesn't mean I understand what the heck it is.

Devine: Yeah. Feng Shui includes believing that, by placing certain objects in the house, for example, you can prevent bad luck from coming into your house. So, Hong Kong is huge in this, Taiwan, too. If there is a huge, modern building, it was built, like thirty-story building, and Feng Shui experts said, "No, this building is blocking the spirit of the mountain to come down to the village, and so this building should not be built." So, the architect, what he did was, on the top floor, he made a huge window-like thing, empty space, so that the mountain spirit would move through that space and down to the village people to bless them. This is all Feng Shui.

DePue: I confess that I was watching "House Hunters," [TV program] I think, one time, and there was a Chinese couple who were looking for a house and had a long list of things that they would not accept in a house.

Devine: Right.

DePue: I don't know if this was one of them, but the house number. They wanted to avoid certain house numbers.

Devine: Yes, like four, number four. It's *sah*; in Korean it's called *sah*. *Sah* is number four, but that is also death. In Chinese character, that also means "death," so they avoid number four.

DePue: Or a house that had a northern front to it.

Devine: Exactly. Yes, that's a no, no, no, no.

DePue: This is all (both laughing)…So, do you live your life that way?

Devine: No.

DePue: Okay. Now we've got a variety of different religions, or you've used the word "philosophy," because, I think, that probably is more applicable, and they're not necessarily exclusive, are they?

Devine: Right. Some are philosophies; they are not religions. The most prominent philosophy, at least during the Yi Dynasty, the final dynasty, is Confucianism. That has to go in there.

DePue: I read one time, as I was flying to Korea, reading about Korean culture and trying to understand it; the author said that Korea is perhaps the most Confucian country in Asia.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: Okay, now, all of this is layering different complexities in the environment you're growing up with. But, talk to me about what it means to be growing up in this very Confucian society.

Devine: Confucian society, I don't think Confucius himself really said, "Oh, men are superior to women." I don't know if he spelled that out, but his philosophy was being interpreted by his disciples. The disciples would interpret the masters, and so, during that process, it became very clear that this is a male-centered philosophy. And women's place is subject to men's wills. And woman is supposed to be completely submissive to the husband and father and the husband's family. So Confucianism ended up creating a very patriarchal society, where women's rights were nonexistent.

So, growing up in that culture was very, very, very, very difficult. I faced neighbors every day saying, "Oh yeah, you should have been born a boy. If you had been born a boy, your parents… They're a very happy couple. They want to just live together, without mistresses or anything. But now, your father will have to take a mistress to produce a male child, because you're not a boy." So, hearing this, as a three, four, five-year old girl, it was really, really tough.

DePue: Let's kind of walk through the rest of the familial relationships. What happens when you get to the point of being married in the Confucian society? Is that something that's arranged, typically?

Devine: Yes. At that time, up to 1950s and, in rural areas, even in 1960s, arranged marriages was the typical pattern.

DePue: Who was doing the arrangement? Was it the men or the women in the families?

Devine: Generally, the parents or grandparents were involved in finding suitable matches for their grandchildren or children. But, you know, all the family members were entitled to bring candidates, suggest candidates, yeah. Then, later on, fellow alums and alums' spouses and everybody, you know, and co-workers in the office, they all felt almost…It was a show of friendship. If you cared about somebody, you tried to come up with some candidates for that person to meet. (laughs)

DePue: Candidate, that doesn't have the same romantic tinge that Westerners would want to hear.

Devine: Right, right, yeah.

DePue: Were there matchmakers? Were there shamans involved?

Devine: Yes, there were. There were professional matchmakers. Yes. It was a big business, yeah.

DePue: Once a man and woman got married, did they move out of the home?

Devine: No. Before marriage, generally, before 1950s, men and women, they were matched. Then, even up to the wedding day, they were not allowed to see each other. Only the matchmaker would have seen the both bride and the groom. So, typically, the bride and groom did not see each other until wedding day. On the wedding day, the groom could look at the face of the bride, but the bride's eyes were glued down with honey mixture to keep her eyes glued all day, so that she doesn't try to peek at the groom. (laughs) They said, "Oh, if a bride did that, peeked at the groom, it's bad luck." So, she did not see him, typically, until the wedding night, until the guy would disrobe her. That's when she saw him for the first time. That was the procedure they went through.

Then, your question about where they lived. Patriarchal society means the woman would come into the man's house to live there. She would become his family member. Her identity, as the member of her own native home and family, is just totally obliterated. So, she is not even allowed to go back home to visit, for years on end. The mother-in-law would hold the right to give permission, when she could go back and visit. If she could do it once a year, she's lucky.

DePue: Did she take the husband's family name, or did she keep her family name?

Devine: Actually, she kept her family name.

DePue: But the children took the father's name.

Devine: The children all took the father's name.

DePue: What was the relationship, the expectations, about caring for the parents of your husband? Was there an expectation that this bride would be expected to take care of her parents?

Devine: Absolutely, hundred percent submission, hundred percent submission to the wills of the mother-in-law, father-in-law, the sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law. All those in-laws were her new bosses.

DePue: How about some other aspects of Confucianism? My understanding is, there's very strong emphasis on education and on your status in society. Is that accurate?

Devine: Yes, yes. Education is the key to success, for men. They had this entrance exam system for government officials. People wanting to work for the government, they had to take these very, very difficult exams. They had different types of exams, depending on what level of government service a person aspired to have. So, yeah, the government entrance, employment exams are very, very…the basic core of Confucian society.

DePue: But strictly for men. Education was just for the men.

Devine: Education was for men.

DePue: Okay.

Devine: There were some educated women. But they were cases like, if the father or grandfather or uncle took pity on some female members of the family, they would unofficially teach them how to read Chinese. So, there were some educated women. But they did not go to any official schools. The schools where boys and men went to, were called *suhdang*.

Suhdangs are Confucian academies, set up by, generally, former, retired government officials. They would retire and then open *suhdang* academies, where they would teach youngsters the education needed.

DePue: When you first started talking about your adoptive parents, though, you said your father was illiterate. Your mother had a third-grade education and, basically, taught him how to read.

Devine: Yes, yes.

DePue: So, isn't that contrary to what you've just been talking about?

Devine: Well, the literacy level of Korea, during the Japanese occupation, was very low. So, especially in the countryside, there were tons and tons and tons of illiterate males and females. The illiteracy rate among females would be almost hundred percent, ninety-five or something. But among men too, the illiterate people was very substantial percentage of the population, because not every family could afford to send their children to *suhdang*, which charged tuition. So, that reflected the poverty of these lower-level people. They just had no money to send children to school, whether they are boys or girls.

DePue: So, even though Confucianism very strongly stressed education, that didn't mean there were opportunities for people?

Devine: Yes, right. No equal opportunities, no. That was a very elitist philosophy and for an elitist society.

DePue: There's one other religion that I think we think to bring into this discussion, and that's Christianity. Normally, people might be surprised, but Christian missionaries had been active in Korea for decades.

Devine: Oh, yes.

DePue: Before you were born even.

Devine: Yes, yes. Christianity came in 1889. I can't be completely sure of the date, but I believe it's in 1880s, Roman Catholic priest, Matteo Ricci, came in. Shortly after that, Protestant missionaries started coming in.

So, this is a very interesting question, Mark. Christianity just spread like wildfire in Korean society. Christianity came to China first, before it came into Korea, of course. Matteo Ricci and Xavier, those people came through China. Japan also received missionaries, too.

But, both Chinese and Japanese, the percentage of their population converting to Christianity is pretty low compared to Korea. Why, Korea now has people claiming themselves to be Christians on census is like 35%, whereas it's not even half of that in China and Japan. It's very interesting question. Why is that? Why did Koreans go wild over Christianity? But Christianity certainly, once they came and took roots, both Catholic and Protestant, they had just thoroughly, completely important impact on Korean society, in changing the Korean society.

For example, they advocated against drinking. Heavy drinking used to be the major cause of domestic violence, against women, especially against children. So, their prohibition against alcoholism had a tremendous impact on changing Korean society, for the better. Also, they advocated equal opportunities for men and women, so that changed a lot of Korean women a lot, too, and education, sending a lot of Korean youngsters to other countries to study abroad. That also had beneficial impact on changing Korean society and modernizing it.

DePue: You asked a rhetorical question, "Why did it have such a stronger impact in Korea than China and Japan?" Do you have an answer for it?

Devine: A lot of people have theories on that. One, the dissatisfaction level of Korean people. Their dissatisfaction with the government: Yi Dynasty, the Confucian society, the poverty, the class separation. The rich class and poor class separation was very dramatically distinct, and the poverty… People in the lower class were just, just totally unhappy. So, the dissatisfaction level of a majority or large percentage of the population, some people think this is one of the reasons they turned to Christianity, which promised hope and faith and afterlife, happiness in the afterlife, and belief that God loved all people, men or women or poor or rich. This philosophy appealed to them.

DePue: Was your family involved with Christianity when you were growing up?

Devine: No, not while I was growing up. I was the first one to convert to Catholicism in my adoptive family. Shortly after that, my mom became a Catholic.

DePue: I think we're a little bit ahead of the story, and I'm spending an awful lot of time talking about, essentially, the nature of Korean culture and society. But I

don't think we understand the rest of your story unless we have this framework to work with.

Devine: Right.

DePue: Tell me what it was like—this is an unfair question—the Korean War starts, June twenty-fifth, 1950. You're seven years old at the time. How much do you remember about your life, growing up in Seoul, prior to the war beginning?

Devine: Um hmm, prior to the war beginning, our neighborhood was a very close-knit neighborhood, very good relationships among neighbors.

DePue: Where in Seoul were you living?

Devine: Where in Seoul? Mun Wha Dong.

DePue: I've got a map here of Seoul, by the district. I don't know if it's there or not.

Devine: Yeah, I don't think it shows on this map anymore. It got incorporated with other neighborhoods, and names changed. I don't think I'll be able to pinpoint it, but I can roughly tell you. It's near the East Gate. There are four gates in Seoul: North—

DePue: These are all from the Yi Dynasty time period?

Devine: Yes, yes. It's southeast section of Seoul.

DePue: So, are they on the southern side of the Han River?

Devine: No, it's north side of Han River, by East Gate. Let's see. Boy, this map is very small.

DePue: Well, I've got another. This is a larger version of the same map. There we go.

Devine: Seoul is here. Wherever the East Gate is, it's near there. I would just tentatively put my X right here.

DePue: Now we're looking at a contemporary map of Seoul, which is something like eight million people. Back in 1950, how large would Seoul be?

Devine: Oh my…

DePue: Maybe half a million or so?

Devine: No, no, I don't have that figure.

DePue: Okay. Obviously, much smaller than today. I don't mean to get bogged down in being that specific. What do you remember about the house that you lived in?

Devine: Oh, the house was very typical, Korean working-class type of a house. The roof was tile roof. And it had a layout; typical layout was like this: here is the kitchen and here is the mother-in-law room.

DePue: Basically a rectangle, and it's divided up into different rooms.

Devine: Yes. Then, across from that, would be the son and wife's room, okay? Then, here is a guest room, and here is the bathroom, and the gate would be like here, the entryway.

DePue: Now you're drawing this, is this under one roof?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: But is it—.

Devine: This is all one roof.

DePue: So, the bathroom would be inside, or is there a courtyard that the bathroom's in?

Devine: Yes. This is the courtyard.

DePue: So, there are rooms surrounding this open-area courtyard.

Devine: Yes. And there would be a little stand, kind of cellar. It's a cement structure, with lower level and upper level. In the lower level it's cellar, where you keep vegetables and tomatoes and things. Then, on the upper level, which is a platform—wide open, no railings or anything—the platform is where they put these jars of *kimchi* and soy sauce and *doen-jang,* yellow bean paste, and *go-chi-jang*, red bean paste. So, this was sauce stand. The faucet would be right here, close to the kitchen. And this is what they call *maru*. And this is a wooden floor. This is—

DePue: Between a couple of the main rooms.

Devine: Yes. This is the wooden floor, and it's wide open. There is no door. The door into the bedroom is off of here, and the door into the bedroom, here, is from here. So, this is open living room space. The bedrooms had *ondol*. *Ondol* means it's a warmed floor. The floor itself gets heated. To heat this room from the kitchen—you know, you would be cooking things—and the heat from the fire from the kitchen would go through flues that are under the floor. There would be chimney here, and the heat travels under subfloor flues and travel out the chimney. So, the floor itself gets very warm.

DePue: The fire is charcoal or wood or—

Devine: Wood, wood. At that time. After the Korean War, the coal briquettes became popular. But, before Korean War, there were no briquettes.

DePue: Was there any electricity before the war?

Devine: Yes. Yes.

DePue: You did have electricity then?

Devine: We did have electricity.

DePue: Would there be anything close to what we would consider as indoor plumbing? A toilet?

Devine: No. No.

DePue: So, essentially, in this courtyard, you had a place to do your business, and then that had to be pumped out occasionally?

Devine: Yes, there were honey-bucket people coming around, you know, and they would—

DePue: That's a wonderful euphemism, isn't it?

Devine: Yes yes. Americans I know use this—honey bucket person coming around, and he would yell out, "Honey bucket here!" Then, everybody will get, "Oh yeah, come on in and take our, you know, (quietly) shit. (both laugh)

DePue: But your family would have been considered working class or lower middle class?

Devine: Working, working, low, low middle class.

DePue: Were there very distinct delineations between various classes?

Devine: Yes, yes. Confucian society, the 600 years of Yi Dynasty, was extremely stratified society. Class distinctions were totally distinct and enforceable.

DePue: By law?

Devine: Yes, and intermarriages between classes were either forbidden by law or, at least, looked down upon or discouraged. The lowest class were people like butchers and prostitutes and artists. Artists belonged to the lower group.

DePue: It's an interesting grouping, butchers.

Devine: Butchers, um hmm. Tanners, they were—

DePue: Butchers and tanners and artists all require quite a bit of skill to do their jobs.

Devine: I know, I know.

DePue: But those are even lower than your average farmer?

Devine: Right. Then, the next level up, were farmers and merchants. Merchants were considered pretty low, too. In Confucian society, merchants and farmers, they are pretty low. Even lower than those, are tanners and butchers and prostitutes, and artists were kind of in between farmers and the lowest class. Artists are pretty low, too. Then, there were the government officials, low-ranking government officials, and their families. Then, higher ranking, etc. Yes.

DePue: So, by 1950, those lines, I would think, began to blur a little bit. But your father, being a truck driver, you said?

Devine: Um hmm.

DePue: Did he work for the government or was it private contractor?

Devine: City, the city of Seoul, city government.

DePue: What is your earliest memory?

Devine: The earliest memory…the earliest memory is all these adults [makes whispering sounds], talking in low voices about some trouble, which involved the coming of the mistress to bear a male child for my father. The adults were unhappy, and I sensed that it had to do with my being a girl and the family needing a boy. My mother, especially, being unhappy.

But, my memories also have happy memories of eating special foods my mother was famous for preparing. She was a wonderful cook, and so she was famous for it in the neighborhood.

DePue: It probably wouldn't be dishes that most of us would recognize, but what were some of your favorite dishes, growing up?

Devine: Okay. Favorite dishes, *mandu*. *Mandu* is dumplings.

DePue: It's essentially a Chinese dumpling, is it not?

Devine: It's similar, but Chinese put different ingredients into the stuffing. Korean stuffing is totally different. Typical Korean stuffing is beansprouts, not the soybean beansprouts, but *mung* bean beansprouts. There's a difference. Also tofu, mashed tofu, lots of green onion and sometime some chopped up *kimchi* gets in there. But, if you put in *kimchi*, that lowers the quality, but it's tastier. So, *mandu* was my favorite. I could just eat twenty or thirty of those. (both laugh)

DePue: You already suggested there's quite a bit more to the story about the mistress. Can you go into that for us?

Devine: The mistress. So, in situations like this, when husband and wife do not produce a male child, in Confucian patriarchal society, because the blood line goes down by the male blood, and also because, at that time, there were no Social Security or welfare systems set up for aging parents and grandparents, it was deemed that a male child was necessary to carry down the family name and also to take care of the grandparents and parents in their old age.

But another important reason why they needed a boy has to do with Confucianism and belief in afterlife. Confucianism is a philosophy, and so it's not a religion that deals with the afterlife, but they do have ancestral ceremonies required. Confucians required the families to offer ancestor-worship ceremonies, several times a year, for each dead ancestor: on the day of the ancestor's death, and on New Year's Eve, New Year's and Korean Thanksgiving, which is *Chuseok*. So, for each dead ancestor, they needed to offer at least three ancestral ceremonies, and you had to do this for three generations of dead ancestors. So, if you had twelve dead ancestors—dead for three generations—and you had to do it three times a year for each, that's thirty-six times. So, that's average three ancestral worship ceremonies per month that the daughter-in-law had to prepare, huge feast. And it's always a midnight ritual. The women would slave themselves over this all day, maybe several days. But men are the only ones who could offer the food and drinks to dead ancestors and do the bowing. Women were not allowed to be part of this process.

DePue: Was there the gravesite? Is that where this occurred?

Devine: Graveside thing is for Thanksgiving time. Thanksgiving time and New Year's Day time, they would go to the gravesite to do it. But other times, they do it at home, at midnight.

Without having a male descendant to offer these ceremonies, the dead ancestors' spirits would starve. They would become starving ghosts. And, with the ancestors being starved, they would not be able to give blessings, pour blessings on the descendants, because they are starving; they're unhappy.

DePue: What happens to the food, then? The food is not consumed?

Devine: Oh, it is consumed. After the bowing and offering of the wine, the family all gather around and eat the food.

DePue: Good! (both laugh)

Devine: That was my favorite part.

DePue: But this sounds like it's not just Confucian beliefs, but it's a fusion between Confucianism and a lot of the folk beliefs that you've talked about before.

Devine: Yes, they are that.

DePue: Or maybe Buddhism, because I would have thought that a lot of these religious ceremonies would have been tied more closely to Buddhist traditions.

Devine: Yes, Buddhists certainly believe in afterlife. But they didn't necessarily believe in the dead ancestors having to be fattened up with these huge feasts, so many times a year. They believed in people coming to the temple and making offerings of money to the temple and lighting incense. That was their kind of showing respect to dead ancestors. It didn't go into this elaborate feasts, three times a year, per every dead ancestor, for three generations.

DePue: Okay. So that's why you had to have a male heir.

Devine: Yes, only male could do this ceremony.

DePue: So then, tell us more about the traditions that developed about mistresses.

Devine: Okay. So, my parents, not having a male child to offer this thing, my father and mother apparently…Even though they just saw each other the day of their wedding…Actually my father very much wanted to see her before the wedding, and he snuck around, hung around her neighborhood, and he did take a peek at her from behind the fence. That's what I was told.

So, he already liked her. But she didn't know if she would fall in love with him. So, growing up, my strongest impression about my parents is, everybody said they were just such a loving, love-struck couple; so, my father apparently didn't necessarily want to take a mistress.

There were at least two ways of dealing with this mistress situation. One, he could have set her up outside the home somewhere, a separate household, and paid her expenses. When a child was born, especially if it was a boy, he could have just brought the boy in the house and given the boy to my mother. My mother and father would have raised him, and the mistress would be forgotten. Okay? That's one system.

The other is bringing her into the house, and when the children were born, they would communally raise the children together. In my parents' case, because my mother had—and this is the whole story of the novel, why this became necessary—my mother had a sister, who was a wine-house woman, and she—

DePue: Which means she ran a tavern, something like a tavern?

Devine: Yeah, an employee of a tavern. Women working in taverns, often they took in male customers for pay. She often became a mistress to rich man who was just fooling around for fun or who was looking for a mistress to bear a male child for him and his wife.

So, my mother had a sister in a potential mistress's situation, and so my mother didn't want to make a mistress out of a woman, set up a household outside, and when the boy child was born, tear the child away from the woman and forget the woman. She thought that would be like doing the same thing to her own sister. Her own sister bore a male child for a rich company boss, and he took the child away from her and gave him to his wife.

DePue: What happened that she never had a marriage arranged for her? Do you know?

Devine: She was beautiful, and she was fun-loving woman. She just fell in love with a guy who happened to be a married guy, and she got pregnant and had a child out of wedlock. When a woman gets into that situation, respectful marriage is out of the question. Her life just went downhill from that point. So, this cousin—who is a prominent figure in my novel—is the out-of-wedlock child born to my aunt. And so, my mother did not want to have her husband fool around somewhere, tear the child away and bring the child into the house, because her own sister went through that heartache.

DePue: How old were you when this decision was being made and the whispers were going on?

Devine: I think I was about five.

DePue: Did you understand at the time what was going on?

Devine: No.

DePue: But there had to be a moment in time when suddenly here's this other woman living in the household.

Devine: Right, right, yeah. So, by the time she came, I think I was six, six and a half, just a year before Korean War broke out. I was maybe six. Suddenly this woman was coming in. My mother was extremely unhappy. She cried a lot and everything. So, I knew this was just not a good thing happening in the house. The day the mistress came, that day my mother spent all day cooking food to welcome the woman, even though, this woman was coming as a mistress. As a first wife, it was her duty, Confucian duty, to be good to the mistress and welcome her into the house.

DePue: This is her own sister though, right?

Devine: No, no, no. Her own sister had a separate life with a rich man, and she lost her son to that rich man and his wife. That already happened. This is a mistress coming to live with my father. That's two different women.

DePue: Okay.

Devine: I brought out my mother's sister case, only to show you why my parents decided to bring the woman into the house, instead of keeping her outside and then tearing the child away from her, because that happened to my mother's sister, who lost the child.

DePue: Did either your mother or father know the mistress before she was brought into the family?

Devine: Yes, yes. My father at least met her. Whether my mother also met her or not, I'm not sure.

DePue: Was this another one of these arranged situations?

Devine: It probably was arranged, yes. To tell you the truth, I really don't know why this woman became a mistress. So, when I wrote this novel, I had to fictionalize that part.

In real life, I asked her. This is like ten years ago, when I was working on the book. I asked her, "Why did you become my father's mistress? What were the circumstances?" She wouldn't answer me. It made her very uncomfortable. So, she didn't answer me, and I didn't press her. So, in the book, I fictionalized it, and I used somebody else's story, which is, that she was married when she was very young, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen year old, marrying an equally, same-age groom. I heard of a woman who married, sight unseen, of course, and on the wedding night—she apparently had some kind of a defect in her leg or thigh or butt or somewhere, there was a huge hole gouged out area or something, some kind of physical defect—the groom, in the dark was groping her, and when he felt this weird kind of a thing, he just freaked out and just bolted out of the room. He just never came back, without the marriage being consummated. So, then she was just sent back to her home.

DePue: Now you're saying, this is in the book?

Devine: Yes, it's in the book, but it's a story that belongs to somebody else, not this mistress who came to my father's house. But, because I couldn't get the true story from her—why she came as a mistress—I borrowed somebody else's story, and gave it to her.

DePue: How did it work out? Did she bear a son for your father?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: Did that occur before the start of the Korean War?

Devine: No. She became pregnant, and then the Korean War broke out. So, during the Korean War, the boy was born.

DePue: Now, you've already talked about watching your mother. But—I think I asked you this before—what were you feeling at the time, about all of this?

Devine: Oh, I was just totally crushed. I was unhappy. I felt like crying. I felt like talking and asking questions, but in Korea, children were to be seen and not heard. You know, that was in this culture too; children were not supposed to speak up when adults were talking. So, in Korea too, that was even more strictly observed. Children were not allowed to interrupt adults and ask questions or anything. So, I heard these stories, and that made my mother unhappy, and she was crying. But I just never asked questions or discussed it or anything. I just kept it all to myself. Something seriously bad and unhappy was happening and that was because of me being not a boy.

DePue: So, all these people who are telling you that you should have been a boy, you internalized that, and you felt very guilty.

Devine: Very guilty, very guilty. I was the source of my parents' unhappiness.

DePue: Did they ever exhibit that to you, in the relationship you had with your two parents?

Devine: No, no. I was never spanked, or I was never chided. No. They totally, completely loved me, which made me even more guilty. You know, this loving parents and loving husband and wife, who were just totally in love with each other, having to go through this, having the woman come, you know. And, because they were so loving, it just made my heart even heavier, and hurt more.

DePue: I wonder if you can sketch out the personality. Describe your father for me.

Devine: Okay. I brought a picture of him in that packet, but he was a very fun-loving person, a jokester. He was always joking. For example, I have my forehead that sticks out, and he would always tease me, you know, "How are you going to find a good husband with that shape of a forehead? (laughs) You'll never catch a good husband with that forehead of yours." He was a terrific guy, very loving, warm, humor-filled

Maija is pictured in her cap and gown, alongside her adoptive father.

man. So, that made it even harder for me to feel I am the reason why he is going to be unhappy. (tearfully) This is why I felt like I just have to write about this.

This man and my mother, they were extremely loving people, in love with each other, and they went through this ordeal. I wanted to show how honorably, with how much affection for each other and consideration for the mistress. In their most difficult situation, they tried to be graceful, honorable and treat the mistress with kindness. They would be this kind of people. They were common people. They were not elite class people. They were not glamorous people, like spies, that novelists would choose to write about. Not many novelists wrote about this common-class people, whose hearts were in good place.

They were trying to obey the teachings of Confucianism, even though the teachings went against their own desire for personal happiness with each other. They had to welcome this mistress. I just wanted the world to know about these common people, going through this kind of heartache and how they met their challenges with honor and honesty and decency and grace.

DePue: How about your mother? How would you describe her?

Devine: Oh, she's one of those people whose formal education was limited, you know, second or third grade. She had to quit school. This was during Japanese occupation. She quit school, I think, partly because they began to make her speak in Japanese only. Also, her family was very poor, and she needed to help at home. There were the aunt's healing ceremonies, shaman healing ceremonies, she needed to help cook, things like that.

Anyway, even though her formal education was very limited, she is one of the people…the wisest person I know. She just has this common sense and deep and very logical thinking ability. She could see situations and sort things out right away and find some kind of solution that would be agreeable to everybody concerned. She was that kind of a very enlightened person, who acted like she had a very high education. And she was respected by all family members and neighbors. Yeah, she was a wonderful person.

DePue: Well, this has been an incredible revelation, in terms of the relationship that your family had and the deep feeling that you had for them.

Devine: Yeah.

DePue: Were you proud to be their daughter?

Devine: Yes, I was. I was. I just don't remember any time I was less than proud to be their daughter. My feelings were totally positive. And, when I discovered that I was adopted, one of the things that I felt immediately was, oh, thank God that I was adopted and received all this unconditional love, Even though I

didn't know I was adopted, and I thought it was all my fault that their ideal life fell apart, because of my not being a boy, because so much heartache came from that, for the rest of my life, yeah, for the rest of my life. I still felt very fortunate to have had their unconditional love. Even after he got this mistress, his love for me, there was just no change.

Earlier, you asked how many children were born to the mistress. She went on and had four boys and one girl. So, I have four boys and one girl on that side and me. That's six of us, okay? Then on my biological side, there's three full-blood brothers, older one, twin and younger one. So, that's six, plus three; that's nine, okay?

Then my birth parents divorced, after my younger brother was born, and my lawyer father remarried. He and the second wife had three children, two girls and one boy. So, add three to nine here. I am one of twelve siblings.

DePue: I wouldn't want to even begin to try to sketch that family tree. (both laugh) I can't remember now what I was going to ask you. It probably will come up here in a little bit.

We're getting to the point. Then, the Korean War begins. Again, was there any discussion—and you're awfully young at this time to understand that kind of thing in the first place—but were you hearing anything going on about concerns about what might happen before that actually occurred?

Devine: Yes, yes. I do remember hearing whisperings, a lot of whispers. One incident, I remember quite distinctly, before Korean War broke out, is the man who was responsible for bringing me from Manchuria to Seoul and giving me to his nephew. So, he is my grandfather, my father's uncle. He came to visit, and it was very dark at night, close to midnight. He and my father went to a neighbor's house, and there were neighborhood men gathering there. It was in the middle of the night. They turned all the lights off, no candles, no electric light or anything. And he, the grandfather, was doing something with a mirror. I think it was mirror. He was having the moonlight reflect against this glass or mirror, and they were trying to get an image to show up in this thing. Somehow that image was to tell them whether North Korea was going to invade South, if there is a war happening, whether South will win or North will win. It, this image was supposed to tell. It's a fortune-telling method, a way of fortune telling.

In my book, I have the grandfather say, "There's this image. The red is flowing down." The whole thing became red, which means red is going to win. But that's fictional part. I don't know exactly what he said, but I knew that they were trying to tell whether there's going to be a war.

DePue: What happened when the war began? What happened to the family?

Devine: We stayed there. And the soldiers came through town.

DePue: The North Korean soldiers.

Devine: North Korean soldiers came through town. I don't really remember them very clearly. So, to write this book, I interviewed a man, a professor at University of Wyoming, to see if he had memories of the Korean War. He was maybe a few years older than me, and he told me some things.

DePue: How old was your father?

Devine: When the Korean War broke out?

DePue: Yeah.

Devine: Oh boy.

DePue: Was he beyond draftable age?

Devine: Yes, he was about thirty-five. He was beyond draftable age. Not only that, he is a only male child in his family, for the third generation. This is another reason why he had to have the mistress, because he didn't have brothers, whose child he could adopt. So, he was exempt from going to war.

DePue: Did he retain his job, then, during this time of North Korean occupation?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: Do you think your life changed much, during those few months, when the North Koreans occupied the South?

Devine: Yes, it changed, because my parents, all the neighbors, everybody had to attend this communist meetings. I don't know whether it was once a week or twice a week or every day. It was in the evening. They needed to attend the communist meetings. And children were required to go, too. I think there might have been once or twice when I didn't go, and my mother was chewed out by the communist authorities. So, there were things like this that changed our life.

Another memory I have is my mother telling me, if anybody you don't know asks you what you ate for dinner, always say, barley. "We ate barley and bean sprout soup," not white rice and red meat, bulgogi meat, for example. I was not to tell the truth. Just say, barley and bean sprout soup.

DePue: Why?

Devine: Because they're cheap. Barley is food for poor people. Seoul people didn't eat barley. They ate white rice, which is the standard food and the most expensive kind of food. Beef was very rare and expensive, so eating beef is a luxury. So,

even us, we had it only maybe once a month. Mostly, we ate vegetables and fish and eggs.

DePue: So, before the war, you'd be happy to brag about what you ate, to show that you're successful.

Devine: Yeah, right.

DePue: Then, after the communists come in, you wanted to show that you're—

Devine: We had no rice in the house, because communist soldiers were coming around and confiscating rice and other food items, also brass, any metal things, like brass candlesticks or…Chamber pots were brass, believe or not, so, chamber pots, they took those away, and pots and pans. I guess they were making weapons with those things.

DePue: What was going on at these meetings the communists were holding? Were these indoctrination sessions?

Devine: Yes, indoctrination, what good communists should do and not do and what they teach you.

DePue: What were your parents telling you, when you got back home?

Devine: They were not telling me anything directly. But they were just talking among themselves, the neighbors. You know, they were just very unhappy. They were very unsure about what this would all lead to.

Also, another thing I remember is, people were talking about digging hideouts, hiding holes, in case of invasion, further kind of attack. They built shelters. In our house, too, under this *maru* that I showed you, the wooden floor, we dug a hole underneath it, where my father could hide.

DePue: Was your father or your parents at all political before the war?

Devine: No, totally apolitical.

DePue: Were there people in the neighborhood, young men in the neighborhood, that were being drafted by the North Koreans into their army?

Devine: Umm hm. And in some schools, middle school. I was just in grade school, but in middle schools and high schools, the North Korean Communist soldiers put their camps there. So, middle school and high school students had a lot more contact with the North Korean soldiers. They even made the students do some work, like piling the sandbags and things like that.

DePue: September 15th [1950] is an important day for Korean history, because that's when the famous Inchon landing occurred and [General Douglas] MacArthur

pulled another miracle, if you will. I know that it was roughly the 27th of September, then, that Seoul was liberated by the American and UN forces, both Army and Marines. Do you remember that?

Devine: Hmm, no. Interestingly, I do not have distinct memory of the street scenes or adults jubilating.

DePue: You didn't see any fighting at all?

Devine: No.

DePue: So, then, the war goes at a completely different direction, and it's quickly after that, the U.N. [United Nations] forces drive north. They don't stop at the 38th parallel. They continue to drive north. They get very close to the borders with Manchuria, with China. Actually, in a couple places, they reach the Yalu River, which defines the border. Then, the Chinese come in, at the end of November. Do you remember hearing about that, or were your parents reacting to that?

Devine: Yes. Yes. When that happened, that's when our family left Seoul. We evacuated.

DePue: Right at the time, early when the Chinese come in?

Devine: It's either November or December. It was very, very cold. I remember it being dead winter. I don't know exactly why, but it was my mother and my grandmother, my father's mother, my grandmother and my mother and I. It was only the three of us, getting on a train.

DePue: So, this is your mother, her stepmother and you.

Devine: No, her mother-in-law.

DePue: Yes, excuse me, her mother-in-law. That's what I meant.

Devine: My mother and her mother-in-law and I.

DePue: What was the relationship between those two women?

Devine: Oh, they were very, very good, very, very tight, yeah. My mother never blamed her mother-in-law for having pushed my father to get this mistress, because my mother knew it was her mother-in-law's responsibility, as a Confucian woman, to make sure her son would produce a male child. She wasn't doing that to be mean to her.

DePue: So, go ahead and explain what happened then.

Devine: So, for some reason, it was just me and my mother and her mother-in-law getting on a train. Well, first of all, we walked a long, long distance in dead of winter. There was snow on the ground, and my grandmother, actually…I don't know where she got it, but she had one of these winter coats of American soldiers (chuckles). I think my father just got it from black market or something. And so, yeah.

DePue: We're looking at a picture of, I think, Korean refugees.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: And this is a famous picture, up here, of the Han River Bridge after it had collapsed.

Devine: Yes, right. We tried to cross, before this happened. So, yeah, we crossed, and my grandmother was wearing huge winter coat, military winter coat. We walked quite a long time. There were planes going [makes motor sounds], you know, bombs dropping. And there were people who had mattresses over their heads, to see if that would protect them from the bullets or bombing.

My mother, once in a while, just covered my eyes. I complained about that, because I just couldn't see. And she said, "Just hold onto my skirt," because her hands were full with things she was carrying. She just told me to hold onto her skirt and just walk. The reason she covered my eyes, here and there, was to keep me from seeing people getting killed and falling on the ground.

So, then, we got to a train stop. It was not a station with a building. It was just out in the open. Tons of people, all waited, and finally a train came. We got on the train, and the train was a series of box cars, no windows, no bathrooms, no chairs, no beds. It was just boxes. People just threw their bundles of rice cakes and whatever, sewing machines…people even took their sewing machines with them. I think my mother did (laughs). Some people had chamber pots, too.

DePue: But a sewing machine might be a livelihood, where you ended up.

Devine: Yes, yes, yes. So, I think my mom took her sewing machine. So, we put all the bundles on the floor of the boxcar, and we just climbed and sat on top of these things or leaned against it. The door closed, and it was pitch dark.

We just rattled along, and then, every so often, the train would stop. Then, the door would open, and people would just pour out and go to the fields to do their, you know, go bathroom. I do remember having to do number two, number one? Which is number two?

DePue: Well, that's the big job.

Devine: The big job. I had to do that. Of course, there's no newspaper to wipe with, and we had to pluck some leaves to do the wiping job. I remember feeling very unhappy, because it just left a smell on my hand. My mother—because I was unhappy about that smell—she poured some rice drink, boiled water with rice in it, and that made my hands stink more, because the water was spoiled. So, anyway, it's just a small kind of memory.

But, my mother ran to the nearest farmhouse to find some food, because we had rice cake in one of those bundles, but there were fifty, sixty bundles, all piled, and we just couldn't get to our bundle, to find the food. So, she ran to closest farmhouse, and she came back with some *japgokbap,* you know, the rice, mixed with barley, that you kind of make into a little ball, rice ball? She brought those, and we ate that.

I think it took at least two days. I just don't know how long it took for us to go down from Seoul to Masan. Masan is near Pusan.

DePue: What do you know about how you got separated from your father and, apparently, the mistress?

Devine: I don't know. I can just only guess that she might have been visiting her family, and my father went to get her. My father might have told my mother… I kind of imagined it and fictionalized it in my book. I think that's what happened, even though I'm not hundred percent sure. I think my father told my mother to, "Get on the train, as soon as possible, because the bridge is going to break." So, he sent her on first, while he went to get the second wife, the mistress.

DePue: I thought she was living with you at time.

Devine: Yeah, but my…I think this is what happened. I think the mistress went to visit her parents' house. She went there, and my father went to get her. Then, my father told my mother, "Just go ahead and get on the first train, because the bridge may collapse any minute." So, my mother, to protect me and the mother-in-law, she went ahead of him.

DePue: Would it be typical that your mother would have known more details of the story, but not told you?

Devine: That's possible, yes. But I never asked her about that, why we were separated. But we found each other, down in Masan.

DePue: Oh, you linked up with your father again…and the mistress?

Devine: Yes. I don't know how that happened, but we did reunite… after a while, though. It wasn't right away.

DePue: It was weeks or months afterward?

Devine: Weeks and months, yeah. I need to tell you an interesting story. When we got there, in Masan, there was a shopping center, with these stalls set up. Apparently it was going to be a shopping area, with all these stalls for different merchants, selling different things, but they were empty at that time. So, we were all told to take one of these stalls.

We put our bed sheets for privacy, and it was warmer there, because it's south. I remember, during the night, my mom saying things. Oh, she would snore, like she never did before. She was not really sleeping, but she would snore, like a man. She thought there may be some bandits roaming around there, trying to rob these poor refugees from Seoul or something. So, she carried out a one-person act, during the whole night. She snored to make it sound like my father was in that booth. She would snore like a man, and then she would say, "Maija, don't touch that gun!" I didn't know where the gun was, but she did this all night, to keep the robbers away. This is what I mean. She just…How did she think to do that? You know, she's just such a resourceful person.

DePue: When it comes to a matter of survival.

Devine: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: What you're describing, and what I can imagine, listening to you, and what I know, this was a society in total chaos, at the time.

Devine: Yes, totally.

DePue: It also sounds like—from your descriptions of what was going on—the Communists were pretty close to getting to occupying Seoul.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: So, that happened. It took about a month and a half to get to the point, from the time that they launched the offensive in northern Korea, it was, I think, early January, when they finally were knocking on the door of Seoul, itself.

Devine: Right, yeah. By that time, we were down in the south.

DePue: You've kind of given us a good sense of this anyway, but what emotions are a little, seven-year-old girl, going through, at the time?

Devine: [Sighs] Yeah, just bewilderment and uneasy feeling in the stomach. But I had nobody to talk to who was my age. I was growing up as an only child, and I was only listening to adults, their worries and fears. I understood everything they were saying, and it was making me uneasy and fearful, what may be happening.

The walk through snow-covered ground was no fun. It was very, very cold. The train ride was really traumatic. You know, we didn't have the food; we couldn't find our bag, and we had no bathroom. There was no light; it was pitch dark in there, with people just completely filling the whole boxcar. I understand that now, later, in reading books, there were people who were sitting on top of these boxcars, and there were people hanging onto the outside of the closed doors. Many of them just froze to death and dropped off the train.

Maija, age eight (left) and her cousin, age five, on the right, 1951.

DePue: Why Masan? Do you know?

Devine: You know, I don't know why Masan. We didn't have any relatives there or friends there. Maybe there was a friend. I know my mother, one day, took me to her friend's house. She was running a squid wholesale business, and her little apartment was just filled, almost to the ceiling, with dry squids, which is my favorite. (both laugh) I thought I'd died and went to heaven. (both laugh) So, maybe that's why they went there, because they had that connection to this friend.

DePue: Do you remember the moment when you reconnected with your father?

Devine: Oh, I'm sure it was just terrific, you know. It was just…I was very afraid that I might not see him again and—

DePue: Prior to that time, do you know how your mom managed to keep the three of you fed?

Devine: Yes. She decided…Well, in the neighborhood, Masan was fairly quiet, because the battlefields were quite a ways away. The Pusan perimeter, and it was pushing up, so the battle frontline was moving away.

DePue: Looking at the map, this might have always been within the Pusan perimeter. So, in other words, always been under United Nations and South Korean control, but pretty close to the line, where the North Koreans were. But I suspect that Pusan, itself, would have been such a hub of activity, because that was the port where ships were coming in.

Devine: Yes, yes. We visited Pusan a lot, because my aunt, my cousin's mother—the child born out of wedlock—my cousin came to live with us in Masan, too. Her mother, my aunt, was living in Pusan. So, during vacation, especially, my

mom used to put me and my cousin… My cousin is three years younger than me. So, if I was eight; she was five. So, eight and five-year olds, she would put the two of us on a bus from Masan to Pusan, during vacation time.

So, we visited my aunt. We stayed there for weeks at a time, during summertime, and it was a lot of fun! That was just busy, busy kind of port city, you know. We could see all these ships going in and out and all these sounds, [makes ship's horn sound], the ships and the fish market with fish all jumping and tons of people shopping and lots of restaurants, cheap food.

My aunt was a great cook, too. She worked for a wine house, very traditional, high-class wine house, with these kinds of rooflines and red and colorful lanterns, all lit up outside.

DePue: Is this the same aunt you were talking about before?

Devine: Yes, yes.

DePue: So, she made the journey south, as well.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: We've been saying "Pusan." How did Koreans say it, at the time?

Devine: Pu-san, Pu-san.

DePue: Why has it been re-spelled, now, to be B-u-s-a-n?

Devine: I don't know why they go through these spelling changes. I don't know.

DePue: Just to confuse us westerners?

Devine: No, they made several attempts to make the Romanization consistent and easy to do, etc. So, they went through several systems. McCune-Reischauer system, was one of them. Then, another and another, so the spellings changed, just like in China, too. Peking, it used to be Peking, but now it's Beijing.

DePue: Again, what was your mother doing, though, to—

Devine: Okay, I forgot to answer that. So, there were several things at first. She helped cook in the neighborhood. If somebody was having a sixtieth birthday, then the whole neighborhood women would go there and cook for the party, and she would get paid a little bit. She also knit; she was an expert knitter. So, she would knit sweaters and hats for neighborhood people, and they would pay her a little money. So, she made some pocket money.

DePue: Is this knitting like what we would think of, with the knitting needles and all?

Devine: Yes, knitting needles. And she probably had some jewelry, gold rings or gold this and that, that she might have gotten from her parents and for her birthday or whatever. So, she probably sold some of those things at first.

DePue: Was this a community primarily of refugees?

Devine: No. The first neighborhood where we lived was a small farming village. There might have been some refugees, but it was not an area that's concentrated with refugees. They were kind of scattered in this village. I went to a farming-village school, provincial school, grade school.

So, back to my mother making a living. After she did some of that and sold some jewelry she might have had, she ran out of money. Then, what she did was, she opened a little roadside stand. We moved down to a larger Masan. There is an Old Masan and New Masan. New Masan was bigger and more industrialized. Old Masan was farming village. We moved from Old Masan to New Masan, where there were more commercial activities going on. There was a big market; there were more customers. We moved there so that she could open a little roadside stand. What it is, is she's just put a little apple crate, empty apple crate, and put some Marlboro cigarettes she got from black market and Wrigley Chewing Gum and some apples and, again, this huge mounds of dried squid that she got from her friend, who was selling these wholesale to shops. So, she opened this little roadside stand, and that's how she made just enough money to keep us alive, until we got reunited with my father.

DePue: How did life change after that?

Devine: After then, the boy was born there in Masan.

DePue: And now you've got a family of, let's see, three girls, your father, a mistress, and the baby boy. So, six all together.

Devine: Yeah, but during Masan days, my mother and I had a separate, little rented room. My grandmother, after we found my father and the mistress, she went to live with the father and the mistress. Okay? They had a little rented room. So, we had two separate rented rooms.

DePue: Were they adjacent to each other?

Devine: No. They were quite a ways. I don't know if we had to…It was walking distance or we had to take a bus, but we were in the same town. But we had two different, rented spaces.

DePue: Was there a reason, other than just out of total necessity, that the family was split up?

Devine: Yeah, because we couldn't find a whole house where we could live together, and, temporarily, we just had two different rented rooms. Then, after the war ended, we came back to the old house.

DePue: Was your father, though, providing for all of you?

Devine: Um hmm.

DePue: What was he doing during that time?

Devine: Just being a truck driver at that time, too. You know, I'm just not sure if he was drafted, anyway. In my book, I fictionalized it. I'm not sure if that really happened. I had him drafted, because, by that time, South Korean army was so desperate for men that they wiped out all exemptions, like him being the only boy in the family for third generation. All that got wiped out, and they just grabbed anybody they could. So, I think he was grabbed and had to be a truck driver for the army.

DePue: But having that particular skill, before the war, would have been very valuable to the Korean Army, I would think.

Devine: Yes, exactly. So, I think he supplied…you know, he ran a supply truck for the army.

DePue: And if he was drafted into the army, that probably was the thing that kept him out of the frontlines.

Devine: Yes, that's right.

DePue: So, the family wasn't totally destitute at time.

Devine: No, no.

DePue: Well, what was your life like then?

Devine: But, you know, there were times before—I think this was before we were reunited—my mother was still trying to make a living for me and my cousin and my grandmother. She decided to… After she quit running the roadside stand, she went to Chinju. Chinju is also here. Chinju—

DePue: Here is Chongju. . .

Devine: Chinju is just right around here. She went to Chinju market, and she sold fabric, I think. And this was far enough that she couldn't just take the train and come home every night. And, boy…My grandmother was not there. She must have gone to live with the mistress at that time, because it was just me and my cousin. My mother left the nine-year-old and six-year-old, or eight-year-old and five-year-old, alone, and she went to this market to sell. And she

couldn't come back home every night. She came home maybe once a week or maybe once every two weeks.

So, we were home alone, me and my cousin, eight and five year old or nine and six year olds. We were home alone, cooking for ourselves, getting ourselves to school and doing homework. I describe it in the book as the best, happiest time of my life. This is during the Korean War. People were dropping dead everywhere. It is very, very traumatic time for the whole nation and for many citizens, especially children, because 200,000 Korean boys and girls became orphans, during the Korean War. But here I was, with my cousin, my mom's gone. Nobody's there telling me, "Oh, you should have been a boy." No neighbor cared about this, because they were too worried about the war and who was returning dead or half dead or blind or without arm and leg. So, they didn't pay attention to me being just a girl. That alone was heaven.

There was a boy who was very interested in me, you know, in the new neighborhood. The boy…and I had other friends too, girls and boys. We would play in the stream, wade in our bare feet. One day, a leech began to eat away between my big toe and the second toe. When I discovered it, I just screamed, and all the kids just ran away, too. But, not this boy. He stuck around, and I don't know he did it, but he took the leech off of me without leaving a piece of it inside my flesh. That's true love. (laugh together)

DePue: Your hero!

Devine: Yeah. And another time we went—

DePue: But you were just eight or nine years old, and you've already got a boyfriend?

Devine: Yes, yes. That was not too early for me. Ha! HaD! It was fun. And another time, we went to a neighbor's house to pick persimmons. Persimmons were dropping, you know, all these orange things, juicy things. The whole bunch of us went in there, and suddenly this boy just yanked me away. I said, "Hey, stop that!" What he saw was, there was a snake, hiding under these persimmon leaves that fell on the ground. So, he saved me from the snake.

DePue: What kind of a snake? Do you know?

Devine: You know, Korea had…in that region, there were some poisonous snakes, too. And that's true love.

DePue: This is quite an adventure that you're going through.

Devine: Yes, another thing is, we used to catch grasshoppers in the rice fields that were harvested in the fall. He would, you know, string these on a weed stem. He would string a whole weed stem full of grasshoppers and present that to me as a gift. So, we could roast it and eat it for snack, you know. That's true love. (laughs)

DePue: I'm not sure young American girls would see it as true love, being presented a string of grasshoppers to eat.

Devine: With grasshoppers, yes, yes, it was true love in Korea, at that time. Anyway, for that reason, it was fun. Another reason is, I was a city girl, growing up in Seoul, which was a wonderful town, but the parks were far away. We could not just walk there, just on our own. We had to wait for parents to take us there. There were rivers, where we could go swim, and, again, we had to wait for weekends, when parents could take us there.

But in Masan, we were just smack (claps hands) in the middle of this nature. Streams were there. There were persimmon trees, where we could pick these things, all the hills we could roam. And there were vegetables we could dig up and make soups with, dandelion soups, for example, and sage. All these were just all new life to me. So, for all these reasons, it was really the happiest time of my life.

Also, this cousin who came to live with me, I was no longer a lonely one, only child. I had a cousin to play with. She was a mischievous one. She knew all kinds of things that you weren't supposed to do. Like one day, she said, oh, such and such gave me this. He showed me how to do this. She showed me how to wrap dry pumpkin leaves into newspaper and roll it up and lick the seam and make cigarettes, little cigarettes, with pumpkin leaves. After dinner—which cooked by ourselves, no mother, no father, no grandmother, just by ourselves—she would say, "Let's smoke." So, we would smoke these (inhaling sound) little cigarettes.

DePue: Wait a minute. Isn't this the cousin that's three or four years younger than you?

Devine: Yes. She was. If I was nine, she was six. And six-year-old would say, "Let's smoke."

DePue: A six-year-old is teaching you how to smoke?

Devine: Yes, yes. For all these reasons, oh man, that was a very happy life. I do have a short story, a memoir piece, essay, I got published in *Michigan Quarterly Review* that deals with this story, why Korean War was the happiest time of my life.

DePue: Well, everything that you've described so far, most people would say, "Boy, she's just living on the edge of calamity here."

Devine: (laughing) We were home-alones, you know, as eight, nine-year-olds, and yet, I found that life just totally charming. The nature, open nature, was wonderful. We were home-alones, but we lived in a kind of walled complex, where there was a landlord family, and there was another family who were renters. So,

these were adults around us. If anything happened to us, you know, they would have helped.

DePue: So, the adults kind of looked out after everybody.

Devine: Yes, right.

DePue: You did mention that you were going to school at this time?

Devine: Yes, yes. We led a pretty normal life. I was third grade, and she was kindergarten, going on to first grade.

DePue: But I thought you had to pay to go to school.

Devine: This school, I don't know. If there was some money to be paid, it was pretty low kind of tuition, and my mother, being completely education nut, she would have done everything to pay, whatever it was. I don't think it was that high, because it was a country school. It might have been even free.

DePue: What were you learning in the school?

Devine: All subjects, Korean language, history, math, social science, art, the whole—

DePue: Learned how to write?

Devine: How to write.

DePue: Did either Japanese or Chinese…was that part of —

Devine: Japanese gone; Japanese gone. After 1945, we were freed. We were liberated.

DePue: Is that to say that the last language you would want to learn would be Japanese?

Devine: Right, right. Yeah.

DePue: How about Chinese?

Devine: Chinese we learned, yes, yes.

DePue: Chinese characters, as well?

Devine: Yes, Chinese characters, yes, all throughout grade school and middle school and high school. So, I know Chinese.

DePue: Were you paying attention at all—again you're awfully young, you're having the adventure of your life—were you paying attention at all to what was going on in the war?

Devine: You mean the political things, the casualty figures and all those things.

DePue: Yeah.

Devine: We would hear, on the radio, the announcers talking about, oh, how Seoul was retaken, and so many people came out to the streets and waved their flags and welcomed the U.N. troops, coming in, and all those things. We would hear that on radios. We didn't have a radio; we were poor. But, there were shops where radios were sold, and they would have the radio turned up, or our neighbors would have a little radio, that kind of thing. So, we heard about the war all the time. Also, there were songs we sang, at that time, that's patriotic songs and anti-communist songs.

DePue: So, you grew up kind of absorbing all this anti-communist—

Devine: Oh yes, definitely. Also, when we went to movies, the previews were all anti-communist previews. They were documentaries, showing North Korean bad guys doing this and that. Also, there were previews, showing you what a communist spy would look like, would behave like. You know, somebody who looks very scary or who were wearing strange-looking shoes not seen in South Korea, who didn't know how much bus fare was, who spoke with North Korean accents. All these—

DePue: Was there an accent difference that you personally could tell?

Devine: Oh, definitely. North Koreans had very strong accent, anybody could tell, immediately, once they opened their mouth. So, there were Koreans, South Koreans, living in the north before the war broke out. We were just one country, north and south. There was no distinction. So, when the war broke out and the thirty-eighth parallel…Well, when the war broke out—

DePue: At the end of World War II, in 1945, part of the Potsdam Accord, I think, was the drawing of the line of the thirty-eighth parallel…

Devine: Yes, exactly.

DePue: …and the agreement was that the Soviets can occupy the northern part, the United States, the south.

Devine: Yes, there was that line. But, travel back and forth was possible, until Korean War broke out, okay? So, there were lots of people living in the north. They came down to the south and opened businesses and things, so we were very familiar with people speaking North Korean accent. Before the war, there was no problem. We were not told to hold anything against them or report such people to police. But during the Korean War, we were told to report those people, speaking with North Korean accents.

DePue: Is there any doubt in your mind that those were the bad guys?

Devine: Oh yeah, they were definitely bad guys. And we should report them to the police and stay away from them.

Depue: I have to believe, though, a lot of those North Koreans were counting their blessings that they were in the south and not in Communist North Korea.

Devine: Yes, and so, in the book, too, I go into this a lot. I show them people who came down to the south before the Korean War broke out, they became very sensitive, as the war wore on, about them coming from the north and people, South Koreans, suspecting that they were communists. So, they were very, very concerned about somebody snitching on them and turning them in to police. So, they tried to hide their accent. They tried to speak loudly against North Koreans, to distinguish them. Even though they speak with North Korean accent, they're South Koreans now, and they are anti-communist. They made that very, very clear, in their everyday relationship with South Koreans.

DePue: Did you see any South Korean soldiers during those years?

Devine: Oh yeah, yeah, very often. Very often.

DePue: How about the Americans or other U.N. forces?

Devine: Ah, Americans, yes. In Masan, my mother and I walked a distance to go and draw water from a well. And one day, we were coming back with my mom, with the water buckets filled with water. We were coming down a hill, toward a train track, and there was a train stopped. It was just filled with Americans and U.N. soldiers—both white and black—just completely filled. And there were hundreds of children, just climbing, trying to climb up to the window to beg for chocolates and gum. They were going, "Oh, G.I., G.I., give me chocolate; give me chocolate, give me, give me!" And the G.I.s were kind of smiling and laughing. Some were giving them some gum and chocolate.

My mother and I kind of stood back. We had to cross the track, and, since the train was there, we couldn't go any further. We just kind of stood back, maybe about twenty feet away. We just watched. I didn't join those children and try to beg. We just stood there and watched.

I could see [that] a soldier took his hat off, and he was passing that around. Soldiers were putting some things in it. Then, he came to the steps, and he seemed to be motioning to me. He went like that. And, of course, that's the gesture that we didn't understand, you know, to "come here" [in Korea] would be this way.

DePue: Would be—

Devine: Koreans would go this way.

DePue: That would look like good-bye to us.

Devine: Yeah. (laughs) Koreans would have made this kind of gesture to make me to come to him, but he was going this way.

DePue: With his hand upside down, bringing his fingers closer.

Devine: Yeah, I didn't understand what that meant, and my mother didn't know it either. So, we just stood there and watched the whole show. (both laugh) Finally, he just came down those stairs, the steps, and walked to me. I was wearing a sweater, and two pockets were there. He just poured all these candies from his hat, into my pockets. Here's hundreds of other kids, going, "Give me, give me chocolate and gum," and "G.I., hello, hello." And he just passed them all and came and put these things in my pocket. It was the weirdest thing, why he would do that, but I was happy. That's the first time I tasted American chocolates. And, you know, I was very careful not to eat even a whole one, not even a half a one, because I wanted it to last me a long, long time. So, I ate just only a tiny little bit to taste it. I asked my mom, "Why do you think he…"

After that, the soldiers, some of them, stuck out their water bottle to my mom. So, she poured water into there, filled their water bottles with the water from her bucket, and some of them gave my mom some cigarettes. So, there was a nice exchange there.

Later, I asked my mom, "Why did the soldier give me all these candies?" She thought—well, because my mom was a knitter, and she had knit me this very beautiful sweater of red and green, and that's a Christmas color to Americans. She thought, maybe, the soldier…The way I was dressed, maybe, reminded him of his daughter he left at home. Maybe I reminded him of, maybe, his baby sister or something, and he wanted to…Besides, I was not begging, so he just wanted to give it to me. So, that's when I decided, "I'm going to America, where all these candies came from. (both laugh) I know where these came from. I'm going there."

DePue: Because the candies were made in America or because you liked the G.I.'s?

Devine: I liked the G.I.'s, too. Yeah, they were friendly. They looked friendly. They were smiling and waving and giving things to kids, and it was a very fun day.

DePue: Did you like the chocolate?

Devine: Oh, man. It was really, really, really delicious.

DePue: The movies, you were going to, were they made in Korea?

Devine: Yes, yes.

DePue: Were these, otherwise, the typical plot lines for movies that you might expect?

Devine: Yes. A lot of them are, you know, family dramas, love stories, sappy, sentimental.

DePue: It kind of surprises me that Korea would have had any kind of a movie industry at that time.

Devine: Yes, they did.

DePue: What other stories do you have, to tell about the time during the war? You've woven such an amazing picture of all your experiences, and not what I expected at all…what I would expect to hear, I should say.

Devine: Yeah, it's kind of an unusual kind of war story, because, like I mentioned, 200,000 kids lost their parents and became orphans. And many of them were taken to orphanages, because no Korean family would take them in. You know, Koreans' attitude toward orphans was very negative. They would not pick up just orphans, whose blood line they didn't know, and raise them. Not very many people did that.

DePue: Is this another aspect of Confucian—.

Devine: Yes, the blood line, their obsession with blood line having to be legit, and has to be a male blood line. Without knowing whether, in the blood line of that person, whether [phone rings] there was leprosy— [interruption of a phone call] Excuse me.

DePue: We got interrupted by modern technology, which she didn't have at that time. I suspect nobody had telephones.

Devine: No.

DePue: I did want to say that I've interviewed a lot of Korean War veterans, and, in many cases, there's a special connection that these guys had with the orphans, because many of the units and many of the individuals would kind of adopt an orphanage that was close by.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: Go ahead.

Devine: I know that's…Yes, the U.N. and American soldiers, many of them adopted Korean orphans. Some of them, I think, set up some orphanages, especially with the help of some churches, Christian churches. So, when all these children were having such traumatic life, during the Korean War, I had the happiest life. (laughs)

DePue: Do you remember when the war ended? That would have been July 27th, 1953. You would be ten years old.

Devine: Right. I really don't remember how we got back. I think we just, probably, took a bus and just came back to our old neighborhood. Our old neighborhood was not destroyed. Our neighbors all came back too. So, it was pretty much back to the normal life that we had before the war.

DePue: I think this is probably the logical place for us to stop today. Then, the next session, we can pick up with what life was like in Seoul and your growing up and the school experiences you had for the next ten or fifteen years after that.

Devine: Okay.

DePue: I wanted to ask just one more question. About March or April of 1953, one of the things that had caused the war to bog down for as long as it did was the negotiations between the United Nations and the Chinese and North Koreans about what to do with the communist prisoners.

Devine: Right.

DePue: There were tens of thousands of Chinese, and especially North Korean prisoners, who did not want to go back.

Devine: Right.

DePue: So, that dragged the whole process on. I think, about March or April, Syngman Rhee just directed that they knew who the people who wanted to stay in the south were, and they felt pretty confident. They just swung the doors of the prison camps open…

Devine: Yes.

DePue: …and these prisoners just poured out, into the countryside. Do you remember that occurring?

Devine: No.

DePue: Or getting messages about, "be a little bit more careful because there's…"

Devine: No. I don't have any memory of that particular, historical event. I only, later on, learned about that. I know that their negotiations just dragged on. And I'm just kind of happy and proud of the fact that so many of the prisoners didn't want to go back to North Korea or even China, because Chinese were turning communists. Many of the soldiers that came to fight in Korea were Nationalists Chinese. They didn't want to end up in communist part. So, I was very happy to hear that, you know, these…they didn't want to go back, and they were given the chance to be absorbed by the South.

DePue: Tomorrow we're going to talk about your life in the next fifteen or twenty years. Part of that story is going to include being in the United States in the midst of the Vietnam War and all of the turmoil that's related to that. This is just kind of setting up a question for you to end today's session. How did you and the Korean people feel about the U.N. and the American soldiers, who had fought in your war in the 1950s?

Devine: As far as I know, the majority of South Koreans were totally, 100% behind U.N. and U.S. involvement in the war. Without their intervention in the Korean War, they feel they would have been just wiped out, totally. So, they see U.N. and American soldiers as their saviors. They saved their lives, and they saved their country, even if it's only half a country.

DePue: I think that's a pretty good way to end today. Thank you very much.

Devine: Oh, you're welcome.

(End of interview session #1 #2 continues)

Interview with Maija Rhee Devine
IM-A-L-2013-071.02
Interview # 2: Aug 30, 2013
Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, August 30, 2013. Today I'm having my second session with Maija Rhee Devine. We had a fascinating discussion yesterday about growing up. We're back in the Presidential Library again. I'm sitting across the table from you and can't help but notice the pin. I think you mentioned yesterday about Harry S. Truman, who we'll get to a little bit later, I think today. I did want to kind of do some housecleaning and ask you a couple questions, based on our conversation since we ended yesterday. I heard you mention, at one time, there were—and maybe this is a reflection of Confucian culture or the society you grew up in—there were seven sins that a woman could possibly commit, that she should avoid.

Devine: Yes, right.

DePue: Tell us a little more about what those seven sins might be and what that was actually about.

Devine: They were called *Chil go ge ach*. *Chil…go…ge…ach*. *Chil* means the seven, seven. *Ge ach*, the final *ach* means sins, bad things. Seven bad things a woman could be abandoned from her husband's household for, forever. One of them is, of course, not bearing a male child or any child, not being able to bear children. Two, stealing. I know stealing is included there. Three, having gossiping habit, gossiping behind peoples' backs, spreading bad rumors, that kind of thing. Fourth, having some kind of incurable disease—like at that time, leprosy was considered incurable disease—leprosy, sexually transmitted diseases and, oh, TB, tuberculosis, those. And—

DePue: So, instead of having sympathy, because you have an incurable disease, you're an outcast.

Devine: Right. Outcast, yes. Also, some kind of inherited traits, like mental illness was considered, maybe, inherited trait. I think that's six I mentioned. Seventh, I have to…Oh, I know, lasciviousness, you know, being sexually loose. That was one of them, too. So, for any of these seven sins, a woman could be abandoned.

DePue: What were the counterparts for the men?

Devine: There were none. Men could do no wrong. (laughs)

DePue: Okay, that's what I thought you would say. The other thing I wanted to ask you about: I don't know that we spent enough time talking about how your mother dealt with the scenario, the situation, of having this mistress come into the household. What was her reaction to that?

Devine: She was totally brokenhearted about it, because she was very deeply in love with my father. And, apparently, my father felt the same way. These couples are very rare, because, after all, marriages were arranged. Grooms and brides married sight unseen. In very exceptional cases, the groom might have seen the bride, maybe, a week before, which was my father's case. He did see her a week or two before they got married, and he liked what he saw. So, my father also was pretty brokenhearted about taking a mistress, which is very unusual at that time. Men, usually, when they have to get mistress or mistresses, they were happy about it. "Hey, good deal."

DePue: In the book, you present the scenario that your mother, the mother figure in the book, got desperately ill. She had a very strong physical reaction about it?

Devine: Yes, yes.

DePue: Was that the case in your family?

Devine: Yes, it was the case. Actually, the day the mistress came into the house to live with them, my father could not really bear the idea of leaving his wife in one room, go to a room next to it—three feet away—with only rice-paper doors between them and sleeping with another woman. So, at the last minute, before he walked into that room, he got this bright idea. He said, "Let's the three of us sleep together." So, what happened is, he and the mistress and my mother all went into my mother's and father's room, and they all slept in the same house. I slept with my grandma, across the hallway.

But, you know, this doesn't mean they were engaged in three-way sex or something, as many American readers ask me about, "Well, did they all have three-way sex or something?" No, it wasn't that. It was that my father just could not leave my mother alone, and it was a very… They were all dressed in their daytime clothes, and they were lying down in the dark. This is when my mother passed out from the trauma of the day: cooking all day to welcome this woman into the house, and her husband saying this very, very

untraditional thing, suggesting this untraditional idea of the three of them sleeping together. She had never heard any man suggesting that, and the mistress never heard that either. It was a very unusual proposition that my father made. And, during that night, from the strain of the evening, my mother passed out. What I remember is, in the middle of the night, all of a sudden, the lights all went on, and my grandmother rushed to my parents' room. My mother was stretched out like a piece of log.

My father told the mistress, "Go fetch a bucket of water, cold water." So, she brought that and he…In Korea this was the custom, when you wanted to spray water on clothes you are ironing or whatever, you put some water into your mouth, and you sprayed it out. That's what my father did. He put water into his mouth and sprayed that water, cold water, onto my mother's face, to revive her. He also slapped her cheeks to help revive her. All this went on that night.

She didn't die. She just became bedridden, from that moment on. For how long? In my five-year-old child's mind, it seemed like it was months she stayed in that state, but it could have been only one month. It could have been two weeks. It's not clear how long she stayed bedridden, but she did stay.

DePue: But long enough that I'm sure people thought, we've got to get her some liquid. She needs to have some food.

Devine: Yes and Chinese medicine doctor was called in. He prescribed this Chinese medicine to be brewed in the room on a little portable stove. There was a clay jar, typically used for boiling Chinese medicine, and it was boiled in her room. So, the smell just went all over the whole house and especially that room. Neighbor women came to visit her, and they helped her sit up and spoon-fed this medicine, because my mother couldn't even sit up by herself.

DePue: Did you know about—you're only six or seven at the time—

Devine: Right.

DePue: —did you know what had caused her to become unconscious?

Devine: No, no.

DePue: You didn't find that out until afterwards?…

Devine: Right, only later.

DePue: …about the three-way arrangement?

Devine: Yes, yes. I didn't even know that the three of them slept together, in the room. Actually, it came from my cousin. My cousin heard that through other relatives, older relatives.

DePue: Is this the younger cousin you were spending so much time with?

Devine: Yes, my younger cousin. She was the source of (laughs) this story.

DePue: But not gossip.

Devine: Not gossip, no.

DePue: Well, the story you have continues to be amazing and a remarkable one, in so different ways. In that respect, it sounds like it's even different—from what the traditional Korean culture would say—which should be happening.

Devine: Yes, it deviated a little bit, because of my mother's and father's love for each other was a little exceptional.

DePue: Did your mom, having some serious issues with her health? I'm sure the six year old, you're thinking that she might be dying. Did that only deepen the sense of guilt that you were having?

Devine: Oh, of course. Yes, yes. I was scared to death of losing her, didn't know what was going to happen. Neighbor women were saying that was because of my not being a boy. It was very, very difficult.

DePue: That's what they were telling you, when all of this is going on?

Devine: Yes, yes, every day. They came to see my mom every day. One or two different ladies came and helped her sit up and take porridge or medicine. Invariably, one of them would say, "Oh, this happened because Maija is not a boy."

DePue: That makes me think that these strong traditions you were being raised in weren't just something that was being perpetuated by what the men were teaching, but these were things, like in most cultures, it's the women who were passing on the culture.

Devine: Yes, exactly. That is an excellent point. Women also bought into the system. And mother's-in-law, they received the same kind of cultural conditioning, and they imposed these rules on their daughters-in-law. Instead of trying to make the daughters-in-law's lives a little better and easier by being more understanding toward abused women's plight, they exacerbated that situation by being even more stronger, stringent enforcers of the male, value-based principles. So, yes, you make an excellent observation.

DePue: Let's get back to where we were in the timeline from yesterday. We were at the end of the war, and you come back to Seoul. Do you remember going back to Seoul, coming back to that life?

Devine: Not the process of returning. I don't know whether we took the bus or train again. That part, I do not remember. But, I do remember just being back in the old house, same neighborhood, and old neighbors returned too. So, there was one family, especially, we were very, very close to, and they all came back. Our life just continued.

DePue: Did you father return to the same job he had before?

Devine: Yes, yes.

DePue: How about your mother? She had been forced to do some things she wasn't doing before the war. Did she return to the role of being the dutiful housewife?

Devine: Yes, she did. She was happy to go back to that old role, rather than being outside and making money.

DePue: There's at least one change, though. You had at least one brother. Were there more at that time?

Devine: No. Just one brother, and he lived with us in the same house, of course.

DePue: How would you describe Seoul—the condition of the city of Seoul—at the time?

Devine: Yes. I saw a lot of buildings, office buildings, knocked down. There were just walls; only some walls were left. Some schools were gone. So, mainly there were tons of buildings around our neighborhood, just gone.

If I may quote Richard Underwood. The Underwood family were Methodist missionaries to Korea, and the first Underwood, Horace Underwood—they all have same names, Horace H., Horace J., Horace this and Horace that (laughs)—so I don't know exactly whether it was Horace G. or Horace H, but he came as a missionary and founded Yonsei University. Dick [Richard Underwood] is like third-generation Underwood or so, and Dick mentioned, in one of these books about Korean War… Dick was, in fact, one of the interpreters, during the *Panmunjom* armistice agreement process. His older brother, Horace Underwood, also Dick Underwood, they were interpreters, and Dick Underwood said, in one of the Korean War books, that when he returned to Seoul after the armistice agreement was signed, he was standing on top of a jeep by South Gate. Okay, *Namdaemun*, South Gate, and he was looking toward East Gate. So, there's South Gate and East Gate, and there were hundreds and hundreds of tall buildings, office buildings and schools. He said he could see, from South Gate, look at the East Gate. There was nothing between. So, he could see the East Gate from South Gate, standing on top of this jeep he was driving. That's how the devastation was.

DePue: And largely because Seoul changed hands, I think, four times, during the war.

Devine: Yes. Several times, several times.

DePue: In pretty brutal combat, I think, most all of those times.

Devine: Right.

DePue: How about your neighborhood? I mean, the classic image that I have of that timeframe are these one-story houses that are, in American terms, very primitive. You talked about the rice-paper walls in the first place.

Devine: Right, right.

DePue: I know, during the World War II, the Japanese version of those kinds of neighborhoods went up like tinderboxes.

Devine: Yes, yes. There were many, many neighborhoods that just, just, yes, just like tinderboxes, they just disappeared. But, I don't know, miraculously, our old neighborhood of some pockets… There were pockets in Seoul that just survived, and ours was one of them.

DePue: How would you describe the relationship that you had with the mistress?

Devine: We really lucked out, in the sense that she was also a very kind person. Her heart was set in the right way, and she was a follower of Confucian teachings for women, how to behave.

The Confucian teaching for women is that they be submissive to in-laws, kind to all in-law family members and neighbors. So, she was a good woman, and so, my relationship became quite positive, especially during the time my mother was bedridden and couldn't take care of me and couldn't take me to my kindergarten or first grade, braid my hair and put clean clothes on me and feeding me. The little mommy, the mistress—I called her Little Mommy—Little Mommy did all those things for me. She sometimes even took me to her parents' house, where I had a good time. They had beautiful flower garden, with moss roses and flowers that my mother didn't grow. I saw them there, and so it became a very positive relationship.

DePue: It sounds like you also got a chance to continue your love of nature.

Devine: Yes, yes. And the children, born to her and my father, I have very positive relationships with them, too.

But—this is important—in one of the chapters of my novel, *The Voices of Heaven,* I talk about when the oldest boy reached a marriageable age. He had terrible time marrying the woman he fell in love with, because, even though Korean society, the Confucian values, insisted that men take mistresses to produce male children, once male and female children were born, they were discriminated against as second-class citizens. Upstanding

families refused to give their daughters to sons born to mistresses. So, this brother, my brother, fell in love with a woman, but her family refused to approve that marriage. So, he became hopelessly depressed, because of the society's discrimination against him and his brothers and sister, just on the basis of the fact that they born to, not the first wife, but the secondary wife or mistress.

By the way, the mistress's name never went onto my father's family registry, either. Now, all five children were registered under my father's name and my mother's name, as the mother of all these six children, including me. Anyway, the bride's family refused to allow him to marry her. What saved that marriage was my mother. My mother, as the first wife of this man, her husband, stepped in there and asked to meet with the family, parents, of the bride-to-be, the prospective bride. What my mother did is very extraordinary.

This is why I wrote the book, because this is the kind of person she was. She didn't have to do a thing. She didn't have to raise a finger to help the child by the mistress at all. But she stepped in and met with the bride's parents, and said, "When the mistress came into our house, my house and my husband's house, to become my husband's mistress, she came as a virgin." She vouchsafed her virginity when she came.

The bride's family was astounded. They were just in awe of this woman, who would do this kind of thing for the sake of the mistress and mistress's child. Whether that was true or not, whether she was really a virgin or not, there was no medical exam record or anything. But, just the fact that my mother was willing to step into the situation and save the mistress's child's marriage, impressed this bride's family so much, they said, "Okay. If the child, the boy, grew up with this kind of mother, as the Big Mother, in addition to his own birth mother, this child must be okay. This child has integrity. He is an honorable person." This is the kind of thing my mother did, [tearfully] and this is the story that I wanted to tell in my book.

DePue: It must have meant the world to your brother, as well.

Devine: Right, right.

DePue: What's the Korean way of saying, "little mother" and "big mother"?

Devine: *Kun oma. Kun* means large, big. *Oma* is mommy. *M*y mom became *kun oma* to the children born to the little mommy. And Little Mommy, I called her "*Chagun Oma*." *Chagun* means little. So, the translation is "little mommy."

DePue: How did the two women address each other?

Devine: Oh, my Little Mommy called my mom *Hyung-Nim*, which means "elder sister." My mom called her, generally, *Yobo Gae. Yobo gae* just is. It's like, "look here." Literal translation is "look here," but, it's just a way of

addressing a person who is younger than you, so I don't know how to translate it. It's like calling her "Younger Sister."

DePue: What did the sweethearts call each other? I thought *yobo* was a word that would be used by sweethearts.

Devine: Right. So, she didn't call her *yobo*. She called her *yobo gae. Yobo gae* means look here. The literal translation is "look here," but it roughly translates to "younger sister."

DePue: So, a term of endearment?

Devine: Yes, familial-relationship word. I don't think I would go as far as to say it's a term of endearment, but it's a term of familial relationship word, like sister or brother, aunt and uncle.

DePue: The next relationship I'm curious about is between the mistress and your grandmother.

Devine: Hmm. That was good. My grandmother was eternally grateful to the mistress for producing male children for her son. So, that was very positive, but my grandmother's relationship with my mother was the main, the most affectionate, close relationship. My mother really took good care of her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law had some physical problems, I know—this is in the book—I know she had hemorrhoid problem and that was not treated properly, so she had this hemorrhoid dropping out of her whenever she went to the bathroom. It was my mother, she would get a clean, wet rag and gently push that hemorrhoid back inside her and wiped her and helped her lie down, this kind of thing. This kind of care—that my mother provided to her mother-in-law—just caused a bonding that's exceptional, between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. This is another thing that I feel very strongly about, to describe my mother, what kind of person she was.

DePue: And the last relationship I wanted to ask you about was between you and these younger brothers, who were quite a bit younger than you.

Devine: Yes. The oldest of the four boys and one girl was at least ten-year difference. Actually, the oldest was a girl. In my book, I fictionalized it, and I said the boy was born as the first child. But, in real life, it was a girl and then four boys. The relationship is very cordial. They were all taught, from day one, to respect the Big Mommy and me, as their older sister. As far as they were concerned, they were supposed to treat me as good as a real, blood sister. So, we've had good relationship.

But, in recent years, the girl, the eldest one, the girl and three youngest boys, began to feel that…I think this is what happened, they just didn't like to be branded for life as the children of a mistress. And my presence reminded

them that they were children of a mistress.[1] So, to them, I became a symbol of their own discriminated status in the society. So, the younger ones began to distance themselves.

DePue: When you say you reminded them, you would tell them, or was it just your physical presence?

Devine: No, my physical presence. Whenever I went to Korea, I would call them and say, "Hey, come to dinner with me. Let's all have dinner together." I cooked spaghetti. I threw a spaghetti party one year, and they all came, with their wives and children. So, at first, they were curious enough about my life in United States, and it was a novelty, this person coming in, throwing a spaghetti party and everything. But gradually, in subsequent years, when I tried to organize dinners like that, the younger ones didn't come. I am just guessing that they just didn't feel the need to keep up with this relationship that reminded them of their inferior status.

DePue: Did you feel less guilty or better about yourself, when the mistress had a son?

Devine: No. No, it just—no. The damage was done, the emotional damage, at the age of five, being told that my mother might die, because I was not a boy. That emotional damage was just forever. It was just done. There was just nothing much that could happen to alleviate that.

DePue: Did you have any hints, at the time, that you had been adopted?

Devine: No. As I might have mentioned yesterday, there were some neighborhood kids who tried to tell me, but—

DePue: I think you talked about the forehead.

Devine: Yeah. My mother always pointed out all these physical features of myself that were similar to my father and her and Grandmother to just demystify the whole rumor forever. And I believed her. I believed, yeah, that there's no way I was adopted. Plus, another thing that convinced me that I was not adopted is my mother's devotion to me—her complete, unconditional love. I just didn't believe that any adoptive mother could do such a thing.

DePue: Was the ultimate example of that her insistence that you were going to get an education?

Devine: Yes, and she did things like, for example, when I was going to school, elementary school, first grade, in wintertime, she would put my shoes on the warm hearth, while I was eating breakfast. When I was ready to go to school, she would put the warmed shoes on my feet, so that from between the house

[1] Interviewee's later note: "I did not verbally tell them to remember their second class status!"

and the school, my feet would be warm. My friends called me "hot shoes princess" (both laugh).

I was always a sleepyhead in the morning, and I just didn't want to wake up in time for school. So, what she did was, when she could physically carry me on her back, piggy-backed me, she would put me on her back, early in the morning, early enough for me to get the breakfast in and go to school. She would piggy-back me and run around the neighborhood a few blocks, to wake me up. This is her way of waking me up in the morning. Now, how many adoptive mothers would do that for an adopted child? This kind of thing just totally settled for me, forever, that this was my mom. This is my blood mom. So, there were rumors here and there, but hey, I don't know why that is, but…

DePue: What would your mother tell you—when I'm sure you went to her to get consoled about the teasing and harassment you were getting—about being a girl instead of a boy. What was she telling you?

Devine: Yeah. Like I said, you know, she would point out all these physical features of myself that were proof that I was her birth child. Also, there's another thing. She had this conception dream. Women, before they get pregnant—this is a folk belief, again—they are supposed to have a conception dream, a significant dream that would show she would expect a child. It would sometimes even tell whether the child was going to be a boy or girl. She told me her conception dream over and over and over again, how this huge peony came down from heaven and dropped into her lap. That was her conception dream, and she would tell me that, over and over, to instill in me how I was her birth child.

DePue: The peony would be emblematic of what?

Devine: Peony is usually a girl. If it was going to be a boy that was conceived, it's usually tiger or dragon. But, a flower would mean she was going to have a girl child.

DePue: Well, I've heard you say that she also was—maybe this is something I got from the book—but, you were supposed to be ten times better than a boy.

Devine: Right, right.

DePue: Was that something she was telling you?

Devine: Yes, yes. Once she recovered enough to sit up and eat her own food and drink her own Chinese medicine, without somebody spoon feeding her, then, whenever a neighbor said, "Oh, this would not have happened if Maija was a boy," she said, she went to many fortune tellers, and fortune tellers all said that girl would grow up to be ten times better than a boy, which gave me the hope that, hey, there must be something I can do. I have to figure out how to

become ten times better than a boy, then it will make my mother happy. It will redeem me from this guilt of having caused my parents so much tragedy.

DePue: I would think that that statement alone would be… Obviously, your mother internalized that. She wasn't just saying that.

Devine: No.

DePue: She was determined to get you that way, and you were determined to help become that.

Devine: Yes, yes.

DePue: And that's why getting an education was so important?

Devine: Yes, exactly. In addition to the fact that in Confucian tradition, overall education is very important, especially for men. But, in this case, my mother had only me, so education for me was number one priority for her.

DePue: Were there public schools, paid for by public taxes, at the time?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: So, you were going to school. Your parents didn't have to pay for you to go to school?

Devine: I think elementary schools were mostly free, public schools. I think there were private elementary schools, too, where there was tuition. I know, when I went to middle school and high school, it was a Presbyterian school, and there was tuition that my mom had to come up with.

DePue: Why were they wanting you to go to the Presbyterian school? They weren't Christian themselves, were they?

Devine: No, they were not. The reason is because I wanted to go to the Kyunggi. Kyunggi is number one middle and high school in Korea, even now, Kyunggi, and Kyunggi is what I was going for. I studied for it, and I even had a tutor. My classroom teacher offered tutoring service in the evening, and my parents paid for my tutoring sessions to get extra tutoring, so that I could pass this entrance exam to Kyunggi, number one school in the country. But I failed it.

So then, my mother said, my parents said, "You know, if you want, we can bribe somebody in the school and get you in. Would you like us to do that?" They asked me, and I was too proud to accept an acceptance into a school by way of offering a bribe. I said, "No, don't do that."

So, the educational system, at that time, for middle school, high school and college, was strictly classified. So, first-class university, first-class high

school, middle school. Then, there's second-class college, middle school and high school. And then third class. It went on like that. So, I had no choice but to go to one of the schools classified as second-class category. At the top of that list—even among those schools, there were better schools and a lot not so good— and at the top of the schools, among the schools in the second category, was Jungshin, J-u-n-g-s-h-i-n Middle School and High School. And that happened to be a Presbyterian school. So, that's why I ended up going there, even though my parents were Buddhist, and they believed in folk beliefs, and my mother had a shaman aunt.

DePue: Once you got to school, was part of the education learning about Christianity?

Devine: Oh, yes, definitely. This was a Presbyterian school, determined to convert as many students as possible to Christianity. So, every single day started out with a kind of athletic assembly out in the yard. Everybody had certain amount of aerobics movements we were supposed to do. We did. Then, from there, we went into the chapel. In the chapel a school minister would give a sermon, and we sang Christian songs. Then, we went to classrooms.

In addition to that, we had Bible classes at least once a week. Maybe it was twice a week. The school minister taught us Old Testament and New Testament stories, and I loved that. I loved the Old Testament stories. They are just wonderful stories.

But, what I didn't like, is the hard-core, hard-sell conversion efforts by the minister, to convert all of us. So, in the Bible class he would have students who didn't go to church the previous Sunday; we had to stand up and be ridiculed in class. So, I hated that. I hated that kind of hard sell. They tried everything, for six years, to convert me. There were lots of students who just… Another thing is, they had revivals, once in the spring and once in the fall.

Revivals lasted, like, three days, and it was an intensive conversion effort period. They invited famous ministers from outside, and the minister would just give passionate speeches every day for three days. And, at the end, he would have all the girls who wanted to convert to come up to the podium and accept Jesus Christ. Lots of girls cried, and they became very emotional, and accepted Jesus Christ. I didn't; I never did.

DePue: This sounds like a girls' school, strictly a girls' school.

Devine: Yes, it was a girls' school.

DePue: Were these teachers and preachers you were encountering, were they Koreans?

Devine: Yes, we had no non-Korean teachers at that time.

DePue: So, even in those years, the Presbyterian Church in Korea was well established?

Devine: Yes, very well. In the back of the school grounds there was a brick building, and that was the residence for one of the Presbyterian ministers. We were invited into that house sometimes for a little discussion group, English conversation, discussion group. I remember going in there as a group, and ah, the smell of chocolate chip cookies that the minister's wife just baked, (laughs) freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies.

DePue: There's that chocolate again, huh? (both laugh)

Devine: Yeah. And there was a grand baby piano in the living room. You know, it really was a culture shock for me, because I was led to believe, through the Bible studies, that ministers, Christian believers, were supposed to practice thriftiness. They were supposed to be poor in spirit and not go for riches, worldly rich, you know, that kind of philosophy. So, I had that in mind, and when I went to the minister's house, I expected them to live very humbly and very, you know, thrifty way. But there was a baby grand piano in the living room, and there was chocolate chip cookie smell all over. (both laugh) I thought… I was confused. I was a little bit confused.

DePue: Well, I want to ask you a question that's a little bit off the track of what we've been talking about, but I don't want to get too far beyond this. War typically is a very powerful change agent in society. Was Korean culture and Korean society affected because of this incredibly destructive war that they'd just survived?

Devine: Uh huh. There were innumerable ways Korean society was impacted and changed forever. I would like to just talk about only two areas. One is about women, impact of the Korean War on women. I talked about it this morning to your Optimist group. Women used to stay home—that was their Confucian teaching—taking care of the in-laws and children and all in-law family members, uncles and aunts. But, when the Korean War broke out and men all went to fight the war, they—even men who were supposed to be exempt from entering the war, like my father, the only male child in the family, even for one generation—weren't exempt. My father was the one male child in his family for third generation, and there was no reason he needed to be drafted. But, even my father was drafted, you know. They just took all the men they could get their hands on.

So, suddenly, women found themselves in charge of having to figure out how to make some money to take care of the in-laws and children. So, they went out and into the streets and sold whatever they could sell. If they could knit, they knitted booties for babies and hats and sold that. They went into the hills and picked dandelions and made and sautéed dandelion patties and sold that. Some made these little brown sugar candies they roasted on a

hot griddle and sold those things. So, women went outside the home and earned money.

Three years later, when their husbands came back—many husbands didn't come back, and these women continued to be the heads of households—but men came back, and, if they were capable of getting jobs again, then the family became two-earner family. Sometimes women decided, "Okay, I did my job during the war. I stay home now. Now my husband is making the money again."

But, I am guessing at least 50% or more percent of women stayed with whatever business ventures they started during the war, because it gave them a sense of achieving something, achievement, a sense of empowerment. So, that became a huge impetus for women's liberation, closing the gender gap kind of movement.

Another is Korean War's lasting effect on children. Two-hundred-thousand children became orphans. Koreans' attitude toward taking care of orphans was extremely, miserably pathetic, because of the Confucian tradition of believing in male bloodline being the most important. They did not accept non-blood-related children, out in the streets. So, many children went to orphanages, and then, from there on, they were sent overseas as adoptees.

But, those who didn't get those chances, became street urchins, just roving marketplaces and doing whatever they could to find food, picked garbage, picked food scraps thrown on the ground. They picked those up, and many of them became pickpockets, small, petty thieves. So, the impact on children was tremendous.

DePue: So, one—the impact on women's role in society—you see as a very positive thing.

Devine: Positive, yes.

DePue: And the impact on those orphans was critically negative.

Devine: Totally, uh hmm, devastating.

DePue: How did your family manage to pay for school, because your father was, as you described before, lower middle class? It's got to be fairly expensive to do this.

Devine: Yes, yes. He made good wage, but it wasn't making us rich or anything. So, we had enough food on the table. But, unofficially, I heard my mom and my father talking and overheard some things, which made me believe that he did some unofficial things, like being a truck driver sometimes, for extra cash. He used to sell the gas out of his gas tank. There were enough people interested in buying gas at a cheaper rate from a truck driver willing to sell gas out of his

truck tank. So, I think he made some extra money. One of the ways of making extra money was this kind of thing. He might have used his company truck to deliver a load of something for somebody that was not part of his job. I don't know, exactly, the many things that he engaged in that was not official, or officially sanctioned kinds of things, but I think he did some of those things to supplement his income. So, he was able to afford my tuition.

DePue: Were you thankful or embarrassed that he was doing these kinds of things? What was your attitude?

Devine: Yeah. These things I kind of, indirectly and roughly, just guessed was going on. I didn't have hard evidence, and I loved my father and respected him so highly that that kind of got me just dismiss some dubious things that he might have gotten into.

DePue: I think you mentioned, before we began the interview, that you weren't necessarily living all the time where your father was living, as well.

Devine: Right. After the war, we were reunited and lived in the same house briefly. But, when I went to Jung Shin Christian School, about that time, he decided our house was too small, because, then, the mistress had the second child and expecting third child. So, the house was too small. So, he got a house built along the Han River in Hannam-dong area.

So, they moved into a new house. My mom and I were expected to move in with them, but that was too far from the school I needed to attend. So, that's when my mother and I got a rental room closer into town. So, my mother and I lived separately from my father, but my father came to visit us and continued to provide money for our living expenses.

DePue: Doesn't that give some of the neighbors cause to gossip?

Devine: Oh, no, no. That was perfectly honorable thing to do, for a man to provide for his wife and his child, yeah. So, in a way, the mistress already had three or four children, and my grandmother went to live with her.

My grandmother's health was failing, and so, she [the mistress] was in charge of taking care of the children and also of the grandma. She became like a housewife, the first wife. She had the responsibilities, whereas my mom didn't have any children to have to take care of or the aging grandmother, about to suffer dementia. My mother had no responsibility.

So, having my father come visit her every other week or once a month, bringing gifts for her and for me and my cousin, it was like romantic relationship all over again. I point that out in my book, too, how the relationship dynamics of the family changed, so that the mistress got all the responsibilities of doing dirty diapers for both her mother-in-law and her children. My mother had no responsibility, other than just taking care of me

and having my father come and visit, you know, on the side, which I think made it a little romantic for them.

DePue: Was your mother working at this time?

Devine: She continued to knit sweaters for whoever was paying her to do so, and we lived very close to the shaman aunt. So, she went to her shaman aunt's house to help cook, at least two, three times a week, and brought some money and also a lot of food.

So, I really grew up—me and my cousin grew up—on the food that had been offered to gods, you know, to heal some people who were deathly sick, and somebody who needed a promotion, and they were paying the shaman to offer this ceremony so he could get a promotion. All these foods that had been offered to gods, they were our dinners and lunches and school lunch.

DePue: Plus an occasional chocolate, here and there, that you got from Americans or from the Christians?

Devine: Yes, yes. (both laugh) It was a good life.

DePue: You told me what you didn't like about going to this school. Other than that, did you enjoy the education you were getting?

Devine: Yes, they really provided me with excellent education, I believe, and I didn't know then. The year I reached ninth grade, because I needed to become ten times better than a boy, for my mother's sake, that I studied like hell. So, I was the top student in just about every class.

My teachers thought I should move on and take the entrance exam to Kyunggi High School again, because we were offered that chance. I was a chicken, chicken shit. I thought I would fail again, and I didn't take that opportunity. So, I finished my high school there.

For six years, I had this inferiority complex about going to a second-ranked school. The school badge—we were supposed to wear a school badge on our collar—while riding the buses to go to school, I covered it up with a muffler or scarf or something, so that nobody would know that I went to a second-class school. This is how my inferiority complex about attending this school was.

But, when I went to college, Sogang University, after the first semester, students who made the honor roll, their names were posted on the outside of the academic dean's office. And my name was at the top. This proved the excellent education I received at the second-ranked school, because the other kids on the honor roll, they were from Kyunggi. They were from Ewha, which is second, number two in the country. So, there were

students from these first-ranked high schools, and they did not do as well as I did, which, to me, proved that the Jung Shin middle school and high school education must have been really good.

DePue: What were your favorite subjects at the time?

Devine: It was English literature. I loved English literature.

DePue: Obviously, you were learning English all the way through this process?

Devine: Yes, middle school and high school, English was a required subject, but we were not taught spoken English. It was all translating word for word and memorizing vocabulary and also learning the grammar.

So, by the time I went to Sogang University, my spoken English was so poor, I was so shy about my spoken English that, the first day of school, there were priests all lined up, American Jesuit priests. They were our professors, and they were all lined up, greeting us, "Good morning. Good morning." The president of the college said, "Good morning. What is your name?" I was just so shy to speak English, I couldn't even say what my name was. I just ran away. (both laugh)

But, talking about this college: to become ten times better than a boy, that meant I needed to fulfill my mother's dream of having me become a lawyer. At that time, during those 1940s and '50s and '60s, parents' dreams—whether boys or girls—parents' dreams for their children was for them to become a lawyer, judge, lawyer and judge. That was top.

DePue: Not a doctor?

Devine: Doctor came…Doctor was there, too, doctor or judicial judge or lawyer. That was at the top.

DePue: Is that kind of an extension of the Confucian belief that the ultimate government official would be somebody who was steeped in the law and would be a judge?

Devine: Yes, exactly. So, my goal, throughout the whole middle school and high school, was to go to Seoul National University Law School. Even as a high schooler, I took this introduction-to-law book, two-inches thick, and I took it with me, back and forth to school. I read introduction to law on the bus, to learn about law ahead of boys that I would eventually have to compete against. This is how determined I was to become a lawyer and go to Seoul National University.

But, when I heard Sogang University just got established—they were American Jesuits who founded it—and anybody getting B average and above would be sent to United States on full scholarships. Immediately, it was

between law school at Seoul National University and majoring in English—because Sogang did not have law school—majoring in English and eventually go to United States. The temptation to go to the country, where there were a lot of chocolate chip cookies (both laugh).

DePue: There is a theme here.

Devine: Yeah. (both laugh) Through foreign movies I saw, in foreign countries, I saw men, boy and girl children were treated equal, more or less. The discrimination against girl children was almost none. That's how I perceived. So, I wanted to go. I wanted to just get the hell out of that stupid, stinking Confucian country. I just didn't have the patience to have anything to do with that society any more.

DePue: Why was it that you were so intrigued or enthralled with English literature?

Devine: I liked literature, even through middle school and high school. When there was writing exercise that the Korean literature teacher gave, the teacher always complimented me on my ability to write, and said nice things.

I was always interested in art. For extra-curricular activity during middle school and high school, I took art. That was just free lesson, after school. The art teacher offered this drawing class which, you know, sketching these plaster-of-Paris heads of Venus and Roman sculpted busts. So, I did art, after school. I did dance. For a while, I belonged to a dance group. And my Korean literature teacher encouraged me to do writing, because I was very interested in literature. All these were in my nature already, not law school. I just didn't like that.

DePue: I guess one of the things I'm curious about, and maybe I'm overplaying this, but, you were drawn more to English literature than Korean literature. I would suspect that Korea had quite a rich literary heritage.

Devine: Right. Oh, yes. But, in order to go to America, I needed to study English literature, not Korean literature, because what university in United States would—I didn't know, at that time, that Harvard University had Center for Korean Studies and all those things—so, I thought I needed to study English literature to be able to go to United States.

DePue: Who were your favorite English authors or American authors?

Devine: Oh, Mark Twain, Hemingway, William Faulkner. I did my master's thesis on William Faulkner's novel, *"Light in August*." British writers, too. I liked Jane Austen, yeah. So, tons of British and American writers.

DePue: I'm trying to figure out where I want to go to next. Is there anything else that we need to talk about, in terms of your high school experiences? Were you involved with any extra-curricular activities?

Devine: Yes, extra-curricular activities involved art class and painting class and dance class and English conversation class.

DePue: So, all these things, to kind of reinforce the chances of your getting to the right school afterwards.

Devine: Right, yeah.

DePue: You were happy to be as totally focused on this, it sounds like, as your mother wanted you to be.

Devine: But giving up law school really traumatized me for life, because choosing between law school, Seoul National Law School, and Sogang University, the American Jesuit University that had no law school, by choosing this school, I gave up my aspiration to become a lawyer, which was my mother's dream for me. That meant I would become a failure, because I failed to become a lawyer. By failing to enter a law school and failing to become a lawyer, I would fail my mother's dream and her expectations. And by failing her, I was going to fail myself. This was the implication of the choice between the two schools.

When I chose Sogang, I was prepared to be a failure, to see myself as a failure, a person who failed to fulfill my mother's dream. So, I was not happy to choose Sogang. I chose it for my own self. I didn't choose it to fulfill my mother's dream, which I wanted to do, so that I could be ten times better than a boy. So, this is a very serious, traumatic experience that stayed with me, even today. I'm telling you, I'm deeply sad that I (tearfully) never became the lawyer that my mother wanted me to become. Even if other people think I'm successful—becoming a professor at a college, being a writer—in my opinion, no. This completely fails. This pales, compared to my mother's dream. I never fulfilled that. I'm a failure, totally.

DePue: So, you just told me that, as much as you didn't like the Confucian culture that you grew up in, you haven't escaped it.

Devine: Right, exactly. This is how far reaching cultural conditioning can be. This is how far reaching cultural conditioning can mess up a person for life. As much as I resisted it, I am the product of that cultural conditioning.

DePue: Yet, you made a decision at this time. In the crucial time in your life, you make a decision that is very typically American and Western.

Devine: Uh huh. Only, because I just could not stand the idea of going to law school and slaving over so many years over introduction to law book, that I detested, and I tried to study, as a high school student. Only, because I could not stand it, and only, because I could not stand living in that society, even one minute than I could stand, that's why I chose to escape. Sogang University was an escape route.

DePue: I'm guessing, though, that the very strong guilt and regret that you feel about this is something that Americans can't even begin to comprehend.

Devine: No. Throughout my life, I've felt that I really, really should have sought some psychological counseling, to work on resolving of these issues I had with my own self and the cultural conditioning, the conflict. But I never did. I probably should have, yeah.

DePue: I'm wondering, at the time when you were growing up, and, especially in your high school years, you're going through these important decision points in your life, how much other things you were exposed to, of American culture, music and food and—

Devine: Oh, okay. One of the many ways that this education of the Jung Shin middle school and high school was, they exposed the children to all kinds of outside world, by taking us to movies, as a group. The whole school group would go and see movies, like *Seven Brides.*

DePue: *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, one of the great musical movies of the 1950s.

Devine: Yes, right. We went to see that, as a school group. And we went to see "*Student Prince*," the German prince who falls in love with a barmaid. We went to see *Hannibal's Expeditions*, Hannibal. We went to see, oh, "*Quo Vadis*." Do you know that movie?

DePue: "*Quo Vadis*."

Devine: Yes.

DePue: I'm not surprised that priests and ministers would want to take you to that, because of its very strong religious themes.

Devine: Yes. And so, also operas. They took us to all major operas that they put out. They were not necessarily opera troupes, coming from abroad. They were produced among Koreans. They had outstanding opera programs, "*Aida*," you know, "*Madam Butterfly,*" "*Tosca*." Oh, all those operas we were exposed to, and I became an opera lover for life.

DePue: How about American pop music? Were you getting any exposure to that?

Devine: No, but we were exposed to all kinds of classical music, Beethoven, Schumann, Wagner. We were classical music addicts.

DePue: Did you have opportunities to encounter American soldiers, occasionally?

Devine: Oh, you bring a very good topic there. Yesterday, I told you about the soldiers who gave me chocolate—

DePue: Which is happening during the war.

Devine: Yes, during the war. After the war, during high school, there was a group of us who were in an English conversation group. As part of that, one of the girl's mom ran an orphanage and was in contact with Americans, missionaries, who donated clothing, and, also, some soldiers. I guess military people also donated some things. Through her, we invited a group of American soldiers to dinner.

We had our moms prepare all this feast. (laughs) I remember, we had a couple of dinners with American soldiers, like that. We were trying to improve our spoken English by practicing English on them. So, that was one.

And then, another story is, during college, my best friend and I, we were just so desperate to try to have opportunities to use our spoken English skills that we used to go to Itaewon. You know, this is the area right outside the Eighth Army, Itaewon Streets. This is where hookers had their beats. They would be walking up and down these streets, looking for soldiers to pick them up. We were college students, but we went there, and we did the same things. (both laugh)

DePue: I would think, with a significant exception.

Devine: Yeah, we were not looking for anything sexy. We just wanted to grab some Americans, so we could practice our English.

DePue: Were you dating Koreans at the time?

Devine: Another very interesting topic. Through college, too, I did not want to do anything other than study, because I needed to become ten times better than a boy, no matter where I went, whether in Korea or United States. So, I was totally focused on studying. After classes, I went to the library, straight there, and buried myself. A boring story, okay? (laughs) But, there were two or three people, men, I dated, during the junior and senior years. I dated them, but, as soon as they would become serious about our relationship, it just kind of…something just turned in my stomach, and I just became cold. I just immediately dropped them, dropped the person. I didn't even say, "Hey, I no longer want to see you." I would just immediately not respond to any calls or notes left at the school. I would just drop them.

I attribute this tendency, to resist more serious advances from guys, to my childhood experience of seeing men fool around, having many mistresses. My father had only one, but there were other men, doing similar things, and they had mistresses all the time. My aunt, her husband…Even though my aunt gave birth to a boy, male child, her husband ran around, and my aunt went to that mistress's house and tore hair off of her.

I heard these stories all my life, growing up, and women always saying, "Oh men are dogs. Men are wolves. Men are mountain thieves." (laughs) Not just regular thieves, mountain thieves. They are worse, worse than regular thieves, okay? So, men are mountain thieves. I grew up with this cultural conditioning, men are mountain thieves and dogs and wolves, except for my father. I think that's why, when a man became serious, it just left me cold, and I immediately dropped him.

I wrote a short story, and this was part of my book's chapter. I titled it, "*The Saffron House*." But my husband called it "*The Serial Dumper Story*." (both laugh) I'm a serial dumper.

DePue: Well, not in all cases, obviously.

Devine: Not in all cases. (laughs)

DePue: This is probably a good place for us to stop, and we'll continue with your discussion about college and, then, the important step of getting to the United States.

Devine: Yes, okay.

DePue: So, that's what we've got to look forward to this afternoon.

Devine: All right.

DePue: Thank you very much.

Devine: You're welcome.

(End of interview session #2 #3 continues)

Interview with Maija Rhee Devine
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Interview #3: August 30, 2013
Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, the 30th of August, 2013. This is Mark DePue, again, and this is our second session today with Maija Devine. Good afternoon.

Devine: Good afternoon.

DePue: We just got done with a good lunch, and maybe we're ready to finish up with our discussion. It's been fascinating, up to this point. I'm sure we'll have more. I wanted to start with picking up where we left off. You were talking a little bit about the high school student and into college years and dating and exposure to some more American culture and things like that. But, one time you told me—you didn't do this on tape, but you mentioned it—you were too short to attract Korean men.

Devine: Yes, uh hmm. Koreans, overall, are shorter people than Caucasians. Maybe, because of that, they are constantly making references to people who are short and making them feel uncomfortable. So, I had an inferiority complex about my size, my height and—

DePue: How tall are you?

Devine: I was five, but I think I'm a little less than five, now that I'm old and shrunk. (laughs)

DePue: Five feet.

Devine: Five, even. And my appearance, too, my facial features, it's not the type that's attractive to Korean men. They have their own concept of what is beautiful, and I didn't fit that kind of category. So, I dated a few men, but I wasn't particularly, wildly popular among boys.

DePue: Well, you just told me, though, before lunch, that there were two boys that were particularly interested.

Devine: Yes, two or three boys, during college. But other girls had ten or twenty guys interested in them. So, relatively speaking, I was not considered terribly attractive.

But, once I came to United States, oh man, that whole thing changed. American guys just found me very attractive and women, too. They really liked my size, and women would often comment, "Oh, what a petite person. I wish I was petite like that." All these things, this positive attention, from both men and women, helped me get over my inferiority complex about my height and my appearance.

DePue: Well, we're going to hear a little more about that. But I wanted to spend a few more minutes talking about your college experience. You said you went to what college?

Devine: Sogang. *So* means west; *gang* means river. So, it's a college on the West Branch of Han River, west section of Han River. It was found by American Jesuits from Wisconsin province. When they came in to establish a new college, in 1955, the Korean educators went up in arms against this idea. They said, "We already have excellent universities, like Seoul National University and Yonsei University. Why do Americans have to come in and establish a new college? The only thing that will happen is brain drain. All the bright kids will go to United States and would never come back." But they went ahead and established it, in 1960. The big publicity campaign they led was, students who got B average, through all four years, would get a scholarship to go to the United States to a graduate school.

DePue: Thus the fear about a brain drain.

Devine: Well, yes, brain drain. So, the graduates did go to the United States, and eventually, some of them came back. I was one of the first to come back to United States.

DePue: What year did you start college?

Devine: Sixty-one. Graduated in '65, and I went to St. Louis University in the fall of '65.

DePue: You've already talked about why you went there, and that was very interesting to hear, as well. One of the things you did talk about, though, going through junior high and high school in this Presbyterian school, was the full-court press that the Presbyterians put on you to convert you.

Devine: Right. How did I convert to Catholicism?

DePue: Well, did that happen? Did the Jesuits really press religion on you, in that respect?

Devine: No, no, no. I went to Sogang College. Jesuit priests were my professors. Ninety percent of our professors, at that time, were American Jesuits from Wisconsin Province. There was a chapel, and on the chapel door, there was a Mass times all announced, but there was not one priest or another Catholic student who said, "Hey, let's go to Mass." Nobody put any pressure on me to do one thing or another, at all, not like the junior high and high school, Presbyterian school, I went to.

After spending a semester, watching these priests and Catholic students going in and out of the chapel, but not receiving any invitation, whatsoever, to come there, I decided there's something really good going on there. Something good is going on, and they are keeping it from me. I decided to explore what was going on. So, during the first summer vacation, after the first semester, I joined the catechism class to find out exactly what good things were going on. At the end of the catechism class, I became baptized.

One of the appeals for me was the existence of the system of confession. As Catholics, you went to confession, confessed your sins to the priest, and the priest said, "Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit forgive you" and all this, and he gave us things to do, like so many Hail Marys and so many Our Fathers, and that was it. If you did that, your sins were forgiven. It was kind of a spiritual washing machine. You could get your spiritual mind washed, like doing laundry in a washing machine. I liked that. That's very clean cut. Once you went to confession and did those things, I could start all over again. That was a very appealing aspect of Catholicism to me.

DePue: Now, Catholicism, obviously, you've got the Pope; you've got priests. There are nuns, but the nuns aren't going to be elevated to the same level of authority in the church. But, when you get beyond that, did you find the message you were hearing from Christians different than Confucianism and the paternalistic society and the emphasis that was there?

Devine: I felt that there was more equality between men and women within Christianity, whether it was Protestant or Catholicism. So, in that sense, I found it refreshing. Although, later, when I did more Biblical studies, I realized there were as many patriarchal values in Old Testament and even some parts of New Testament. But, compared to the Confucianism I was exposed to, Christianity, overall, was much more equitable toward men and women.

DePue: Your major there continued to be English literature?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: Where did you pick up your ability to speak English, because you speak it very well?

Devine: No. I did not speak well, and the first day at school, I couldn't even answer the question, "What is your name?" (laughs)

DePue: As we talked about before, but you obviously got beyond that.

Devine: Yes. I immediately needed to…it was a language-immersion program, because we had no…Well, we had a couple Korean professors, but I wasn't taking classes with them. So, all the classes I took were taught by native speakers. Immediately I needed to just understand and write notes in English and take tests in English, and everything was done in English. I had to catch up real quick, and I was able to pick it up pretty fast.

DePue: You've talked before about the sacrifices that both your parents were making, to make sure you got a good education. I've got to believe that going to the university now is much more expensive than going to the other schools—

Devine: Oh yes.

DePue: And, by this time, that there had already been some traditions established that all those other children that were coming along were needing to go to school and have those expenses paid for.

Devine: Right.

DePue: How did you afford going to school?

Devine: Right. The first semester tuition was paid by my father, the adoptive father. After that, I knew there was no more. That's another reason I studied like heck and got on the honor roll. When you get on honor roll, you get full-tuition scholarship. So, from then on, the rest of the college days, three years and one semester, it was all free.

DePue: Where was the college getting its money? Certainly not from the Korean government, I would think.

Devine: Oh, college money. Oh, Jesuits, the president and development officer working for the university, they were all out asking for money from American Catholics, throughout the whole world, actually. They sent out these donation solicitation letters every month.

DePue: Were you living at home at the time?

Devine: Yes, with my mom and my cousin.

DePue: Why did your cousin end up living with your mom, as well?

Devine: Well, because her mother was not able to take care of her. She was working for a wine house. She was working many hours during the afternoon hours and also night times too. My mother felt that it was not a very good environment for a child to be growing in that situation. So, she took her under her wing.

DePue: Did you work at the time?

Devine: Did I work, during college? Yes. I had a part-time job as a switchboard operator. At that time, you had these cords that you had to plug into holes in the switchboard. Yeah, I worked.

DePue: Did you like that job?

Devine: I loved it. I thought it was just…I t was empowering experience because, for the first time, I could make my own money, over which I had some control.

DePue: Was there any talk, at that time—we already talked about your own dating experiences—was there any talk among your relatives, your mother and grandmother, etcetera, that, oh, we need to start finding her somebody to marry?

Devine: No, absolutely not.

DePue: But, that would normally be the experience, would it not?

Devine: Yes, it is. College students were not allowed to date, have any serious relationship. Parents, grandparents, everybody encouraged college students to only concentrate on studying. Once they graduated, then immediately they were swamped with all these marriage arrangement proposals, but not until graduation day.

DePue: Was that another reason to come to the United States for graduate school?

Devine: No, no, no.

DePue: Tell me about the process that you went through to decide to go to the United States. That was obviously part of the arrangement when you went to college there in the first place.

Devine: Yes, that was my hope and expectation. And, as expected, I was always at the top, so there was no question about my getting a full-tuition scholarship to a graduate school somewhere in the United States.

DePue: How did your parents feel about that?

Devine: Oh, they were delighted. You know, as I probably said before, to my mother, I could do no wrong. No matter what it was, whatever I decided, she went along

with it. She was terribly upset that she would not be able to see me for several years. She was broken up. In fact, at the airport, she cried so much that I just could not stand it anymore. I barely even said, good bye to her. I just turned around and left, because she was going to continue to cry.

DePue: She had to be fearing also that you might never come back.

Devine: Right, right, yeah.

DePue: I know that that was not the only traumatic experience that happened before you came to the United States, that you discovered another piece of news.

Devine: What? Oh, the adoption news, yes. When I heard that, I just immediately went into total denial, no.

DePue: How did you hear it?

Devine: Oh, the man who brought me from Manchuria to Seoul and gave me to his nephew and nephew's wife, he told me, over lunch. He said, "I'm getting to be an old man, and you are going to the United States, and you may not return at all. Or, if you return, it may be several years from now. I may be dead. So, I need to tell you something that I kept from you all your life. You have been adopted," he said.

I just acted like I didn't hear a thing, because my mind just totally rejected it. It just cannot be possible. First, if I knew I had been adopted, then I would not have felt so much guilt for having been the cause of my parents' unhappiness, of having to invite a mistress. All that guilt and all the guilt during the time I felt I needed to become ten times better than a boy to make my mother happy, all that was not necessary. All that suffering and anguish and efforts, staying up all night to study for the exam the next day, all that was for nothing. There was no reason for me to drive myself insane like that. And I did that, all my young life. And here, this man is telling me there was no reason for it. You have biological brothers, older one, twin brother, and younger brother. If I lived in that house, it would

Maija's biological family. (left to right) older brother, Soon-back Rhee; twin brother, Jongjeon Rhee; mother, Whock-sill Jeon; and younger brother, Soon-il Rhee, 1994

not have mattered whether I became ten times better than a boy or less good than one girl. It would not have mattered. I would not have driven myself insane trying to reach this goal, which I thought might be impossible for me to fulfill.

DePue: Why did he decide he needed to tell you this?

Devine: Because he thought he might die before I came back to Korea, and he just felt he needed to clear his heart out before I left. I went into a complete denial, and this is what happened. My older brother and my twin brother and my younger brother, they all knew I was their sister. They came and visited me. I was only one who didn't know they were my actual birth brothers.

DePue: You mean, your biological family was living close to you?

Devine: Yes, in the same town. After they moved down from Manchuria, they came to Seoul. My adoptive parents were living in Seoul, too. So, we were all living in same town.

DePue: All of these adults knew about this relationship.

Devine: Yes, everybody knew, except for me. My older brother came to visit me, at least once a month, and took me swimming to the river and picnics. My twin brother began to come and see me, too, during high school days. We went playing ping pong. But I didn't see the younger brother, ever, before I went to the United States for graduate studies.

When I arrived in St. Louis, I immediately attracted the attention of an Italian boy, Italian guy, who was getting a masters in psychology and counseling, and he became interested in me. We got engaged, and I sent the engagement photo to my older brother, because older brother and I, I knew him all my life, because he came to see me and my family. So, I sent the picture to him, and he apparently shared that photo with my twin brother and the younger brother.

I got a letter from the younger brother, one day. He said, "*Nuna*." He called me *Nuna*. *Nuna* means older sister. It's an endearing name for older sister, *Nuna*. He said, "I have been waiting all my life to be able to call you *Nuna*. I was forbidden to call you *Nuna,* because I wasn't supposed to tell you we were brother and sister. But now I can call you *Nuna*."

He said, "You know, the picture you sent? In that, you look like, exactly, my mother. You're like the twin sister of my mother," and so on. He wrote this letter. You know, I was a heartless little witch. I was in such a complete denial about this and didn't want anybody to think and know that I knew about this adoption, that I wrote a letter back to him. I wrote only one line. I said, "Why the hell should I look like your mother?" That's all I said. And never… He never wrote me again.

DePue: Did you actually not believe it, or there was one part of you that did believe it and understood it and the other part just couldn't accept it?

Devine: Right, couldn't accept it, yes. There was great possibility I look liked her, but I didn't want to admit that. I didn't want to accept it. I didn't want him to think that I knew I was adopted.

DePue: I'm curious. What were you thinking? Your older brother was coming to visit you; your twin brother was coming to visit you; were you thinking they just wanted to be friends, or were you confused that maybe they wanted to have a more serious relationship?

Devine: No, no, no, they were known to me as the sons of my parents' friends. They were my parents' friends.

DePue: So, you didn't think anything more of it than that?

Devine: No, absolutely not.

DePue: Did it change the relationship you had with your parents, at all?

Devine: No, because I kept it as a complete, total, hundred percent denial, on my part. I didn't want to let my mother, the adoptive mother, know I knew about the adoption, because, even letting her know I knew, I felt that would be an act of betrayal of our relationship. If she knew that I knew, she would know that, "Oh, my daughter now knows she's not mine." You know? So, she would feel completely and totally hurt. She would feel like she lost me. She would feel like I was no longer hers alone; I was also part of another family. I just couldn't bear to have her have that feeling of betrayal. So, I completely never, never told her that I knew about the adoption.

DePue: It's interesting to me that they never wanted to tell you, because they thought this would be so painful and damaging to you.

Devine: Right, right.

DePue: And now, these roles are switched.

Devine: Yes. Now I knew, but, because I thought it would be so painful for her to know that I knew, I never, never told her.

DePue: When did you find out about your older brother's role in the Korean War?

Soon-back Rhee, as an 18-year-old Korean Navy sergeant during the Korean War.

Devine: Oh, I learned more and more about that. I knew that he was in the Navy because, when he was in the Navy, during the Korean War and before and after, he came in Navy uniform. So, I knew he was with the Navy. But his involvement in the Incheon landing, that part I learned afterward. Because I had a continuing relationship with him, throughout my elementary school, through teenage years and college, we just continued that relationship. It's just that I never told him I knew he was my blood brother. We continued the same relationship. DePue: Did he know that you knew?

Devine: No, no, this is the whole thing. Nobody…

DePue: This friend tells you, but nobody else now is aware that you know this secret that's been hidden away from you for all these years?

Devine: No, no. But they didn't tell me, but they figured this man might have told me. So, without me knowing, they secretly, among themselves, suspected that I knew. But I didn't know they suspected that I knew. This gets a little complicated.

DePue: Well, this is going to sound terribly trivial, but this is the gist for so many soap operas, and Koreans thrive on this.

Devine: Yes, exactly. Yes, yes. The *hallu*, the Korean wave of all these movies being world popular movies, this is because these family secrets and drama behind every family, it's just continual fodder for movies.

DePue: Did you apply to a variety of different schools in the United States to attend?

Devine: Actually, no. I just followed the advice of the college president, who recommended that I apply to the St. Louis University, because most of these Jesuit professors who came to Sogang, they came through St. Louis University, or Milwaukee University. That's also Jesuit.

DePue: I wasn't aware that St. Louis University was a Jesuit school.

Devine: Oh, it is. Yeah, it is. It's a Jesuit university, so I'm Jesuit educated, throughout.

DePue: Was there anything you remember, specifically, about the decision to become a Christian and the conversion ceremony. Was there anything like that, a baptism?

Devine: Oh, yeah, I have a baptism and the pictures. Maybe I should have brought the baptism picture.

DePue: Was that a meaningful ceremony for you?

Devine: It was, very meaningful. I thought I was starting a new life, kind of leaving behind Korean Buddhism, Confucianism, folk beliefs. Now I'm adopting a new belief and new way of life. I was coming to United States, too. So, it was all new stage of my life.

DePue: Tell me about the actual travelling to the United States and, especially, arriving in the United States.

Devine: Oh, yeah, okay. Well, you know, I didn't have any money for the airplane tickets. My parents were not able to afford that. So, luckily, there was an announcement about a Fulbright Travel Grant, given to deserving, poor students. I applied for that, and there was a written exam, oral exam, and I got that. So, round-trip plane tickets, were free, and I had full-tuition scholarship from St. Louis University.

The president of my college, Sogang College, at that time, Father Killoren, introduced me to Mr. and Mrs. Curtis Ford, of St. Louis. He was the CEO of St. Louis Steel Company. They lived in Ladue, one of the exclusive neighborhoods in St. Louis. So, he arranged for me to live in that house for free, get room and board.

DePue: This is Father Killoren?

Devine: Father Killoren.

DePue: Was he in Korea or in the United States?

Devine: Yes, he was in Korea. He was our first president of the college. Before the university became a university, it was a college, and he was the President of Sogang College.

DePue: So, you've got a way to get to the United States. You've got tuition paid for, once you get there. But that doesn't pay for quite everything.

Devine: No. So, I got room and board, but I had no pocket money. But, at that time, Korean government allowed only $50 per student going abroad to take with her or him. So, I had $50 in my pocket when I came to St. Louis.

Because my visa application took a long time, and it got delayed—you know, we had to go through anti-communism screening, too—the police investigated our family background. Every student going abroad, their family background was checked thoroughly to see if we had anybody connected to the North Korean communists.

DePue: Which government, the United States or Korean?

Devine: No, this is Korean government did that. Passport and visa application processing involved Korean government's investigation into the family

background. So, it got delayed. Finally, when I got the visa to come, I was late to school by maybe a week. At the registration, they said, "You have to pay late fee," which is $35. So, out of the $50 I brought in my pocket, they took $35. So, I had $15 for the semester or for the whole year, for whatever I needed.

For the whole semester, I never once got a Coke or soft drink out of the machine. I couldn't afford it. We were eating lunches with other students, and they were taking the soft drinks out of the machines. I had never done that, until Mrs. Ford, after about a month or two of me living in that house, she said, "You know, I just never saw you getting any mail that had some money in it." And she said, "If you would help me with some bookkeeping, paying, writing checks and things, I'll give you some pocket money." So, that's what I did. I kept books for her, and she gave me some, $15, $20, every few weeks.

DePue: I've heard your stories about the first encounters with Americans, and then again in Seoul, when you occasionally would encounter Americans. What were your expectations before you arrived in the United States? And what did you discover about America after you got here?

Devine: Actually, my expectations were pretty high, and Americans met those. I did not find them disappointing.

DePue: Are you talking in terms of the quality of life, the—

Devine: Quality of life, the way they treated foreign students. I didn't know very much about, at that time, the racial conflict between the whites and African-Americans. So, those things kind of escaped me. What I saw was just Caucasians, mostly, relating with foreign students. I thought they were very positive and supportive. Yeah, I really enjoyed living in the United States.

DePue: Did you find some things that were difficult to adjust to?

Devine: Yes, there were. For example, you know, my English was not perfect, and it's not perfect now, and it wasn't perfect then. There were some mistakes I made with the English language. For example, after living in that Ford household, I needed to leave, change my living arrangement. So, when I left, I left a note to Mr. and Mrs. Ford, thanking them for having kept me there. This is the mistake I made. In that, I said, "Thank you for everything you did to me." I should have said, "Thank you for everything you did for me." But my English was not at that level yet. So, what I did was, "Thank you for everything you did to me," to me. Only later, I realized, oh my god, I made a mistake. I meant to say something nice, and it just didn't end up being nice.

DePue: I assume they were very gracious about it, though, and probably never even mentioned it to you.

Devine: Well, you know, there were some circumstances that might have…I don't know, actually.

DePue: Were there other Koreans going to school?

Devine: Yes, yes. We got together with other Korean students from other universities. Also, we had a small group of graduates from the same college, Sogang College, so we hung out together, yeah.

DePue: How about Korean food? I suspect, suddenly, that wasn't as available.

Devine: Right, it was not available, and so, the next best thing to *kimchi* was coleslaw. There was one barbeque place in St. Louis that had famously wonderful coleslaw. So, I got addicted to that coleslaw. I ate that as much as I could. Another thing that was very similar to me, to *kimchi,* was green beans drenched in Wishbone Italian salad dressing.

DePue: (laughs)

Devine: After I left the Fords, I lived in DeMattias Hall. DeMattias Hall is a convent that belonged to St. Louis University. I went to live there. For room and board, I and another Sogang grad, we worked in the kitchen, drying their dishes and also doing work at the switchboard. And there, oh man, once a week or so, the nuns would have these green beans, just drenched in Wishbone Italian salad dressing. Oh, when that happened, I just ate a whole mountain of that and ignored all other dishes, (laughs) because it was like *kimchi*.

DePue: Was there no other place you could get Korean food, authentic Korean food?

Devine: No. The only times that I did have authentic Korean food was if a Korean faculty member invited Korean students to his or her home at Christmastime or Thanksgiving time. That's the only time we tasted Korean food. After I got into an apartment where I could cook my own things, I made my own *kimchi*, yeah.

DePue: Well, that requires some ingredients that you're not going to find at the average American grocery store, at the time. Was there a Korean grocery store, an oriental grocery store?

Devine: Some friends who had cars might have taken me to oriental grocery store, but I don't remember it that much. I could get garlic and green onion in American grocery stores, and they had cabbage—maybe not Korean cabbage—but they definitely had western cabbage and carrots. We just found whatever ingredient we could find in American grocery stores and made *kimchi*.

DePue: How about the red pepper?

Devine: Red pepper too; they had red pepper.

DePue: That you can get in American grocery stores?

Devine: Yeah, in American grocery stores. You know, I would make it once in a great while, because I was under tremendous pressure to read all these books for my degree work. So, when I did make *kimchi*, I just couldn't stop eating it. My fiancé saw me eating this *kimchi*, and he said, "Oh, oh, don't just drink it. Don't just drink it." I said, "I'm not drinking it. I'm using a spoon." (both laugh)

DePue: Did you find it difficult to get around? You didn't have a car.

Devine: I didn't have a car, and so, yeah, I just had to get rides from my boyfriend or other friends. But I was just so busy, studying in the library. I didn't have places I really wanted to go, anyway.

DePue: You mentioned that this boyfriend asked you to get married?

Devine: Um hmm.

DePue: What were your thoughts about the whole situation, at that time?

Devine: I liked American men. They liked me, and the feeling was mutual. I loved American men. They're—

DePue: But this is one particular man.

Devine: One particular man. He was a very good man, good hearted, great sense of humor. He was studying to get a masters in psychology and counseling, a very sensitive person and very well-read person. So, there was nothing I didn't like about him.

DePue: Were you seriously thinking about getting married, at that time?

Devine: Yes, we were engaged. Um hmm.

DePue: Well, I know that didn't eventually work out for you. But, before we get to there, was there anything else that you were surprised at the difficulty, in adjusting to life in the United States?

Devine: There were things that I couldn't understand, like this Ford family. They were super rich people. They had horses for their teenage daughter and son, and they had at least one apple tree that was dropping these delicious looking apples, on the ground; they were rolling on the ground, but they were not picking those to eat. They were buying apples from the grocery store. I just…I didn't understand that. You know, they had all these apples in their trees, and

they were buying them from grocery store. That kind of rich class ideas, I just didn't get it.

DePue: Did they emphasize or—I'm going to use a word here, maybe it's a bit inappropriate—did they flaunt their wealth, like you would have expected a rich Korean, possibly, to do?

Devine: No, no. They were not flaunting in any way. It was just their way of life. No, I didn't think they were flaunting it. But another thing I had difficulty understanding is the teenagers. They were just so much into sex and dating, sex and dating culture of young people, teenagers. I mean, Koreans were opposed to dating and sex lifestyle for college students. Here, in United States, I found that high school students were having sex and constantly talking about dating and matters related to that. That shocked me. I didn't like that at all. I inherited the Confucian cultural traditioning of kind of a puritanism, puritanism as it relates to sexual matters.

DePue: So, that's something that happens after you get married.

Devine: Yeah, right. So, I was scandalized by teenage behaviors, especially as it related to sex and dating.

DePue: Were you attending church during this time?

Devine: The Mass, Catholic chapel. There was one in St. Louis University, and we went there.

DePue: How about your intentions after you got done with graduate school?

Devine: Oh, my intention was completely, hundred percent, to return to Korea and teach there. That's why I chose English literature as my major. If I knew I would be coming back to United States and living here the rest of my life, I would have majored in anything but English literature, because native-speaking Americans were getting masters and PhDs in English literature. There were PhDs in English literature, a dime a dozen in this country. And how could I compete against those people to get teaching jobs in this country? So, I would not have majored in English literature. I would have done journalism, library science, whatever else.

DePue: I think St. Louis University has a good law school—not just a law school, but a good law school.

Devine: Yeah, law school, I…no, no. No law school anymore in my life. I just didn't like that law school idea.

DePue: So, you had been focused so much on becoming a lawyer, but it sounds like you could never envision yourself being a lawyer.

Devine: No, no, and not envision myself going through what I needed to go through, all the studying, to become a lawyer. I just didn't think I could do it.

DePue: Did you have a chance to travel around the United States at all, during this time?

Devine: No, not during the graduate school days. After I got my masters from St. Louis University, I did go to Minneapolis, thinking I would get another masters degree, this time in library science. So, I did go to University of Minnesota for one semester.

DePue: Were you able to keep in touch with your family on a pretty regular basis?

Devine: Oh, yes. I wrote to them.

DePue: Telephone calls, or strictly writing?

Devine: No, strictly writing. Telephone calls were too expensive and elaborate process to make the phone calls.

DePue: When did you actually change schools and go to Minneapolis? Is this the University of Minnesota, you said?

Devine: Yes, the fall semester of '68. Fall semester of '68. I got my masters during the spring semester of '68. Then I worked during that summer, and then saved up enough money to pay for my way to Minneapolis. I might have gotten a scholarship there, too, because I couldn't have saved all that money in one summer. So, I must have gotten a scholarship there, but I worked for the travel and dorm fee, and I was there for one semester.

DePue: You majored, at the University of Minnesota, in library science?

Devine: Library science.

DePue: Okay.

Devine: I hated it, yeah.

DePue: What did you hate about library science?

Devine: Why did I hate it? When I took the course, called "Reference Books," the instructor expected us to memorize everything that was in each reference book, and there were 200 of those. I thought, this is crazy. I just don't want to memorize all these books. What I want is, I want to be the person, the customer, asking reference librarian, "Hey, I want to find this. Where can I go to find this?" I want to be on the customer side, not the reference librarian side. So, that's when I decided, no, I don't want to do this. I have to find

something else to do. Then a job offer came through, from Korea, to come and teach.

DePue: A couple more questions, before we get you back to Korea. This is what I was trying to think of before. What was your masters' thesis about?

Devine: Oh, that was William Faulkner, his novel, titled, "*Light in August*" and C. G. Jung's concept of the Self. C. G. Jung. *Jung's Concept of the Self.* That was the title of my thesis.

DePue: C. G. Jung is—

Devine: C. G. Jung is a German psychiatrist, psychologist, who advocated the importance of all human beings recognizing the important role of the self-conscious mind. Much of the human conflicts and unhappiness rise from trying to live with only the conscious mind, the conscious mind being in control of the life. But there's unconscious mind that we have to pay attention to. When you have a balance between conscious mind and unconscious mind—integration between the two parts of ourselves—then, we would be happier.

DePue: After hearing your whole story and the trauma that you've gone through, I'm not surprised that you were drawn to that particular philosophy.

Devine: Right, right.

DePue: Did you do any dating, up in Minnesota?

Devine: Yes, I dated, and that became a very serious relationship. But he was not ready for marriage, and I had a visa problem. I was on a student visa, and either I needed to go back to Korea, or marry a person with a U.S. citizenship. He was not ready. So, when the teaching job offer came through, I took that, and I told him, "You know where to find me. I have to go to Korea and teach." So, that's what I did.

DePue: It sounds like, when you left St. Louis, you were the one who wasn't ready to get married.

Devine: Right, right.

DePue: And when you left Minnesota—

Devine: He was not ready.

DePue: —he was not ready.

Devine: Yeah.

DePue: What was the offer you got to come back to Korea?

Devine: What was the offer? Soodo Women's Teachers College—which later became Sejong University—offered me a full-time teaching job, teaching English literature.

DePue: First class, second class, third class?

Devine: Oh, second class.

DePue: But, you say that with no regret.

Devine: It was a teaching job, um hmm. And it was a women's college, and I liked the fact that I was teaching at a women's college. I wanted to raise the consciousness of women, Korean women, about what Korean society was doing to them, and to become aware of other ways of life out there that will raise their consciousness.

DePue: Well, speaking of having consciousness-raising experiences and Jungian psychology and then, plopping it all down in 1967 and 1968, United States, which was essentially a cauldron of conflict at the time—

Devine: Right, yes.

DePue: —were you observing or trying to understand what was going on in the United States in those years?

Devine: You know, I tried. I tried very hard to keep up with news. *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines were my regular source of information, outside my own little world of graduate school, also TV programs. Oh there were some TV programs I really loved. It was "I Spy." I don't know if you know "I Spy?"

DePue: Bill Cosby, and…I can't remember the white character.

Devine: Yeah, Robert Culp?

DePue: Robert Culp, yes.

Devine: Yeah, Robert Culp and Bill Cosby. "I Spy" was one of them. Oh, another one was "Run for Life." That's…Oh, what's his name? Oh, my goodness, yeah—

DePue: So, you had a little bit of time to watch American TV.

Devine: Yes, yes, I did. Those two programs I watched, pretty religiously, yes. "Bonanza," once in a while, I watched that.

DePue: Which is quite different from "I Spy," I would think.

Devine: (Laughs) Yeah, so I didn't watch much of "Bonanza." There was another one, family drama, um. I forget the name of it, but it was just a family drama.

DePue: Most of these are dramas that you're talking about, not comedies? You weren't drawn to the comedies as much?

Devine: No. You know, humor is the most difficult part of learning a language or learning a culture. Humor doesn't translate very well. I appreciated humor, American humor especially. All those guys, three men I dated most seriously in my life, they all had sense of humor. That's one thing that ran common. Their sense of humor became better and better, as I went along with…Current, my husband, his sense of humor is the best. It is the best, because his humor is just natural. He's not trying to be funny. It just comes out natural.

DePue: I would think, when you're mixing cultures together, there's lots of opportunity for humor.

Devine: Right. (laughs)

DePue: Lots of places for misunderstandings and miscommunications and humorous situations, I would think.

Devine: Right, right.

DePue: Well, the main thing that was consuming the United States, at that time, was the Vietnam War and the growing resistance to the Vietnam War in the United States, especially among student populations. You had to be seeing that, somewhat, in both St. Louis and Minnesota.

Devine: Yes, of course.

DePue: What was your feeling about that?

Devine: Yes, anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, movements, were boiling at that time. But I am very apolitical person. I would take in the news items, but not particularly feel the urge to take action and join demonstrations, for example. I did not become an activist in any way. I only tried to keep up with the news, just knowing what was going on. Of course, the tragic events like…Was it Cleveland?

DePue: Kent State?

Devine: Kent State. I kept up with the news, but I did not become an activist.

DePue: Were you aware that South Korea had a sizeable number of troops in Vietnam?

Devine: Right, right, yes. And later I learned that that became a big basis for Park Chung Hee's economic development forum.

DePue: Park Chung Hee being the president later on.

Devine: President later on.

DePue: Okay, so when did you come back to Korea? When was that?

Devine: The spring semester of '69.

DePue: Would it be fair to say, you were just a little bit broken hearted about coming back?

Devine: Oh, yes, yes. I was a mess. I was a mess. But, I knew I needed to pull myself up and do this teaching job well. I enjoyed teaching immensely, and I was in charge of putting out the school English-language newspaper. So I surrounded myself with a few good students, and we worked on getting this newsletter out. I forget if it was every other week or once a month, but I formed a very close bonding, particularly with these reporter students.

DePue: Were you—looking for the right word here—overt in your efforts to talk to these young ladies about, perhaps, there's another way of looking at the world, other than Confucianism?

Devine: Um hmm.

DePue: How strident were you in pushing those views?

Devine: In conveying those views? I was not really a hard-sell person on that point. I was teaching mostly literature, and I conveyed those ideas through reading literature, like *Catcher in the Rye*, which I understand, even with Americans, that became a life-changing experience, reading *Catcher in the Rye*. I know that was one of the books I taught.

DePue: Did you stay in contact with your American boyfriend for a while?

Devine: For a while, yes. And then, I met my future husband, because he came as a Peace Corps volunteer.

DePue: Okay. Let's talk about that then, how that happened.

Devine: Yeah. He was assigned to teach at Sogang University, my alma mater. As I mentioned before, Sogang University priests were heavily criticized by Korean educators for establishing that school, which will become only brain drain. And here I was, I was one of the first graduates to get a masters' degree and come back. My priest professors at Sogang just could not stop talking about me and bragging about me. So, when Michael came to that college to

teach English as a second language, every other day or so a priest would say, “Have you met Maija yet? You know, our graduate who came back to Korea. She’s teaching at Soodo Women’s Teachers College.” So, after hearing this several times, he thought he would check me out.

DePue: I might have missed this. Sogang is a co-ed school?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: Okay.

Devine: So, those guys that I dated, they were co-ed.

DePue: So, essentially, the priests set you up on a blind date?

Devine: Yes, I know. The priests, they just kind of dropped an axe on their own toes by talking about me, bragging about me coming back to Korea, teaching. But then, they ended up being an unofficial matchmaker for me and Michael to get married. After that, we left and came back to the United States, and they lost me. (laughs)

DePue: When you came back to Korea, was there an attempt by your family to arrange a marriage for you, as well?

Devine: Yes, yes. I did go to some of these arranged marriage proposal meetings.

DePue: Describe one of those for me.

Devine: Oh, a miserable and pathetic affair. I was not interested at all in meeting any Korean men. But, once in a while, I just complied, just to please. Just to get my mom off my back or our landlady off of my back, I had a couple of those meetings. But I was totally not interested. It was just a formality I went through.

DePue: What happened? Did you go to a restaurant or what?

Devine: Yes, we went to a restaurant and talked, and nothing came out of it. I didn’t call the guy; the guy didn’t call me, and that was the end of it.

DePue: You described this before as, these two people would never even see each other before. Well, now I guess there’d been some progress. You’re sitting across the table, at least. I assume you’re looking at each other and sizing each other up?

Devine: Right, right. This is more modern-day kind of a pre-date meeting, you know. If they met and they liked each other, then they would start dating. So, this is for 1970s and ‘80s and modern days, they do meet like this. But, before the

Korean War, the couples just [claps hands] agreed to marry without seeing each other.

DePue: Maija, it seems to me, though, that what the Catholic priests were doing wasn't entirely different from what your mother and your mother's friends were trying to do.

Devine: Right, yeah.

DePue: Do you remember the first time you met Michael?

Devine: Yes, we met at a tea room in Shin-Chon, Shin-Chon Rotary. There's a circular rotary, and that area is called Shin-Chon. On the east side, there's Yonsei University and Ewha University. On the west side, there's Sogang University. There are three major universities in that area. We met at a tea room, right around the Shin-Chon Rotary.

He was already there; I was always late. He was always there first. He stood up, like a good American gentleman. He stood up, and he just rose and rose and rose and rose, (laughs) because he was six feet three tall. And he had just all these curly ringlets of hair, all over. Oh, I just… My first impression was, "Wow, this is really different." But immediately, after we sat down and started talking, he just made me laugh with his humor, and he is just kind of… Good naturedness kind of shines out of his face. Kind hearted, generous, gentlemanly, sensitive personality just shone through. He was very well travelled, and, of course, extremely well read. He just was a wealth of interesting stories in history, world affairs, travels. So, you know, I could just listen to him, on and on.

DePue: I'm confused about one thing in this. You talked about him standing up, and he just kept getting taller and taller. You'd already said that Koreans really are attracted to somebody who's tall. Was he, perhaps, too tall?

Devine: Too tall, yes, yes. See, the interesting thing is that, my guy I was engaged to in St. Louis, was like five-eleven. The guy I dated in Minneapolis was about six-one? And Michael was six-three. So, the guys I was dating, their height was getting higher and higher (both laugh). I jokingly say, that's the reason why I stopped dating any more and married him.

DePue: How long did it take, before the subject of marriage came up with Michael?

Devine: About six months. We met in March, I think in March, and he proposed in September, early October? And we were married November 7, at the chapel of Sogang College.

DePue: Was it tough, at all, to turn your back to the young man in Minneapolis?

Devine: It was. It was very, very tough.

DePue: Did Michael know about any of that?

Devine: Yes, I told him. Even the first…second date. When he asked me for the second date, I decided to just tell him, be honest and be open. I am in a relationship, and here's the guy.

DePue: How'd he take all of that?

Devine: Well, I don't know, but he asked for a date again, so (both laugh) I'll let you think whatever you want to think.

DePue: So, I'm in a competition, but I'm in the right place, and he's in the wrong place. (both laugh) What did your parents think about you marrying Michael?

Devine: Yeah. My parents, as I mentioned before, they were very supportive of whatever I wanted to do, major decisions. They did not ever object, fuss at all. My father, I don't think, ever met him, but my mother and my aunt met him. This is an interesting thing: my aunt, ever a very interested in the looks of men and women—

DePue: Is this the shaman aunt?

Devine: No, not the shaman aunt, but my cousin's mother. When we sat down with Michael, at an Italian restaurant, one of the things my aunt said is, "Well, Michael is handsomer, as a man, than you, as a girl." You know, referring to me, Maija, as a girl, potential bride here. She said, "He is handsomer as a man than the bride-to-be, as a woman." I translated this to Michael, and he immediately loved her. (both laugh)

DePue: At that point in your life, did it not bother you to have that said?

Devine: No, I was pleased. I was pleased that I was marrying up, (both laugh) in terms of physical appearance, at least.

DePue: Were either of your parents and any of your relatives attending in the marriage?

Maija (center) and her husband, Michael Devine (right), on their wedding day in November, 1970.

Devine: Only my aunt and my cousin and my mother attended the marriage ceremony.

DePue: Is there any reason why nobody else did?

Devine: I wanted to keep it very small and not advertise, because, at that time,

Koreans' attitude toward interracially married couples was extremely negative, because, as you mentioned early—I think you did—men dating Korean women, the Korean women were all deemed to be prostitutes. You know, G.I. women, G.I. princesses. So, they were looked upon as prostitutes, and we could not walk the streets without some Korean man yelling out rude obscenities at us. So, for many reasons like that, I decided to keep the wedding very quiet. Plus, I needed to quit the job and follow him to the United States. I just wanted to quietly quit the job and quietly leave the country.

DePue: Was this a Western-type ceremony or a Korean or a—

Devine: It was a Catholic Mass.

DePue: What did you wear?

Devine: A white wedding gown and white veil.

DePue: A traditional Western garb.

Devine: Traditional Western, yeah. The priest who married us, later, he quit being a priest, and he married one of the students. He and his wife lived in the United States, and then, that marriage broke up. For a while, he was in a relationship with another woman. He was no longer a priest. So, Michael and I have a standing joke about this. "Hey, are we still married? Is our marriage still legit here? (both laugh) The priest is no longer a priest, married and divorced…" and all that.

Michael Devine (center right), with some of his new in-laws on his wedding day. The women are, two friends (bottom) and, from left to right, Maija's cousin, aunt, and adoptive mother.

DePue: Well, you've got the papers to prove that.

Devine: Yeah, yes.

DePue: This is going way back. It sounds like papers never existed to show that you had ever been legally adopted.

Devine: No. There's no adoption paper. I am just on my father's family registry as the eldest child of him and my mother. The mistress's name did not ever go on there, even though she had four sons and one daughter. My mother is listed as the mother of me and the four sons and daughter, so, six children.

DePue: That would be the closest thing to any kind of a legal document.

Devine: Yeah, and when I came to United States, and I was inviting my mother to come to live with us in Ohio, while we were expecting our second child. When we went with her to apply for her permanent resident papers, the court people saw the family registry that showed that this woman, my mother, was the mother of six children, okay? I'm the oldest, and I am asking her to live with me forever and ever, as a permanent resident in the United States. The court people said, "How can this woman abandon those children in Korea? You know, she's the mother of six children. You are the oldest, and she wants to come live with you and leave all those young people in Korea?" So, I had to explain the whole mistress…(both laugh).

DePue: That's probably more than he was ready for, at the time.

Devine: Yes (both laugh).

DePue: When did you come to the United States?

Devine: After we got married in 1970, November 7, we came to the States at Christmastime, in '70.

DePue: Was Michael Catholic?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: And you went to where, then? Where did he come back to?

Devine: We lived in Columbus, Ohio, because he wanted to get a Ph.D. in history from Ohio State University.

DePue: How long were you there?

Devine: We were there until 1972. In 1972, our first child, the boy who is now a Benedictine monk, was born, in July of '72. And that fall, in August, we moved to Athens, Ohio, because Michael was offered a job to be an instructor in history, in the history department.

DePue: Is that a high school or is that at the—

Devine: No, at Ohio U, in Athens.

DePue: Well, this is the second time you've been to the United States. Was it different from being a student, now being married?

Devine: Yes. One of the things was, I came into contact with non-student, Korean women population, living in the United States. They were married to American husbands, and many of the American husbands were former G.I.s.

So, these were women who worked in military compounds in Korea or elsewhere. Many of them were office girls, and many of them worked in the officers' club or, you know, eating establishments, inside military compound. Some of them were prostitutes, okay?

But outsiders could not distinguish who were office girls and who were prostitutes, so they lumped them all together. Koreans and…mostly Koreans, Koreans married to Koreans. They just saw Korean women married to Americans, as just G.I. princesses, former prostitutes. So, even though these women attended Korean churches, where Korean women married to Korean men. They all attended the same church, but they were like water and oil. They did not completely integrate. They were segregated.

I realized this in Columbus, Ohio. I am a college graduate and had a master's degree and taught at a women's college, but I was being lumped together with these women, who might have been prostitutes, by Koreans who were married among themselves. I found that many of these women were illiterate. Even in Korea, they had never gone to school, or they received very limited amount of school. Some of them didn't even know how to write in Korean, let alone, knowing enough English to be able to hold jobs.

So, I became very, very involved with these women, being discriminated against by their own Koreans, who had married other Koreans, and being looked down upon. So, voluntarily, I held English classes, to teach these women written and oral skills, taught them grammar. What really became important is, many of them wanted to learn enough English to find a job somewhere. Also, to be able to do that, they needed to drive.

They needed to get driver's license, and their English was not good enough to get driver's licenses. So, what I did is, I got a driver's license book, and I translated, word for word, line for line, I translated into Korean. And I recorded the entire book. I would read one sentence in English and then, translate it into Korean and recorded that for them. So, they could go through, with the book and recorder, and understand what the English was saying. That tape became so important to them, because one person studied it and studied it, with this book and the recording. She passed the driver's license exam and got a job, which became a huge, big celebration among themselves. And then, that tape got passed around. Even after I'd moved away, and I was no longer teaching them, it got passed around. I heard later, how many people owe their lives to that tape, because they went on and got their drivers' licenses and got jobs.

DePue: Did you already have a driver's license, at that time?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: When did you get your driver's license?

Devine: That was…it must have been '71?

DePue: So, after you were married, though.

Devine: Yes. Michael tried to teach me how to drive, and that was total failure. (both laugh)

DePue: So, the old adage proves right, in this case.

Devine: Yes, yes. You know, he thought, "Oh, you don't listen to me. You're not listening to me. I said, 'Do this, and do that.'" I said, "Michael, I am trying to listen. I understand it in my head, but it's motor skill, and my leg and my hands are not following."

DePue: Were you trying to learn how to drive on a standard or an automatic transmission?

Devine: It was a standard, a stick shift.

DePue: Making it even doubly hard.

Devine: Even doubly hard.

DePue: Did you work at the time? You've already talked about this school.

Devine: Yes, I worked for Ohio State University in the Slavic Languages and Literature Department, as a typist. I was a clerk typist.

DePue: Did you have aspirations to be teaching English or a literature course some place?

Devine: Of course I did, but I knew that I was up against stiff competition from native speakers, holding these jobs. So, I never tried.

DePue: When did your mother come and live with you?

Devine: In '76.

DePue: So, this is a little bit further down the road.

Devine: No, '74.

DePue: I assume that Michael could speak Korean, as well.

Devine: Yes, a little bit.

DePue: You spoke better English than he spoke Korean?

Devine: Oh, much, much better, yes. His Korean is very basic.

DePue: If you could, tell me…go through the rest of your children here. Bret is the first one, 1972?

Devine: Yes, um hmm.

Maija and husband, Michael, holding their son, Bret, in 1972.

DePue: When were the rest of the children born?

Devine: Oh, Chris, Christopher, is '75, and Mia is '77, and Lisa is '80, and Brian is '83.

DePue: For the children, did they grow up in a family where they're exposed to both of the cultures?

Devine: Right.

DePue: How did that work out? How did it work itself out?

Devine: Oh, yeah, it really worked out well. We loved our children and we both appreciated having the third adult there. We had a built-in babysitter, and our children just adored her. She was a very loving grandmother. All her life, she wanted to have babies and children to take care of, and I was the only one she took care of. Then, when she came to live with us, I kept having babies. There was another baby and another baby to take care of, and she just loved it, yeah.

DePue: Did she do a lot of the cooking, as well?

Maija, oldest daughter, Mia, on the right and her baby sister Lisa, in the early 1980s, Cincinnati, OH.

Devine: Yes, she did a lot of cooking.

DePue: So, you got Korean food.

Devine: Yes, finally, I had just plenty of Korean food any time I wanted, and the children, too. They were exposed to all this Korean food.

DePue: How much Korean cooking did you know and did you do?

Devine: Actually, I didn't know how to do any of it when I got married. But, because I looked at, watched my mom do the cooking. She would say things once in a while: "Oh, for this you have to do…Make sure to do this and that." So, I learned this, a pinch of this and a pinch of that, kind of school of cooking of Korean food, and I became pretty good at it.

DePue: How about American cooking? I assume that Michael wasn't ready to give up all American food, after he got married.

Devine: Oh yeah, yeah. Right after we got married, we were given a—as a wedding gift by one of his former college friends and his wife—a cookbook, called *Dinner for Two*. When I opened that cookbook, my eyes just totally opened up, because I had not even seen any cookbook in my life in Korea. I'm sure there were cookbooks, but they didn't come to my attention. So, when I realized there's such a thing as a cookbook, and I went through and saw the recipes, I thought, "Oh my god." A whole new world opened for me.

I experimented. What happened is, once I experimented it, and it turned out well—but even if it turned out well—second time, I would never do the same thing again. I would add my own touch, whatever. If I felt it could be spicier, I would put a little pinch of red pepper flakes and that kind of thing. So, I invented my own recipes. I have salad dressing that our children think I should patent it, and I would become a rich woman. (laughs)

DePue: What was the favorite Korean food for the family?

Devine: They, of course, liked *bulgogi* [grilled beef] and *mandu* [dumplings], um hmm. *Bulgogi* and *mandu, chap chae* [fried glass noodles] with meat and vegetables.

DePue: How about American food, American dishes?

Devine: American dishes, oh. Fried chicken was their favorite and spaghetti with meat balls, lasagna and chicken pot pies.

DePue: When did Michael get his Ph.D.?

Devine: In '74.

DePue: And he was already working, at that time?

Devine: Yes, he was teaching part-time at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. That's when he worked on his dissertation. And, in '74, he finished. Then, he became the director of the Ohio Bicentennial Commission in Columbus, Ohio.

DePue: I assume there's a termination date for that.

Devine: Yes, right. So, right after that, well, I think he was the director of bicentennial the year before the centennial year. Then, when that finished, a year later, he became the deputy director of Ohio Historical Society.

DePue: I'm curious. We've talked a lot about how much Confucian society stresses education. What was your mother's attitude, and how did you feel about Michael achieving this exalted position of getting a Ph.D.?

Devine: Oh yeah. We were just proud as hell. (Both laugh) Yes, my mother was very proud, and my mother was very proud of me, having a master's and teaching at a college.

After Ohio State University, where I had secretarial jobs, then, when we went to Cincinnati, Ohio, and Michael was the director of the Consortium of Colleges and Universities in greater Cincinnati area, I was looking for a job. He said, "You should apply for a job, teaching English as a second language, at Xavier University. There's an opening." I said, "No way! There will be so many native speakers applying for that job, and I'll be humiliated for not getting it." I refused to apply.

One day, we had some kind of a bet going on, between him and me, and he said, "If you lose, you apply for that job, and, if I lose…" whatever it was. I lost that bet. I had to apply for that job, and I did. The next thing I knew, I was called in for an interview. So, I went in there, and I got the job, on the spot, to teach pronunciation and grammar. So, I taught English as a second language to foreign students, coming in there. That was the beginning of my teaching at college level.

DePue: At that time, what countries were these people coming from?

Devine: Oh, Puerto Rico, Colombia, China, Egypt—I had a Russian student—all over the world, Brazil. That was the beginning of my college-teaching career, and my mother just could burst with pride.

DePue: I was going to say, is this about the time she says, "See, you became ten times better than a man?"

Devine: Right, yeah. So, as far as she was concerned, I fulfilled her expectation, even though I was not a lawyer. But, as far as I was concerned, I did not fulfill that, because I was not a lawyer. So, this is the tragic part. I just could not let go of that dream that my mother had and I had, for me to become a woman judge. I could not let go of it. So, no matter what I did that people thought was a success, it just didn't compare to what I should have achieved.

DePue: I'm going to make a stab here, and I'm thinking that, if you had become a lawyer, you would have been unhappy, practicing law.

Devine: Yes. But it didn't matter. It doesn't matter. That was what I wanted to become, and I didn't become it. This is the kind of very strange logic—irrational. This is irrationality we're dealing with, this kind of…

DePue: There were certainly some things about Confucian society and Korean culture that you were happy to pass on to your children. And there are some things that you obviously didn't want to pass on. How would you break that out?

Devine: One of the Confucian values that I tried to pass on to our children is sibling relationships. In Confucian values, the older sibling has more responsibilities over the youngsters. For example, if I was to have them divide up some cookies or something, the older sibling might give the youngest one more than to himself, as a way of showing his love for the younger one and his responsibility. In Confucian society, the older one took care of the younger ones.

But, in American way of thinking, they all equally divided up, equally. They're more or less equals, siblings are, compared to Confucian way of thinking. Sometimes it became a hot issue. For example, when they were teenagers, and my teenage son, Chris, had a car, he had to pay for insurance for the car. When he let the younger one borrow that car for an extended period of time, Chris, the older one, wanted the younger one to pay him back for part of the insurance money. This is very American way of dealing with it, and I was appalled. No, you are the older brother. Younger brother, he does not have any money. How can you… Don't expect him to pay you for part of that insurance money. He couldn't understand that. You know, he's using it, so he should pay. This is the kind of conflict I ran into, trying to teach certain part of Confucian values to our kids, and they were resisting.

DePue: As far as you and Michael were concerned, were you wanting your children to be Americans or Korean-Americans?

Devine: In many ways, I wanted to raise them Americans. And, again here, there was a conflict. For example, Korean Confucian tradition is, children to do just extremely, exceedingly well in school and get nothing but A's. I mean, B's and C's are unacceptable in Korean tradition. But, when our kids brought—maybe one kid brought a B—I was upset. You know, you're perfectly capable of doing an A work; how come this is a B? But, my husband said, "B is perfectly fine. We want our kids to be rounded people, with interest in sports. They should play some kind of sports, this and that, socializing with other students. That's as important as getting all A's. And a B is perfectly fine."

He, himself, said he was not a straight A student in high school. He sometimes got C's and D's, and it was okay with his parents. So, I had to change my thinking. Okay, what do I do? Spank these children for bringing a B or accept more American way of raising well-rounded human beings? I decided to go along with Michael's view.

DePue: Was the family attending church?

Devine: Yes. We attended Catholic Church, but not every Sunday. I have a very big resistance to doing religious activities out of habit or weekly ritual. I want that act of going to church as something coming straight out of the heart, rather than because it's the weekly thing to do.

DePue: Is that, somewhat, a reaction to all of those ceremonies for all of those dead ancestors, back when you were growing up?

Devine: I don't know whether it's that or resistance to the Presbyterians who tried to cram the religion down my throat. I'm just not sure. I'm pretty rebellious. (both laugh)

DePue: Which isn't unique among Koreans, is it?

Devine: No, it's not. Well, I think it is unique. They're more submissive to authority.

DePue: Well, here's a question for you, totally out of left field. One of the things that you learned how to cook—was it chocolate chip cookies?

Devine: (Laughs) Yes, yes. I baked chocolate chip cookies quite a bit as kids were growing up. I loved baking things with them. And I do ceramic pottery. That's one of the things that I shared with our children.

DePue: What I want to do here is talk about some of the other positions that Michael went to. A couple of them, we need to spend a little bit more time than others. So, after all these experiences in Ohio, where was next?

Devine: Okay. After Ohio, it was Maryland. He was the deputy director at St. Marie's City, the old English spelling for that was St. Marie's Citti, even city was c-i-t-t-i or something. So, if you don't use that, it's St. Mary's City. It's a historical society, partly doing living history, outdoor things, included the Dove, where Marylanders came in. You know, they came in this ship, boat, named "Maryland Dove."

DePue: Okay. This is one of the oldest, established cities in the United States.

Devine: Yes, the oldest. Yes, the oldest capital.

DePue: Did you work while you were there?

Devine: Yes, I taught English as a second language. There's a naval base there, and they offered this, as part of their program for the community.

DePue: Well, I was going to ask you next, if there was a Korean community there, but the naval base would suggest that there probably was.

Devine: Yeah. I taught English as a second language for the school system, too. So, I taught from elementary school, up to high school, as well as the community people on the naval base.

DePue: How long were you there?

Devine: We were there from '82 to '85.

DePue: Where to in 1985?

Devine: Springfield, Illinois. We were here from '85 to '91, because he got the job as the Illinois State Historian.

DePue: The Illinois State Historian, who, at that time, [worked in the] newly created Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, which this institution is a part of today.

Devine: Preservation Agency, yes.

DePue: So, if I'd been there at that time, he would have been my boss.

Devine: That's right. That's right.

DePue: Did you enjoy Springfield?

Devine: Yes. You know (laughs), it's interesting. Some people are very land bound. They are happy only in a certain location. But for me, and Michael too, we just enjoyed just about everywhere we went to live. I have a friend who feels the same way. She calls people like us "geographical whores." (laughs)

DePue: That's not very kind.

Devine: No, but it's just funny. You know, that's how we liked each place we lived in. We enjoyed living here, and we kept up with the friends that we made here, like Cullom Davis, very good friends of ours; and Mike Lennon, of Sangamon State University, professor of English literature; and Bob Klaus in Chicago. He used to come down there and participate in Illinois Historic Preservation Agency activities.

DePue: Of course, in Springfield it's all about Abraham Lincoln.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: Does Lincoln have any special stature in the mind of Koreans?

Devine: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Well, you know, all over, every country in the whole world, the students memorize the Gettysburg Address and admire Lincoln, as a human being and politician. And Koreans are no exceptions; we admire him very much.

But, I attended a ceremony—I think birthday party, birthday celebration or something, anniversary—dealing with Stephen A. Douglas in Chicago. I have—I think I mentioned to you—this article I wrote for *Illinois Times*. It's called "A Little Giant," and it's an article, written from my immigrant point of view. Yes, I scanned it, and sent it to you.

DePue: Right. We've got that. It will be part of the collection.

Devine: Right.

DePue: You mentioned at lunch time, also, an article that you wrote that appeared in the local newspaper, about the Korean community.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: And I asked you if you could read a paragraph or two from that article.

Devine: Actually, I didn't look at the article for a long time. So, it will be difficult to pick out the best paragraph to read.

DePue: Let me pause here real quick, while you're looking. [Pause] Okay.

Devine: Okay, this is an article I got published in *Illinois Times,* titled "Koreans in Springfield."

DePue: And what's the date of it?

Devine: This is November 10 through 16, 1988, volume 14, number 11.

DePue: So you'd been in Springfield about three years, at that time.

Devine: Um hmm, and in this article I quote a historian, who wrote about immigrants, diaspora, Korean diaspora, [reading from article] "As the Pulitzer-Prize winning historian, Oscar Handlin pointed out in his book, *The Uprooted*, immigrants feel alienation that is 'complete,' 'continuous' and persistent. Being no exception, Koreans, regardless of their location in the United States, do feel a certain amount of alienation, made more acute by language barriers. Out of this sense of alienation, most Koreans, Christians and non-Christians alike, turn to a Korean-speaking church 'as a refuge from the anguish of the world,' seeking to satisfy their social and cultural, as well as religious, needs. The Springfield Korean church has been meeting these needs for its members." Okay?

DePue: Okay. From everything you've been talking about so far, though, the term I wasn't hearing from you was that you felt alienated.

Devine: In a way, yes, I did feel alienated, because, as I mentioned before, Koreans married to other Koreans, they could never fully accept me, because I'm married to a Caucasian American person. So, I could really, really never bond with a Korean person married to a Korean. We could form a certain level of friendship, but there's always that rift. I am a person married to an American, and she is married to a Korean.

DePue: Did you have any of that same sense with Caucasian Americans, with the average American?

Devine: No, no. I never really felt discriminated against by Americans because I was married to an American. That may be, not because there was no discrimination, but it may have been because my attitude toward Americans was so positive. And my assimilation, my desire to be assimilated into this culture, was so strong that I may have ignored some signs of discrimination, subtle signs. These often tend to be very subtle. So, it may be just because I decide to be blind to that aspect of it. Only in the last ten years or so, looking back, I am thinking there might have been discrimination, but it was a kind of subtle, kind of negative. It was not a positive act of discrimination, but it was a negative kind of discrimination, which means they held back certain amount of warmth, for example. It's very difficult to prove that kind of discrimination, because it's somebody holding back something, rather than positively doing something that hurts you.

DePue: Well, I would think it would be difficult to sort that out, versus the normal, Midwestern American reserve.

Devine: That's right. That's right. That's another thing. I felt that there are two regions where I thought, maybe there was more of that, more of a kind of reserve that may come from racially rooted feelings. I thought, maybe there was some in the Midwest, in Missouri, and maybe there was some in Wyoming. But I was just too busy with my life to pay attention to those things and be really analyzing.

DePue: Well, having five kids, though, (both laugh) would keep anybody busy, I would think. How did the Korean community, here in Springfield, respond to your article?

Devine: Yeah. The educated elite professors and doctors, who were doing superbly well economically and in terms of getting respect from both Korean community and American community, they had no problem with this article. But, the Koreans who used to hold blue-collar jobs in Korea, like bankers and school teachers and those people, when they immigrated to this country, and they could not get equivalent kind of jobs, because of their lack of language skills, English-language skills, they generally turned to businesses, like opening laundry, restaurants, working as waitresses, opening beauty shops, those things. I said, they generally have inferiority complex about their current jobs, compared to the more elevated jobs they held back in Korea.

This was the gist of the point I made, and these people, holding these jobs, saw that as my attitude, looking down upon them. So, they misunderstood my intention, and they became pretty upset. They protested to the editor of the newspaper. One of the doctors even became pretty upset, too. He thought I was somehow attacking, saying that these Koreans were misfits or something. He said he is a very well-respected WASP, and he said he was very proud to be a WASP. This is what I remember, the exact quote: he was proud to be a WASP.

DePue: Which, in the lingo of the day, was White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

Devine: Yes, yes.

DePue: Which he, obviously, was not, at least not the white part.

Devine: Right, right, he's not the white part, but he followed the WASPish principles and lifestyle, and he was proud to be that. And that was one of the criticisms I got. I laughed about that, anybody being proud of WASP, but yeah.

DePue: It sounds like it got a little bit ugly for you for a while.

Devine: Yes, it got very ugly, and the editor even called me up. Bill Furry, I think, was the editor, and he asked me if I would consider writing a rebuttal or redact? Is that the word? Redact? Retract?

DePue: Retract.

Devine: Retract—whether I wanted to retract something, because it got so ugly.

DePue: Did you?

Devine: No.

DePue: Okay, this is probably a good place for a stop today. I was thinking we might be able to get finished—but I'm not surprised that there's more I want to ask you about—because we need to finish this off. There are some general questions, especially, that I'm very much looking forward to asking you about. So, unfortunately, you're heading north to Joliet. We're going to have to pick this up on another day, I'm afraid.

Devine: Okay, okay.

DePue: Thank you very much.

Devine: Oh, you're welcome.

(End of interview session #3 #4 continues)

Interview with Maija Rhee Devine

IM-A-L-2013-071.04
Interview # 4: Oct 3, 2013
Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, October 3, 2013. This is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm doing my fourth session with Maija Devine. Good afternoon, Maija.

Devine: Yes, yes.

DePue: We probably should explain, this one is going to sound a little bit different, because I'm in Springfield, and Maija, where are you?

Devine: I am in Kansas City, Missouri.

DePue: You live out there, correct?

Devine: Yes, we live in Lee Summit, Missouri.

DePue: Let's just put this as a marker. I always think it's kind of interesting to put a marker into what's going on in the world. What's the main news event of the day, would you say?

Devine: Where, in Korea or here?

DePue: Here.

Devine: Oh, oh, it's the government shutdown that went into effect on Monday. My husband is a federal employee and director of the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library. He is considered non-essential employee, so he's been on a furlough for two days now.

DePue: (laughs) He's probably not enjoying it, is he?

Devine: No, no.

DePue: Well, let's put contemporary American politics aside for a little while. (laughs) This is a peculiar way to start the interview—and I didn't even realize this—but I wanted to start with a little bit of discussion about your becoming a citizen, because, when we finished off last time, we had you and the family living here in Springfield…your husband working as the state historian, I believe, and lots of talk about the construction of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, even at that time. So, you were kind of relishing in all the history of the United States. Talk to me about your thoughts about becoming a citizen and when that happened.

Devine: All right. That happened in 1975. That's when we were expecting our second child. We were expecting him when we invited my mother to come, not only just to visit for a few months, in which case just a tourist visa would have been sufficient. But we wanted her to stay longer than that, and possibly live with us and enjoy living with her grandchildren and help us also take care of them. So, she came in 1975. We were living in Columbus, Ohio, at that time.

I believe it was in Cincinnati—the courthouse where we had to go for the citizenship swearing-in ceremony was Cincinnati. So, we travelled to Cincinnati, and I became naturalized citizen. I really did not want to get the American citizenship so quickly. I was not very willing to give up my Korean citizenship. But, because I needed to become a naturalized citizen in order to fill out paperwork for my mother to stay longer than three months, so yeah, I became a citizen.

It was a very, very moving experience. For me, it was more a matter of convenience, to get my mother to stay longer. But there were immigrants from other countries, Mexico and all kinds of Latin American countries. They were really just so, so looking forward to becoming American citizens. There were DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] group ladies, passing out chocolate chip cookies. These men and women from Latin American, Caribbean countries, they were just weeping with joy for becoming U.S. citizens. It was a very touching experience. I understand that that gets repeated over and over in all parts of United States, wherever there's a naturalization swearing-in ceremony.

DePue: But it sounds like you were surprised that other people were so emotional to have the opportunity to become citizens.

Devine: Yes, I was surprised. But actually, you know, after I became a naturalized citizen and began to live in this country and saw how much freer American society is, in terms of all kinds of discrimination, gender biases, poor and rich people biases, the economic-based biases, class conflicts. You know, class conflicts are very, very severe in Korea. They're very class-conscious people, and even physical things, too. Koreans are very biased against small people. And overall, they are much smaller than Americans, but they have all kinds of discriminations. I found that, in United States, people were a lot less biased

against things that are beyond their control, like religions, economical status, and race, especially. Although Americans still have a lot of issues with race, still, compared to some other countries in the world, I find that American society, American people, are much freer. They dealt with their biases at a more advanced pace. So, I found living in the United States liberating, very liberating.

Even domestic scenes, too. Like, in Korea, mother and daughter-in-law relationship is notoriously poisonous for generations, traditionally. It's very, very difficult relationship. But in the States, I've seen a lot of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law getting along. Or, even if they don't get along, they agree to disagree and hold civil relationships. I find that very liberating.

DePue: What was your initial reluctance to become an American citizen?

Devine: I suppose it's just a natural kind of instinct to hold onto what I had known as mine, which included nationality, my identity as a Korean. That was reflected, significantly, by the fact that I held a Korean citizenship. Even though I had so much rebellious responses to Korean traditional values, male-centered, patriarchal values, I still held onto my identity as a Korean and Korean citizen. It's more like an instinct, rather than a reasoned conclusion. So, I just kind of held onto it as long as I could.

But, the necessity of my mother, having to invite my mother… My mother was living by herself. There was nobody living with her, and she was getting on in her years. I was worried about her living alone, too. Plus, we were expecting our second child, and we thought the bonding between the grandchildren and my mother would be beneficial to everybody. My mother, too, because she had a lot of physical problems. She had hypertension. She had nervousness and just aches and pains that come with aging, although she was not even 60 yet, maybe 58 or 59, when she came here, to this country.

But, you know, her physical problems were partly psychosomatic because of the trauma that she went through with sharing her husband with the husband's second wife and living with the second wife in the same house and watching the second wife bearing four boys and one girl. All that kind of wore my mother out. So, she was not in a good physical shape when she came to our house. She was also suffering from insomnia. She depended on sleeping pills, which worried me a lot.

Once she came to Columbus, Ohio, and to our house, she saw this two-year-old boy running around all over and getting into things that he wasn't supposed to get into. And I was expecting the baby any day. So, she just immediately found tons of things to do to look after the little two-year-old boy running around, and me, and she loves cooking.

So, she cooked for us. (laughs) That kind of thing just wore her out, so much that, shortly after she arrived at our house, she did not need any sleeping pills any more. She just slept like a baby, as soon as our older son, Bret—who is now a Catholic Benedictine monk—as soon as Bret went down for the night, my mother was just snoring away. So, some of the physical symptoms, like insomnia, kind of disappeared. But she continued to have hypertension. So, I took her to the doctor regularly, and she was under the doctor's care to keep the high blood pressure under control.

DePue: I want to jump in and ask a couple of questions of clarification here. Up to this point, you have described the relationship between your mother and your father—and these are your adopted parents—as a very loving kind of relationship.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: I know that, when you were at school years, that your mother was living in a different part of Seoul. But I still had the understanding that they had a good relationship between them.

Devine: Oh, yes.

DePue: Well, obviously, somewhere along the line, that became more strained, or is that the decision your mother made, to kind of distance herself more from her husband?

Devine: No, no. The first time she and I were separated from my father was because of the war.

DePue: Right.

Devine: Yeah, escaping from Seoul, during the confusion of thousands and thousands of people just rushing to get out of Seoul, before the Han Bridge was bombed by North Korean Soviet-made MiGs, bombs, planes. During that confusion, we got separated, so we lived away from each other for about two, three years, during the duration of the war. Then, after the war, somehow, they found each other, and we went back to our old home in Seoul and lived together again.

But then, the only reason we separated again is because I did not pass the entrance exam to the best high school in the country; Kyunggi is the name of the school, Kyunggi Girls' High School. I failed it, so I needed to go to a second-ranked high school, which was Jung-Chin. Our house was kind of far away from that school. And, besides, my father, because his second wife kept having babies, and the house was getting smaller and smaller, he went and got a bigger house built on the Han River, even farther away from the school that I needed to enroll in. He expected me and my mother to all move in with him and his mother and his second wife and children. But that meant we would be

living really too far away from the school I needed to register in. So, my mother decided to just move closer to my school, so that I could go to school.

DePue: Did she not move in, back with your father again, after you went to college?

Devine: No. That separation became more permanent. But, my father came and visited us, maybe once or twice a month. He always brought money to support us and brought snacks and spent nights with us. So, even though we did not live under the same roof, my mother and father's relationship continued to be very, very loving, maybe even more so, because now, his second wife became more like a wife, you know, washing diapers and taking care of his mother, who was a little bit senile. She [second wife] was bogged down with household chores, whereas my mother had just me to take care of. Coming to our house and being with my mother seemed to me like—for my father—that seemed to be like a nice little break away from his humdrum life, back at home with the second wife. So, I got the impression that my father and mother's relationship even became close and even romantic.

DePue: But it sounds, also, like, when you came to the United States, your mother—Did she still live alone, or did she move back in with your father and the rest of the family?

Devine: Oh, actually, shortly after…in 1972. See, I got married in 1970, in Korea, because Michael came as a Peace Corps volunteer. He taught at Sogang Jesuit University, and I was teaching at another college, on the other side of Seoul. Sogang was on the west side, and mine was on the east side. Anyway, we got married in 1970, and then I came to the United States with Michael to live in Columbus, Ohio, where he was getting his PhD in history at Ohio State. Within two years of my leaving Korea and living in Ohio, my father passed away.

DePue: Okay.

Devine: Yeah, there was only a two-year period when I did not live with my mother, you know: when I left Korea, in 1970, between 1970 and '72, when he died. She was alone only two years. During that time, my cousin, who appears in my novel, *The Voices of Heaven*, too, she lived with me and my mom during the Korean War, when we were separated from my father. So, my cousin lived with my mom, and then my father passed away, in 1972.

DePue: Now, I lost track of this. Were you in Korea at that time? Were you able to attend the funeral?

Devine: No, no. See, I was in Ohio.

DePue: Okay.

Devine: We had our first child, a boy, who is now a monk, in 1972. That's the year my father passed away.

DePue: And you were not able to go back to Korea for the funeral?

Devine: No. We couldn't afford that, at that time. Mark, actually, she didn't even tell me he passed away, because I was expecting a child. I didn't have the child yet, when he passed away. I think he passed away in, like, May of '72, and we had our first child in July of '72. So, I was about to have a baby, and my mother knew that. She didn't want the news of my father passing away to be something of a serious shock. She was afraid I might try to borrow the money for the plane fare and come all the way to attend the funeral. She worried about that, and so, she did not even tell me. I didn't even know when he passed away. Only after she came to live with us, she told us my father passed away.

DePue: That was how many years later, three?

Devine: When I was told?

DePue: Yeah.

Devine: No, she came in 1972 to join us.

DePue: Okay. I'm not doing well on the dates. I'm sorry about that.

Devine: Nineteen-seventy-two, she came. Let me see, she came in, like, April of '72, and she became a naturalized. She received a green card in the fall of '72, and she told me, when she came in April of '72, that my father passed away, just a month or so before that.

DePue: Did you have any resentment, finding out about it that long afterwards?

Devine: Oh, no. I fully understood why she did not tell me. Even if she told me, right when he passed away, I probably would not have been able to go there. I was expecting, and we had no money. You know, the airfare at that ime, with Michael's income at that time, would have been a huge sum. So, I probably would not have been able to make that trip, anyway, and I would have been pretty upset.

DePue: What was Michael's reaction when he found out that you hadn't been told?

Devine: I don't think he thought much of it, because I explained to him that the reason she didn't tell me was to save me from a trauma I might experience, while I was expecting a baby.

DePue: But that's not an American kind of a response to that kind of an incident. Americans tend to—

Devine: Yeah, I know it's not the kind of thing an American parent would have done. You know, keeping that kind of news from the daughter, just because she's expecting. Though my mother's not telling me until later is very un-American or it's very Korean; that's different from American way of dealing with such a situation. And Michael's reaction was very unusual, too. I think both of them, the way they dealt with it, was a little bit unusual. But the Americans are a lot more upfront with things.

But then, you know, Michael, himself, grew up with similar kind of thing. For example, in his family, there was an uncle who committed suicide. This is like when Michael was in elementary or junior high school. His mother kept that from her children. She did not tell the children that the uncle committed suicide. She just said something like, "He had a heart attack" or something. Only later, when Michael was a teenager, he discovered, through other people, that Uncle Donnie actually committed suicide. So, this kind of family secrets—being kept with the intention to keep the children or the pregnant woman—keeping secrets from them was done in this country too.

DePue: I wanted to ask you, also, if you had an opportunity to travel back to Korea, during these early years of your marriage.

Devine: Oh, no, no. Actually, because I was so burned out. I felt so burned out about that patriarchal, male-centered values and traditions that I really had no wish to go back. I didn't want to go back, and also, I didn't even want to think about Korea. I didn't even want to read Korean newspaper. I didn't even want to pay attention to the sporadic news items about Korea that was reported in this country, either. I wanted to have nothing to do with that culture or that country, even though, you know, I was a little bit—not very—I was a little reluctant to give up the citizenship. Overall, my emotional relationship with that country was, I just want to put that behind me.

I am in the United States, and I want to live my life in the present and future. The future did not involve going back to Korea. I did not go back for twenty-five years. And, in fact, I became so I was very, very studiously following news in this country, always *Newsweek* and books about America. I was constantly reading and trying to keep up with the culture and news of United States, whereas I didn't want to do that with Korea. It got to a point of, even me, being just totally ignorant about what was going on in politics and society back in Korea.

One day, we had lunch with this famous person, Mr. Newman, Ralph Newman. He is a collector of rare books, in Chicago, a very famous person because, one, he appraised Nixon papers, when either Nixon or his family wanted to sell part of his papers or something. His things were appraised by Ralph Newman. And his wife, Pat Newman, she is the mother of Scott Simon of the NPR [National Public Radio], okay?

So, anyway, we were having lunch with Pat and Ralph Newman one day, and Michael went out for a little bit, to run some errand or something, with the children. So, I was left alone with Pat and Ralph for a little bit. Ralph asked me, "Well, what do you think about the North Korea and South Korea, all these things going on here?" I was just totally caught off guard. I was so ignorant about Korea, what was going on, I was embarrassed. I had nothing to say. I, in fact, just kind of said, "Well, I don't keep up with those things, Michael does. (both laugh) Michael is the resident historian, and he keeps up with those things, but I don't." Even to this day, I just feel so embarrassed when I think about that lunch and the question Ralph asked me. That was my birth culture and birth nation, and here I said I know nothing about it; ask my husband.

DePue: Most immigrants, who come to the United States, look for opportunities. They look for other Koreans, because there are certainly lots of aspects of the culture that they miss: the food, the language, other aspects of the culture. Did you have a lot of experience with other Koreans? I know we talked last time about some difficulties you had, while you were in Springfield, but, otherwise, were you looking for those kinds of relationships?

Devine: No, no, no. I didn't want to look for them at all. As I said, you know, I was finished with that culture and those people.

DePue: Where did you attend church, or did you attend church?

Devine: I did not attend church. I did not attend any Korean church, ever, in this country.

DePue: How about—

Devine: Even in United States, even in Korea, too, I went to the high school, which was Presbyterian. So, I went through three years of middle school and three years of high school, with Presbyterian ministers, who tried to convert me to Presbyterianism, but I resisted it. Then, when I went to Catholic, Sogang Jesuit College, I got baptized, because they did not try to convert me. The Jesuit priests just left me alone, and the other Catholic students and the priests were going in and out of this chapel every day, but nobody was saying anything about inviting me to come or anything; left me alone. Pretty soon, I decided, you know, there's something really good going on there, and they're not telling me about it. (laughs)

DePue: I know we talked about that last session. I guess my curiosity here is, you have a son who, obviously, became very religious. Was the family going to church on a regular basis?

Devine: Yes, yes. We didn't go every weekend, every Sunday. But, if we went to any church, it was Catholic Church.

DePue: The reason I was asking about going to church—it might sound peculiar—but I know that most Korean communities in the United States, that was the place where they were able to gather and enjoy being Koreans together.

Devine: Right, right. I know that, and, when my mother came, I knew she would miss Koreans. I knew Korean churches, whether it's Catholic or… She became a Catholic too, after I became a Catholic, because she wanted to pray for me to the same God as my God. So, she became a Catholic too. But, you know, it didn't matter whether it was Catholic Church or Presbyterian or Methodist, wherever there was a Korean church, Koreans gathered there. I took her to those churches every Sunday. And so, yeah, I helped her keep up with her Korean friendships. But, I did not seek to keep the similar kind of social life with Koreans for myself. I had my American side, my American life, and our children that we were raising, pretty much according to American values rather than Korean values. I was happy with that.

DePue: Were your children exposed to both languages?

Devine: Yes, of course, because my mother didn't speak English. She gradually picked up words, here and there. After a few years, she got to be good enough that, if somebody called us, and Michael and I were not home, and our children were too young yet to answer the phone and take messages, she would write down the phone numbers for us.

There are just so many funny, comical situations, too, because our children were picking up some Korean words like "milk." *Uyu* is Korean word for milk, and they would mix it up, Korean and English. So, they would say, "*Halmony*," which is grandma, "*Halmony*, give me *uyu*." So, they would mix the words, and she did too. When we were rushing around to go somewhere and we would say, "Come on; put your shoes on. Get your shoes on." My mother decided that "shoes on" meant shoes. So, she would say, "Hey, is this your shoeson? Where is your shoeson?" (both laugh)

DePue: Well, I know, with the Korean language, also, they have a tendency to put vowel sounds in an awful lot of words where they don't necessarily belong.

Devine: Yes, yes, right.

DePue: I'm curious about the shoes. Did the shoes come off when you first came in the house?

Devine: Yes. I didn't really make it a very strict rule, but no, we kept our shoes on, but kids just sometimes kicked them off, and they couldn't find their shoes. When there are five kids, with five pairs of shoes, plus extra pairs per kid, you know, we would have three, four different pairs, times five. That's twenty little pieces of shoes. We were constantly looking for shoes, and my mom said, "Is this your shoeson? Where's your shoeson?" (both chuckle)

DePue: Were you the typical American family, taking your kids to soccer games and basketball and cheerleading and all of that?

Devine: Oh yes, soccer, football, baseball, you know, there's softball.

DePue: How did the other mothers treat you? Did you feel like they treated you differently than they were interacting themselves?

Devine: No, I really, no. I thought they were very open with me, and I thought they were very genuine. I really did not feel very significant kind of racial prejudice among Americans. But it may be that, because I had such positive attitude toward American culture and American people that I'm… There may have been some subtle signs of racial biases, but I just either ignored them or didn't pick up on them.

DePue: When did you finally go back to Korea, the first time?

Devine: Okay, twenty-five years later, so 1995.

DePue: And what was the reason you went back in 1995?

Devine: That was a pivotal year. Michael received a Senior Fulbright Lectureship at Yonsei University, which is number two or three in the country. It's very near my alma mater, Sogang Jesuit University. Sogang and Yonsei and Ewha—the largest women's university in the world—the three universities are in the same neighborhood.

Michael got to teach graduate courses in history at Yonsei University, and I took advantage of living in that neighborhood. I applied for a job at my alma mater, Sogang University, and I taught there for a semester, too. That's why we went.

When we went, our youngest were: the daughter was, like, fifteen, and he was like thirteen. Oh, they cried and cried. They said, "Oh my god, go to Korea? Whoever heard of Korea? Where the heck is this? We don't want to go. We have friends here. When we come back, our friends will have forgotten us. We won't even know where to find our locker room." Oh, they were crying and crying. But we took them with us.

We lived on Yonsei campus, and we put them in an international school, which was attended by ambassadors' kids, business, banking executives' kids from all over the world—Canada, Germany, Britain—all over the world. It just opened their eyes, and two or three weeks after they began to attend this Seoul International School, right on Yonsei campus, they began to cry again. So, we said, "What's the problem now?" And they said, "Do we have to go back home? We want to live here." (both laugh)

So, it totally changed their outlook on life. Three years later, when Michael got another opportunity to teach overseas, this time in China at Johns Hopkins University, Nanjing University Center for Graduate Studies, Michael got a teaching job for a year, and I got a teaching job, there at Nanjing University, as well. So, we were going to go, with only the youngest one, Brian, who was fifteen then.

And our daughter, who was fifteen when we went to Korea, she was now eighteen, about to go to the University of Alaska to major in elementary school education. When she heard that we were going to China, she said, "Oh my god, I'm going with you." And she began to pack, even before we began packing. We said, "No, you can't go. You have to go college." And she said, "No, I want to postpone my enrollment." And we said, "Well, if you go to China with us, you have to take some courses for credit. You can't just take flower arranging or calligraphy or those kinds of things. You have to take academic credit courses." And she said, "Yeah, I'll do anything. I'll do anything to go with you to China."

See, that trip to Korea forever changed both kids, and now they both wanted to go to China. That's when she started taking Chinese at Nanjing University. A year later, when we came back, she entered University of Iowa, as a Chinese major. She double majored in Chinese and anthropology and got credits for one whole year of taking Chinese language. So, she tested out of the first year, freshman year, and she just went straight into sophomore year at University of Iowa.

DePue: DePue: Is she using that degree now?

Devine: Devine: Oh yes. She works for a nonprofit organization called One World Now. She is a deputy director. The organization raises funds from various sources, including the Bill Gates Foundation. They use the money to give scholarships to low-income high school kids to learn critical languages, which include Chinese and Arabic. She hires Chinese teachers and Arabic teachers.

She went on and studied Arabic, as well. So, she speaks both Chinese and Arabic, although her Chinese is almost native-speaker level. Her Arabic is more beginning. She uses Chinese a lot on her job. Last year, she took a group of students to China for two or three weeks, and throughout the whole thing, you know, she was speaking Chinese.

DePue: So, she knows English, Korean, Chinese and Arabic.

Devine: Yes. And Spanish.

DePue: And Spanish. Wow. Here I struggle just learning one, just coping with one. I wanted to take you back to that experience, going back after twenty-five years to Korea, and ask you a few more questions. How had Korea changed?

Devine: Oh, it changed. Physically it changed so much. I mean, there was nothing I could recognize about my hometown of Seoul. The neighborhood where we lived, it was totally leveled, and there were two-, three-, four-story apartment buildings there.

The only things that I recognized were things like the South Gate; the historical landmarks, like South Gate, Gwangwhamun Gate; and the Seoul City Hall. That building is still there. The mountains surrounding the city of Seoul, they're all there, but, other than that, I just… Everything changed. You know, high-rise buildings twenty- thirty-story, high-rise buildings, office buildings, they just totally blew me away. I did not recognize the country as mine.

DePue: How about all those things that you had so strongly objected to about the Korean culture, the paternalistic nature of things? Had the culture and society changed some, since you'd been gone?

Devine: It changed in some ways. Like, for example, there were no men anymore who brought their mistresses into their homes to live together with the first wives. That did not happen anymore. Maybe some of that was still going on in real remote countryside, but I think that type of polygamous living arrangement disappeared.

DePue: Why had that changed?

Devine: Why had that changed? I think, partly it was Christianity. It was introduced in 1882, and Christianity brought some changes, reforms in Korea. The prohibition against alcohol consumption, for example; it helped Korean families to reduce their domestic violence. Even though Christianity – and especially in the Old Testament – Christianity also carries patriarchal values and male-centered values, especially in the Old Testament. At least, in the New Testament and forward, Christianity, compared to Confucianism in Korea, Christianity upheld more equality between boys and girls.

DePue: But you're talking, Maija, about something like 25% of the population, maybe, had considered themselves Christians at the time. Yet, there's some pretty significant influences on the whole society, it sounds like.

Devine: Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. Now, I believe, about 35% of Korean population report themselves as Christian. Korea is second to only United States in sending out missionaries of their own to the world. Anyway, the Christianity had some influence on gradually making Korean men, at least, not bring their mistresses into the house. But, they continue to have mistresses outside the house.

And there were many, many children born to the mistresses who were brought into the homes for the wives to raise. That practice continues, even to this day. I just read an article, the other day, about former presidents, the last

three or four presidents, their relationships with women who were not their wives and patrimony suits that were brought against them, because they kept their mistresses. So, informally, this still continues, but at a much reduced rate, partly because of the Christian influence and partly because Korea became a nation that just exported young people to go abroad to get their PhDs.

I think, along with Taiwan, Korea has the highest per capita PhDs in the world. So many young people—men and women—went abroad, and they became introduced to more Western culture and their values, which included more equality among men and women. So, for various reasons like these, Korea became more and more, less gender biased.

However, I need to at least say, that gender bias continues very strongly, even to today, 2013. In 1994, the Planned Parenthood Federation of Korea released this figure. In that year alone, 1994, 30,000 female fetuses were aborted. Why? Because, even though Korea did not have one-child policy, like China did, Koreans general public voluntarily decided to limit their number of children to two, because it was so expensive to raise children that they voluntarily limited the number to two. If they were going to have only two, they wanted to make sure that one of them would be a boy. So, in 1995, when we lived there for a semester, we often saw families with the oldest child was a daughter, and then, ten years later, there's a boy. What happened in between? How many female fetuses were aborted? This kind of number gave me the sense that Korea changed a lot, especially economically and technologically. It jumped from being a third world country to an advanced country.

During Korean War, or just before that, we were at the level with Ethiopians and Haitians and people in Bangladesh, in terms of the annual GNP [gross national product]. But now, Korea is among the top eleven economic powers. So, compared to those economic and technological advances, Korea is lagging behind in male-centric values still being in place.

For example, another figure I usually give is the number of working women. Forty percent are in the work force. Of those, of the 40% working women, there's only 5% who hold legislative and executive, CEO positions. That is even lower than Mexico, which shows 24%; even lower than Egypt, which shows 10%; Turkey and Japan, 9%; New Zealand, 37%; Britain, 34; Canada, 33; United States, 45. These figures may be a little off, depending on the various factors, and these figures are a little bit old, like this is from 2001. However, it just gives you a general idea where Korea is, in terms of closing the gender gap. Just twelve years ago, only 5% of Korean women held executive positions, but then, they elected a woman president. So, a lot of my readers of my novel say, "Hey, doesn't that mean Koreans, effectively, closed the gender gap?" No, but she's a legacy candidate, just like Indira Gandhi, [Benazir] Bhutto of Pakistan, and Corazon Aquino of Philippines, women

who rose politically, mainly because of the political foundation laid by their husbands or fathers. This current woman president of Korea, her father was Park Chung-hee, who laid the foundation for Korea's electrifying, dazzling economic advancement in the last thirty, forty years.

So, yes, I found Korea changed, particularly in financial and technological areas. But, no, I did not find Korea changed all that much in terms of closing the gender gap. Even now, just last week, we had a house guest who is a faculty member at Kyung Hee University, which is a private university. She said, even a few years ago, for the male faculty member, the university provided a discounted insurance coverage for his parents. But, for a female faculty member, she could not get that discounted health insurance for her parents. So, this type of gender-based discrimination, that's still going on.

DePue: Well, I think historians will be quick to tell you that cultures very, very rarely change on a dime, like that.

Devine: Right. Just going back, just briefly, to the gender issue, the abortion, the aborted female fetuses, that left South Korea in a dangerously unbalanced population. For 115 boys, there were only 100 girls, even, like, nineteen years ago. This population imbalance has been going on for thirty, forty years. Every year, there were so many girl fetuses, female fetuses, being aborted.

So, Korea has been importing brides for these boys. They are coming from Philippines and Vietnam, mostly Vietnam. Compared to North Korea, their population has been decreasing, for various reasons. So, the government attitude is "Oh, just go ahead and have babies. We don't care whether it's a boy or girl." Left alone, without any reproductive intervention, generally, it's supposed to come out about fifty-fifty. And that's about where North Korea is. It's 97.1 boys to 100 girls, in North Korea. But, in South Korea, in 1994—which was less than twenty years ago—the ratio was 115.1 boys to 100 girls.

DePue: Well, we're obviously talking about a subject you feel very passionate about—

Devine: Yes.

DePue: —because you're able to quote all these statistics, right down to the percentage point on this.

Devine: Yeah, I—

DePue: I'd like to move us to a different subject a little bit, if we can—

Devine: Okay.

DePue: —and ask you if you had an opportunity, when you went back, to track down some of your relatives, perhaps even relatives that you'd kind of lost track of for a long time.

Devine: Yes. I really never lost track of any family members on either birth side or the adoptive side. I continued to correspond, on a regular basis, with relatives on the adoptive side and also the birth side, because, in real life—different from the fictional life account in my novel—in my real life, the birth side and I kept in touch just about all my life, because they knew who I was.

I have three full brothers, and they knew I was their sister. I didn't know. I did not know, until I graduated from college. Because I knew them, since I was in grade school, and had an established relationship, friendship, that I kept that up. So, you know, at holidays, I would send them cards, and they would send letters occasionally. Yeah, that continued.

So, when I first went there in 1995, I saw relatives on both sides, adoptive and birth side. Getting together with the birth side was not always smooth, particularly with my birth mother, because I had never seen her before. I had seen her once in my life, without knowing she was my mother. And then, when I went back to Korea, in 1995, I went there and met her knowing, and she, knowing I knew, that she was my birth mother. That was not very smooth. It was pretty traumatic, and I got sick. I wrote a short story about that, too. (laughs)

DePue: Do you recall how the Korean people treated you, when you came back as, now, a Korean, but had become an American citizen? They probably thought you had a little bit of an accent, even.

Devine: Oh, actually, no. Even though I did not really keep up social life with Koreans—especially those who are church members—I just didn't really want to get involved in that scene.

But, I did keep up a certain amount of contact with Korean people, and those were special kinds of women. They were Korean women, married to Americans. We had that in common. We were mixed. We were having a mixed marriage, married life. So, I was a member of these women, all married to Americans. Many of the Americans were former GIs, and many of these women were illiterate. They spoke Korean language, but they didn't have any knowledge of written Korean. So, I was often a teacher. I taught them English, but I also taught them Korean, sometimes, if they were illiterate in Korean language.

I particularly helped them with getting the driver's license, because many of them wanted to get a driver's license, so that they could get a job. So, I recorded the driver's license book, the booklet. I translated it, word for word,

into Korean and recorded it for them. They passed around this recorded textbook, and many of them got their drivers' licenses and got jobs.

So, I did keep up with certain amount of social life with Koreans, and my Korean was really pretty good. My relatives, on both sides, were blown away, actually, by my speaking Korean well, because they had seen lots of Koreans, who came to this country and went back. They had some accent, and Koreans were making fun of some of these things. —

DePue: Well, this is a little bit of an indelicate questions, but so many Americans, who do marry Koreans, the Korean woman are practicing the "oldest profession." Were there some assumptions you encountered about that?

Devine: Yes. Actually, that's why, when Michael and I got married, in 1970, partly because he wanted to come to United States to Columbus, Ohio, and get his PhD. at Ohio State, but also because we just could not walk down the street together without people, kind of, making fun of us, laughing at us and even making snide remarks. That was not pleasant, because, at that time, forty-three years ago, Koreans' attitude toward inter-racially mixed, married people was extremely negative. Their assumption was, these women must have been what they call *gongju, yanggongju*, which means, western prostitute, prostitutes catering to westerners. So, yeah, it was not very pleasant to be treated as a prostitute.

DePue: But, in '95, had that changed somewhat?

Devine: That changed quite a bit. That changed quite a bit. I would say, that negative attitude got cut down by at least 70%. There were lots of foreigners working there, living there, and having Korean wives, and yes, the attitude relaxed a lot.

Now, compared to 1995, their attitude went even the other way. They really have a positive feeling about interracially married couples.

DePue: Well, sounds like the Korean culture has changed quite bit, then. Anything else you want to say about the experience of going back and actually living in Korea, before I bring you back to Springfield again?

Devine: Let's see. In 1995, when Michael said he got this Fulbright, and he was going to Korea, and he wanted the family to come, my first reaction was fear: fear of communism, because North Korea is so close, right there, within an hour of Seoul. I was just very afraid of communist spies. Maybe there will be some spies, spying on us, or…I was just full of fears about, you know, Korea, living conditions. Maybe the security is not very tight in these buildings. It was serious apprehension. But, I found that living in Korea was fun. I loved teaching, and so, since I was teaching at my alma mater, that made my life very enjoyable.

Then, three years later, we went to China. My first reaction, again, was fear, because that's a communist country, too. See, the communism really struck fear in my young heart when the Korean War broke out. Communism just forever stays in my mind, as something to be feared. So, I was afraid before we went to China.

But, oh, my goodness, China was just so open. The society was so open, and communist soldiers were there. We saw them, but they were just kind of standing around and watching people go by. The university: at the gate, there were communist soldiers in their uniform, but the only weapons that they had was a whistle and a red flag. If somebody rode a bike too fast, there would be a whistle going, [makes a blowing sound], you know, whistle going, to stop that person. So, the communist soldiers were doing that kind of police action that was a kind of friendly kind of police action. I saw communist soldiers in their uniforms on Sundays, shopping with their families, in department stores. So, pretty soon, my fear was totally gone.

DePue: I did want to bring you back to Springfield, enough to talk about what you did for work while you lived in Springfield.

Devine: Oh yeah. The first job was working for Sangamon State. Now it's Southern Illinois University, Springfield?

DePue: University of Illinois, Springfield. UIS.

Devine: Yeah, University of Illinois, Springfield. It used to be Sangamon State. I worked in the dean's office, dean of arts and sciences. I was an office worker. Before then…Do you want me to come to Springfield or talk about, like, a few years back in Cincinnati? When we were living in Cincinnati, Ohio, I got my first teaching job—

DePue: I think we talked about that a little bit.

Devine: Okay, teaching English as a second language.

DePue: Right.

Devine: Yeah. So, then, when we moved to Springfield, for a while I worked in the dean's office. Then, I got a teaching job at Lincoln Land Community College, teaching English. It was not English as a second language. It was freshman English. I taught paragraph writing. I tell you, I was really, really scared, because I was not going to teach English to foreign students. This was just real, straight American students, freshmen, at Lincoln Land Community College. It was called "English 099." It was a basic, freshman English, paragraph writing. I was very scared, but I did fine. I taught there for two, three years. Then, I worked at Illinois School Board office for a while.

DePue: Board of Education?

Devine: Uh huh. Then, I got an editor's job, working for SIU School of Medicine. I was the editor for three years, there, from 1998 to 1991. In 1991, we moved to Wyoming. Michael was the director of the Illinois Preservation Agency, which was also combined with the Illinois Historical Society. He was the director there, from 1985 to '91, six years. So, for the final three years of our life in Springfield, I was editor of SIU School of Medicine.

DePue: Which is another position you probably had to kind of pinch yourself. Now you're holding a traditional job of somebody who's an expert at the English language, and here you are, somebody who had mastered the language, only as the second language for yourself.

Devine: Right. So, I was very pleased that I was able to move from office type of work to teaching English, which was more my professional trained background.

DePue: Did you enjoy that job and the teaching job, straight English, more than you did teaching English as a second language?

Devine: Well, I cannot really say that. Professionally, teaching freshman English and working as an editor was a step up from teaching English to foreign students. But I enjoyed teaching English as a second language, too, because my interaction with the foreign students was so enjoyable. Even after twenty years, I still keep in touch with some of these students I taught English to, you know, Chinese students and Latin American students.

DePue: Tell me about the move, then, the family made to Wyoming.

Devine: Well, that was quite a dramatic transition, both in terms of the weather… We were used to the weather patterns in the Midwest. This was the first time exposure to the West. The cultural difference, as well as the weather.

And my mother moved with us. But, within a year, she passed away there. She's buried there, by the University of Wyoming. Our children all had a tough time transitioning, partly because we lived on the lake. Is it Lake Springfield?

DePue: Yes.

Devine: Yeah, we lived on the lake, and they enjoyed the life on the water, taking the boat out and water skiing and all this kind of thing. And leaving their middle school and high school buddies that they became so close to, it was very traumatic to them.

And, by the way, talking about the kind of racial discrimination topic, for a minute, again. Our children, they really did not experience serious racial discrimination. We discussed it with them some time ago, and they just really never had big problems in school. They were very integrated, very well, with the rest of the children.

I feel very lucky. I don't know what I need to credit that to, but I think, overall, immigrant experience becomes much easier, if the immigrant wants to assimilate into the new culture. If their attitude is very positive and want to assimilate, then the cultural transition becomes pretty smooth. But, if there's some resistance, that's when there could be some opportunities for problems. Anyway, so where do I need to go back to?

DePue: Well, where in Wyoming did you live?

Devine: Wyoming. We lived in Laramie, which is the only place where there is a four-year institution of higher education. That's the only four-year university in the whole state. There are colleges, like Casper College and other colleges, throughout, but they all are colleges or two-year places, and they feed students to University of Wyoming.

We loved Laramie, Wyoming. The university town has its unique kind of cultural setting there, with faculty members from all over the United States and even from other countries. So, it's a very cosmopolitan kind of setting. And the parking was so… There was just unlimited amount of parking, everywhere. Laramie, geographically, is surrounded by mountains. So, it's not spread out, which means we could go from one end to the other, within, like, fifteen minutes. Maybe we would go through, like, half a dozen stop lights. And the population being low: at that time, it was only, like, 400,000 people in the whole state, and in Laramie, it was more like 26,000, including the natives who were living there.

DePue: And I would assume that South Korea can fit inside Wyoming, two or three times over.

Devine: Oh yeah, definitely.

DePue: So, part of the adjustment you're making, as an American now, did you get used to having so much more elbow room than the Koreans would have?

Devine: Oh, my yes, yes. I loved that aspect of United States, living here. There's just so much room. Whenever I go back to Korea—we now go back to Korea at least once a year—and when I come back… I enjoy visiting Korea, but once I get back, and I get into my own car, and I just drive down this four-lane, six-lane, eight-lane roads and just go wherever I want to go, without having to be stuck in traffic for three hours. It's just wonderful.

Wyoming was particularly even more pleasant, in that sense. There's just so much more room there, too. And culturally, because of the university, there would be operas and symphonies and plays. All these things would come in, and, to faculty members, it was practically free, and the parking was ample. The football was good. Basketball was good. Yeah, it has, like, 320-some days that are sunny in Wyoming, so, literally, it was a blue sky and people were smiling. It was quaint to see these cowboys, still wearing

western-style cowboy outfits, and kids, at first, said, "Oh mom, there's a cowboy. There's real cowboy there." (both laugh)

DePue: Did the family become a little bit western, yourselves?

Devine: Oh, yeah. We blended into the cultural scene and, like in Halloweens and these holiday parties, we would dress up as, you know, cowboys and cowgirls. We attended all these Albany County state fairs and watched the rodeo. And, yeah, Cheyenne has a Frontiers Day.

DePue: Was there anybody in Wyoming who thought, maybe, your kids were Native American?

Devine: You know, a couple of our kids were always, yeah, drawing attention, in that sense. Lisa, particularly, looks a little bit Middle Eastern or Native American. Her complexion is a little bit darker than her sister, Mia. Mia is very fair skinned and blue eyed, hazel eyed. We have couple kids with hazel eyes.

DePue: Well, that defies biology, almost, doesn't it?

Devine: Yeah, yeah. Well, Michael has blue eyes and light, very curly, hair. So, one child has pretty curly hair. Well, now it's straightened out a little bit, so it's wavy. But, when she was a child, oh my goodness. She had hazel-blue eyes, curls that were tight, like popcorn, and beautiful. People thought, "Oh, she looks just like Shirley Temple." (both laugh)

DePue: Which might, initially, have taken some explanation of who Shirley Temple was.

Devine: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Well, tell me about how the family made the move to Kansas City, and especially, Michael getting the job at the Truman Presidential Library.

Devine: Yeah, when we moved from Springfield, Illinois to Laramie, Wyoming, we had all five children, still pretty young. That was '91, so our youngest was only eight years old, which means our oldest one was eighteen. He was freshman in college. He went one year to University of Illinois, but he decided to go with us, rather than stay in that school. So, he was enrolled in University of Wyoming. They were still pretty young, all five children, and my mother, and we had a dog. So, there were eight of us, plus a dog, and we took our boat with us, because our children didn't want us to sell that. They thought, in Wyoming, there would be a body of water, where we can still continue to do our boating. So, we took our boat with us.

Driving all that distance, all the way to Wyoming, was not much fun, especially in May, the end of May, when it was getting pretty hot, and the car was getting overheated if we kept the air conditioning on. It's a twelve,

thirteen-hour drive, pulling the boat and dog and eight people. (both laugh) So, that was the move from Springfield to Laramie.

Laramie to Kansas City, Missouri, we…all the kids left, except…you know, they all went off to college, and we had only one child, the youngest one, still living with us, Brian. So, we went from eight people, plus a dog and a boat, to just Michael and me and our youngest child. So, that was different.

Michael became the director of the Truman Library, and Brian entered KU (Kansas University), which is only one hour away. So, every other weekend or so he would come home, with a huge big load of laundry to do.

We lived on a lake here, too, so he enjoyed bringing his buddies and going swimming and canoeing here. He has a good memory attached to this house and this neighborhood, because he lived here. But other kids were all over, in Iowa and Port Townsend in Washington et cetera. So, their memories are not that attached to this house.

DePue: I'm curious, Maija, about Mike going to the Truman Presidential Library and Museum, and Harry S. Truman's role in Korean history, as well. Have you played a role in that, because Truman's story is so much about the Korean War?

Devine: Yes, yes. In fact, I think it was 2003. We moved here to Kansas City, Missouri, in 2001, in October, no, a month before 9-11 broke out. That's when we moved here. In 2003, in cooperation with the University of Missouri, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library held a Truman Conference at the library.

The library staff invited me to take part in that conference and give a presentation. So, at that time, I was writing my book as a memoir. When it was a memoir, the working title, at that time, was, *Ten Times Better than a Boy.* But, later, it changed to *The Voices of Heaven,* when it became a novel. But, I was working on that, and part of the story was my experience of fleeing Seoul and resettling in Masan, near Pusan. So, that war story, I was asked to read a few pages from that war story chapter. And, because President Truman was a pivotal person in the way Korean War started and ended and afterwards. Yes, my story made a really big impression on the audience.

Again, about three years ago, they had a special exhibit on Korean War. And, you know, my biological brother, ten years older than me, was a Korean Navy communications specialist. In short, he was kind of an equivalent of Radar, in the TV series, *M.A.S.H.* [2] He fought alongside General (Douglas) MacArthur. So, my brother, the navy guy, and Korean Marines went island to island—there were dozens of small islands in Incheon Harbor—and these islands needed to be cleared of communists, before

[2] M.A.S.H. – for Mobile Army Surgical Hospital – was a very popular TV series during the Korean conflict.

General MacArthur could land on Incheon. So, that part was included in this special exhibit, done at the Truman Library. That must have been in commemoration of the—

DePue: In the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war.

Devine: Yeah, yeah. So, yes, I participated in these things. I provided the material on my brother, the pictures and stories that became part of the special exhibit.

DePue: I know that Korean people think very highly of Douglas MacArthur. How do they feel about Harry S. Truman?

Devine: Oh, yes, that's a very good question. Yes, especially South Koreans, my generation, and maybe ten years younger than us. These people went through the Korean War, more on a personal level. We worshipped, we respected and admired and loved General MacArthur, because we thought General MacArthur's goal of reuniting the South and North, at whatever cost, even if it meant, possibly, causing China to enter the war, it was identical with South Korea's goal. We wanted to go all the way to the border with China, the Yalu River, and unite the whole peninsula. So, we loved General MacArthur.

But, President Truman fired him for insubordination and other reasons. South Koreans just couldn't understand that. Why, why did President Truman do this? If he left General MacArthur alone, he would have gone all the way to Yalu River and would have reunited the whole peninsula. But, South Koreans, of course, do not understand that that might have caused the start of World War III, and President Truman did not want that to happen. He needed to keep General MacArthur in check, in order to keep the war from spreading to a dangerous level. He wanted to make that a limited war.

Maija's older biological brother, Soon-back Rhee, at the statue of General Douglas MacArthur in Freedom Park, overlooking Inchon Harbor, the site of General MacArthur's Inchon landing. 2010

Koreans my age and a little bit older and, maybe, ten years younger, we have had enormous respect for General MacArthur. We're on his side, and we have a huge, sixteen-foot bronze statue of him overlooking the Incheon Harbor in a very beautifully maintained, meticulously maintained park, called Freedom Park. But our attitude toward President Truman is very… We don't understand his decision, and we just don't like him because his action, we felt, left Korea

divided forever and ever and ever. This feeling does not go away that fast. I understand there is a small, diminutive-sized statue of President Truman, but it's stuck away somewhere in Seoul. Nobody knows where it is, whereas, General MacArthur's statue is just way, you know, on a high point, overlooking the Incheon Harbor. There are visitors there.

My brother, who was in the Navy, visited General MacArthur every so often, once or twice a month. He always took rice wine with him and poured a paper cup of rice wine for the general, put it on the platform there, and he would pour one cup for himself. My brother slowly drank his wine and kind of talked to the general about the state of affairs in South Korea, and asked the general to kind of guide the Koreans, so that they could vote for the right person, who was right for the country. If a grandchild was on the way, he would talk to the general about that, too, and ask his guidance to make the delivery go well. In other words, General MacArthur became kind of like his personal friend and personal god and confidant. Then, he would take a walk around the park, and he would come back to the spot and say goodbye to the general and say, "I will come back in a week or so. Until then, goodbye, General." He would look at the general's cup of the wine, and the wine would be always gone. It was very obvious that the general enjoyed the wine.

DePue: (laughs) Well, has your opinion of Harry S. Truman changed any, after Michael got this job?

Devine: Oh, yes. I learned a lot more about President Truman. For example, I admire him for several reasons. One is, he is an accomplished piano player, classical piano music. I heard that he always carried this black briefcase, and one of his aids, one day, said, "Mr. President, can I carry that for you?" And he always refused, "Ah, no, no, no, I carry it myself." People thought there must be something really, really important in there. Later, it was known that he had his music in it. That music was very important to him. I admire that about him. He's a farmer. He didn't have a college education, but he self-taught world history. He was an avid reader, just went through all the public library books. I admire him for educating himself like that.

Another reason I admire him is, he is a Romeo, a real Romeo, totally smitten with his wife. Even after, like, thirty years of being married to her, he would write—on Valentine's Days and other days—he would write sweet notes, like, "You are the girl of my life." I like that about a man, you know, a loving man like that. At the [Truman] Library, on Valentine's Days, their curators get these love letters out and put them on display, yeah.

Yes, I learned quite a bit about the president. And the more I hear about him, the more I respect him. He was a plain-speaking man. His language was sometimes pretty rough, but he was a very honest man, made lots of tough, tough decisions that impacted the whole world history, ever since he was in office and afterwards.

DePue: And he doted on his daughter, as well.

Devine: Oh my, yes, yes (laughs).

DePue: You probably liked that, too.

Devine: Yes. He was a good father.

DePue: I want to finish off with a little bit of discussion. You've already mentioned it. We've woven this into the discussion quite a bit, but what led you to decide to write the book?

Devine: Ah, I think the fact that I was five years old when my father's mistress came to live with us, just forever became an image that just burned in my heart and in my brain. And the fact that neighbors were all saying that…You know, my mother fell ill, after the mistress came, and she was bedridden for several months. While she was bedridden, neighbors came, and they would help her sit up to drink the Chinese medicine. I thought she was going to die, and these women would say, "Oh, if that girl had been a boy, this would not have happened." That scene, the scene of the second woman coming, my mother working away all day, chopping things to make Korean food, a feast table, to welcome the woman, that day. And also, the day my mother fell ill, which is the night, when the mistress arrived, my mother passed out and became bedridden. Then, neighbors coming to say I should have been a boy. This just burned in my head all my life.

I told Michael this story, when we got married. He said, "You need to write this down. You need to write it." But, we began to have children; we had five children. We had soccer games, football games to drive them to, piano lessons, and I just didn't find the time. But those images just stayed with me, for the next thirty years, until 1992, after we moved to Wyoming.

A friend talked me into taking a memoir-writing class. I went to that class and the teacher said, "You know, the first assignment is, you go outside somewhere, find a nice quiet corner, in a park or by the river or whatever, and write two pages of your earliest memory." So, I did. The earliest memory that I came up with was the day the mistress was coming into the house and how it felt to watch my mother chop the Korean food, the vegetables, and preparing for the party, when she was beginning to share her husband with another woman that day. As I looked back at that scene, again, as a married woman, with children, I just broke down and cried. So, that became the time to write about this.

I wrote about that day, when the mistress came, and my teacher had us to read what we wrote. We took turns. When I read mine, I couldn't finish reading it. I just broke down and cried. So, my teacher picked it up, and she finished reading it for me. She said, "Now, Maija, you don't ever cry at a reading again. Don't you ever cry again, at a reading. You just finish it."

She's also the one who said… I was taking graduate courses to become a counselor, counseling in psychology. I thought I would become a family counselor. But, she said, "You need to write this book. You really need to do that." She said, "Take a year off from your counseling. If you don't like the writing, you can always go back to counseling. But, you need to do this." So, I began to do that. See, one of the reasons I didn't want to do the writing, even though Michael encouraged me to do it for thirty-some years, was because I didn't want to go back to this painful memory, the culture of the entire country, other than Christians, who believed that boys were more valuable than girls. I just could not, could not make sense out of that.

You know, men became victims of this belief, too. My father didn't really want to get a mistress. He waited fifteen years for my mother to bear a boy child, so he didn't want it either. I'm not saying this male-centric values only victimized women only. In many cases, it victimized men too. If men didn't really buy into that idea, they suffered, as well.

Anyway, I felt very strongly about how this male-preferring culture affected the everyday life of all Koreans. This is not a unique, one-in-a-million kind of story. The reason I wrote about it is because it's so common. This kind of boy preference affected everybody's life, positively or negatively.

Positively, if you were a boy. When you were born, parents draped a straw string, with red peppers stuck in the string, and announced to the whole world that a boy was born; Wow! But, if it's a girl, they draped a straw string to keep people from going in and out when a newborn was there. But, they stuck these pieces of charcoal, which is not very pretty or glamorous. Even in North Korea, recently, I heard that Dennis Rodman [professional U.S. basketball player] had been there. Apparently, Kim Jong Un's wife talked about their daughter, you know, Kim Jong Un and his wife's daughter. The rest of the world didn't know they had a child, but Dennis Rodman is the one who came back and talked about Mrs. Kim being excited about a girl. Well, if it had been a boy, you know darn well, North Korea would have made the whole world know, oh Wow, we have the next leader-to-be; a boy was born to our young Marshal..

DePue: I hadn't anticipated asking this question, but what do you think about what you hear, now, in the news, about the way Islamic culture thinks about women and their role in that religion and that society?

Devine: Um hmm, yes. That is very interesting question, too. I am very intrigued by Muslim culture, Middle Eastern culture, where women are kept under the control of men, being deprived of educational opportunities, the tragedies that happen. There are very significant correlations between that culture and Korean and Confucian sphere. Cultures in Confucian sphere, which includes

Vietnam and China and Japan. Yes, there is an amazing amount of correlation between those two cultures. But, there are some differences.

I read Geraldine Brooks' book, *Nine Parts of Desire.* That's one of my favorite books. She wrote it as a journalist, travelling all over Middle Eastern countries, and, in that book, she points out that the reason that males keep women hidden away and covered up in burqas and kept away from participating in public meetings and schools and public activities, is because they believe that women were given, by god, nine parts of desire. Men got only one part. Since women got nine parts of desire, they're the temptresses. Their hair, their eyes, their movement, their body, the whole female being—the purpose of that being is to tempt men. That's why women needed to be covered up, head to toe, only with little slits, where they could look out.

So, there's some differences—the fundamental differences, in viewing men and women and the world. There are some differences, but, the end result of male-centered values, seem to work in a very similar way, like denying educational opportunities to women. You know, in Korea, too, especially during World War II era, a lot of Korean young girls, thirteen-, twelve-, fourteen-year-old girls, were dragged away to provide sex to Japanese soldiers during World War II. These girls, in many cases, they were just grabbed. But, in some cases, they were told that, if they would go with them, they would be going to Japan, and they would work in factories, and they would make a lot of money, and they would even be sent to schools. Many of these girls, voluntarily, followed these people, who led them to the ships to Japan, because they wanted educational opportunities, just like these women in Middle-Eastern countries, where they're being shot at, because they went to school. They had a burning desire for education. They were shot. The young woman, the young girl, twelve-year-old girl [Malala Yousafzai], who was shot. These Korean girls, too, they were girls, who went to school, and the father came and grabbed her and beat her up.

It was not just men who deprived women of educational opportunities. There were women who bought into that belief, too. There were not just fathers who abused daughters for trying to go to school, but there were mothers, too. Mothers also believed that girls, women are not supposed to be educated. Girls, who can count up to ten; that's okay. But, anything above ten, will cause their husbands to die early. Those girls would drive men to early graves. So, there were some women who believed that, also. I'm not just saying it's all men who oppressed women. Women also participated in that. I suppose it's cultural conditioning that caused them, both males and females, to behave in certain ways.

So, there is a huge correlation between educational opportunities and political activity opportunities being denied in Middle Western societies and Korean society, where these girls, many of them, ended up becoming comfort

women, because they were led by people who promised them educational opportunities.

DePue: Going back to your book, then. I know you said you started it as a memoir, but that's not how the book ended up.

Devine: No, no, that's right. It was a complete memoir. Actually, the novel does not even cover even half of the memoir material. But, after an agent… Her name is Stephanie von Hirschberg, in New York. I met her in one of the literary seminars in Laramie, Wyoming.

DePue: What was her last name again?

Devine: von, small v, v-o-n, Hirschberg, H-i-r-s-c-h-b-e-r-g, Stephanie von Hirschberg. In fact, she and I communicated just recently. We reconnected. But, she read my memoir version. This was in 2001 or '02, after we moved to Kansas City. In Wyoming, I wrote this memoir version. After we moved to Kansas City, I showed it to Stephanie, and she read it. She thought, well, nonfiction book, memoir, by an unknown person, is very difficult to sell. If you are Jackie Onassis or Michael Jackson or something, your memoir will sell like hotcakes. But, for an unknown person, memoirs really don't sell.

So, she encouraged me to turn it into a novel. I said, "Oh, my goodness. I don't do novels. I don't know how to do it." She said, "Well, you know you have turned chapters of this memoir into short stories, and you got them published in prestigious literary journals, like *Kenyon Review,* twice, and won awards. So, why don't you just write it like a short story? Pretend like you're writing a short story, but keep going." So, that's more or less what I did.

I continued to take literary workshops and courses, graduate courses, at universities in Wyoming, Laramie, University of Wyoming. Also, after we moved to Kansas City, I also took a course at UMKC, University of Missouri Kansas City. So, I continued to take classes and workshops to get the training I needed to do a novel. It took ten years to do it.

I had a very prestigious agent, Tim Seldes, who was the president of the Russell and Volkening Literary Agency, in New York. He liked my novel very much. I met him in a Key West workshop, and he encouraged me to keep revising it and keep revising it. Without his help, I probably would have given up.

DePue: How did you come about deciding to take the approach, where you had multiple perspectives? You go back and forth, between four or five key characters.

Devine: (laughs) Right. You know, I did that after I read the novel, *Cold Mountain,* that was made into a movie. Charles Frazier, I think Charles Frazier is the

author's name. I have to double check on that, but *Cold Mountain* had two voices, alternating, the Civil War soldier, wounded soldier, on the way home and the girlfriend, his girlfriend, waiting for him. So, the voices switch back and forth. I was very, very impressed with that method. You get to live and experience the worlds of two different characters.

I wanted to try that, maybe, with my story, too. When it was a memoir, it had only my voice, only one voice. But, when I was trying to write it as a novel, I thought, well, wouldn't it be interesting to show, not just my point of view, but my mother's point of view? How about my father's point of view? How about the mistress's point of view?" I kept going like this.

I have a short story, which was a chapter of my memoir, but, when I shaped it into a short story, it won a fiction contest in *Boulevard*. That is written from the point of view of the first boy, born to my father and the mistress. When the boy became a marriageable age, even though the society endorsed the man, my father, to go ahead and get a mistress and produce male children, once the male and female children were born to the mistress, then those children were treated as second-class citizens, because they were not born to first wife; they were born to a mistress. This is the kind of social injustice that I wanted to bring out. If they wanted boys to be born, and a man was encouraged to take whatever method to produce the boy, then they should honor the boys and girls born to the mistress. They should honor them and treat them as equals. Why do they treat them, for the rest of their life—it's not just for briefly, it's for the rest of their lives—they were treated as second-class citizens.

Maija Devine and her half brother, Bong-jin Rhee, share a meal together at her cousin's home in Seoul, 2010.

When this boy became a marriageable age, the potential bride's family would not approve of the marriage. This young man was madly in love with her, but the family would not give her to him. The only way that marriage ended up succeeding was because my mother, as the first wife, stepped in. She asked to meet with the potential bride's parents. She held a meeting, and she said, "My husband's mistress came to our house. When she came, she came as a virgin. She was not a trashed woman. She was not a prostitute. She was a virgin." My mother had to testify, verify this. Well, there's no way to really physically verify, but

my mother vouchsafed this fact, in front of the potential bride's parents, and the parents were so impressed.

DePue: Yeah, you mentioned that story once before.

Devine: Yes.

DePue: It's a very memorable incident in your own personal life. What year—

Devine: While we're talking about the different points of views that you asked about, the points of views, I wanted to explore that boy's point of view, and I did. So, I am very grateful to Stephanie von Hirschberg for having suggested this novel, because this way, I not only lived and experienced my own life experience, but, through writing this, I experienced my father's life more deeply than I would have if I didn't try writing this from his point of view. I would not have lived the experience of that boy, born to my father and the mistress, if I hadn't written the fictionalized version of his life.

DePue: When did the book get published?

Devine: It was published this year.

DePue: This has been a long journey, then.

Devine: Yes, it's been a very long journey, and there were lots of discussions on what the title should be. When it was a memoir, as I mentioned, working title was *Ten Times Better than a Boy*. But, some agents and editors said, "Oh, that title is too polemic." And my husband thought, well, maybe…You know, at that time, Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club* made huge success, made into a movie, and it was just world-renowned book. Michael said, maybe the title of my book should be *Ten Times Better than Amy Tan*. (both laugh). That's a joke. I don't want Amy Tan to get mad at me. (laughs)

DePue: You don't need that.

Devine: No. But, anyway, then *The Voices of Heaven.* I chose that, because I didn't even need to fictionalize it. The Voice of Heaven is my mother's real, life-time name. Her name was *Eum-chun*. *Eum* means sound or voice. *Chun* means sky or heaven. So, my adoptive mother's, actual, real, lifetime name means "the sound of heaven or voice of heaven." So, the editor and I turned the voice into voices, plural, voices of heaven. I think that title works in at least two ways. One, it's my mother's real name. Two, it works as a metaphor.

The Confucian values, the male-centric values that was practiced for 600 years, during the Yi Dynasty or Chosun Dynasty, which began in 1392—so from 1392 down to 1910, when Japan occupied Korea, 600 years, the Confucian value, the male-centered values, became ingrained into the Korean soul. Everybody, whether aristocratic, nobility or common class or real lower class, like prostitutes or artists—artists were also classified as lower class—and butchers. This philosophy permeated everybody in Korea, from top to bottom. These values were handed down to each of us, as though they were like Ten Commandments for Christians. These were commandments from heaven. These were voices coming from heaven, "You do this. You follow these rules, and your life will be happy and peaceful." These were handed down to us. So, this, *voices of heaven*, works as a metaphor for the philosophies and beliefs that Koreans tried to live up to for 600 plus years. It's heaven's commandments. That's the metaphor.

DePue: You've been out promoting this book for several months, then. What has the experience been like, in promoting the book?

Devine: Oh, it's been very, very uplifting and rewarding, because many people think that the book just talked about the past, 1950s. But, many readers ask, "Well, these things don't happen anymore, do they?" And "Did these stories occur in the North, too? Was it common to North and South?" I try to answer these questions during my readings and presentations. And, as I mentioned, briefly, before, it's about female fetuses being aborted and also population imbalance and the gender-biased policies, still in place, in private schools. I make the point that these values that are described in my book, are, in some form or another, still affecting the lives of Koreans in 2013, this year, in today's Korean society. Korean people, who have high-tech culture and the culture of advanced country, economically, but in terms of these cultural values, they're still showing a gender bias.

The book cover of Maija Rhee Devine's novel, "The Voices of Heaven," published in 2013, won four book awards in 2014.

In my presentation, I connect these stories in the book with the current Korean, South Korean, situation in there, especially in the area of population imbalance and gender biased policies. When I do that, the audience really… they seem to really

appreciate that, bridging the 50-year-old story, with the current, Korean situation, especially when I compare some figures with the population figure in North Korea and Kim Jong Un. [3]

DePue: When you've been out promoting the book, are you talking to both Korean groups, as well as Americans?

Devine: Yes, yes. Mostly, either it's been all American group, with one or two Koreans mixed in, or it was half and half. I haven't talked to any strictly Korean group yet. Mostly, you know, I wrote this book more with the American and English-speaking audience in mind.

Koreans already know about this. They lived this life. You know, the young people, their mothers and grandmothers, uncles and aunts all lived this life, and they already know this story. But, the outsiders, the world outside Korea, to them this is very exotic. I wanted to share this part of Korea. Maybe there are some Koreans who may feel that, "Oh, this is something that we don't want to talk about. We don't want to dig up this polygamous life situations. That was long time ago. It doesn't happen anymore. So, why do you write about this now? Korea changed now. Koreans now love daughters more than boys."

Well, that's very nice, thank you. You know, they love girls more than boys. That's also gender-biased thinking. Can we be free of gender-biased thinking, is what I try to say. But anyway—

DePue: Have you gotten comments like that from some Koreans?

Devine: Oh, yes. Just about every time, when I finish talking about these issues, somebody would say, "Oh, yeah, but recently Koreans now much prefer to have girls than boys, because girls, even after they get married, they stay emotionally and physically close to the parents, and they visit all the time. But boys, once they get married, they more or less become the family of the in-laws, and they don't come and visit very often. So, actually, girls are a lot better." They like the girls better. But, that's still gender-biased thinking, as far as I'm concerned.

DePue: Any other memorable experiences, while you've been promoting?

Devine: Yes. People constantly come up and tell me their personal stories, as they relate to the stories that I told in the book and through my presentations. They tell their own stories, and they confirm how the stories I told in the book and the continuing narratives, to this day, they confirm that.

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[3] Find Maija's presentation at: *TEDxTalk at http://youtu.be/GFD-6JFLF5A.*

One woman came up to me, and she looked to be in her thirties, thirty-five, maybe, and she said her mother had three daughters in a row, including this woman, who was talking to me. She said, when her mother had the third daughter, she was just so ashamed. She felt she did not deserve to eat the seaweed soup. The seaweed soup is the new-mother's soup, because it's supposed to help produce milk. So, all new mothers drank this seaweed soup, six times a day. That's the tradition. But this woman's mother was so ashamed, felt so unworthy to eat this soup, she refused to eat this soup. She did. While she was telling me this, this daughter, tears were just rolling down her face. At the same time, another person came up to me, after the same meeting.

Actually, I did talk to completely Korean group. This was one, completely Korean group I talked to, in Seoul. They were employees of GE, General Electric. There were about twenty-five people, maybe about ten were women and fifteen were guys.

One guy came up, and he said, "Well, my mother had three daughters, too." But then, she had him, and she said, "Ah, ever since then, my house has been like a party central, always celebrating the birth of this fourth child," who was him, the boy. He just told me this story, with big smile, you know, just the opposite kind of story. That tells me that, even thirty years ago, Korean women felt this strongly about giving birth to either a daughter, in which case there was a shame, or for a boy, in which case it was an occasion for partying and celebrating, for the rest of the life.

Another story is, I met this man. Jon Han is his name, and he teaches creative writing at Missouri Baptist University in St. Louis. I met him at the New Letters Literary Conference, here, in Kansas City. He and I got to exchange books, and I gave him my book, *Voices of Heaven*, and the poetry book, *Long Walks on Short Days.* He and I got to talking about Korean values, that we both lived through.

In his case, his mother gave birth to him. He was the only son that she gave birth to. His father was a farmer, who made some money, and when men begin to make some money, then they begin to womanize. That seems to be a general pattern. So, this farmer decided to have a mistress. He kept her outside the home, but the mistress had several babies, and the babies were brought into the house for the wife to raise.

This woman, the wife, raised them, just exactly as though they were her own flesh and blood. She was such an angelic woman that she just treated those kids so well that, even now, this man, who is her biological son, lives here in United States, in St. Louis, and she lives in Korea. All these children, by the mistresses, they come to her and cook for her, bathe her, wash her clothes. They are taking care of her.

But this man, he sees himself as a victim of this boy-preference culture, too, because he was deeply hurt when his father took a mistress. His mother became very ill, as well, traumatized. So, she became very, very unhappy, and, even though later on, when the children were born to the mistress, she took care of them, but she stayed as an unhappy person all her life.

This man, he saw his mother suffering, so one day he talked to his father. He said, "Why did you do that? Didn't you love my mother? Why did you need to have a mistress?" The father said to him—this was when this man, this man, living in St. Louis, he was a teenage boy when he asked his father that— "Why did you get a mistress?" His father told him, "Oh, son, when you grow up, you will understand a man's ways and man's heart."

Well, this man, John Hahn, grew up, and he married and has two daughters himself. But all his life, even now, he resents his father for having hurt his mother's heart so badly by having the mistress. This is what I mean by what I said earlier. The boy-preferring culture has hurt, not just women. Most of the victims were women, but there were some males who suffered too, like John Hahn. He said he suffered, because he loved his mother, and it hurt to see her so broken hearted.

DePue: I understand you had another experience, where a woman came up—I guess this was an American woman came up—and said that listening to you, hearing your stories, changed her opinion about Koreans.

Devine: I'm not sure. In what context?

DePue: That she said she hated Koreans.

Devine: Oh, yes, that's about Korean War. Yes, she and I worked together in Wyoming Territorial Park Outdoor Living History program. She and I had lunch, after working together for several months. After lunch, she said, "I have a confession to make." Then she said, "I hated Koreans all my life, thirty years. I hated them, because my brother was killed there. I felt like Koreans killed my brother." Yeah, but she also hated Chinese and Japanese and Vietnamese, because she couldn't tell us apart. So, I told her, "Well, I can't tell us apart, either," which made her laugh. But then she grabbed my hand, and she said, "Will you forgive me for having hated Koreans all my life?" And she said, "You know, after seeing you work hard and raising your five children, teaching them American values, the American values of democracy, independent spirit, individuality, freedom of speech—all these American values—hard work ethics, honesty, all these things." She began to realize that, maybe, her brother's lost life, and the lost life of all those—up to 700,000 U.N. [United Nations] and American soldiers—who were killed or wounded, maybe those lives might have been worth it, if they saved lives like mine and

many other South Koreans' lives. She, Ceil Potterr, asked me to forgive her for having hated Koreans.

I just didn't know what to say. I mean, I should have said, "Forgive me. Because of us, your brother's life was lost, and tens of thousands of American lives were lost." I was the one who should have asked for forgiveness, and here she was; it was the other way around. So, this story was taped in Korea while I was there this past June, and it's on the U.S. Embassy's website. It's a three-minute, oral-history program. It was part of the observance of the sixtieth anniversary of the armistice agreement of the Korean War.

I am very happy that I was asked to participate in this oral history program and to talk about this, because a lot of people who saw this video tape said they were deeply touched by the effects of war, whatever kinds of war. All wars affect human beings in this way, very tragic way. In some cases, there's instances of forgiveness and eventual making sense of what looked to be senseless.

DePue: Well, we're at the point in time, where I think we can close with a few provocative questions, as if I haven't been asking you provocative questions all along.

Devine: (laughs) Now, you're getting into the real good stuff.

DePue: Oh, well, maybe so. This has all been fascinating. You're obviously very passionate and the perfect person to be talking about these issues. They're important for anybody to understand, I think.

Devine: Oh, thank you. Thank you.

DePue: But, I wonder, having been an American since 1972, how do you identify yourself today?

Devine: Ah, yeah. I identify myself, culturally, as an American. Whenever I go to baseball games, football games, basketball games and sing the national anthem, I get a lump in my throat, because I appreciate what America stands for. They're fighting for freedom all over the world. I appreciate it, and I just cannot listen to or sing the national anthem without getting all emotional. Just like those people who became very emotional at the swearing-in ceremony at the citizenship ceremonies.

But, at the same time, my cultural conditioning, for the first twenty-one years of my life, was done in Korea and by Koreans. And the early cultural conditioning does not disappear. It affects you in ways you may not even realize, all your life. It stays with you. Deep down, I hold Korean culture, and I feel I am still a Korean, but with very robust appreciation for American values.

DePue: Would your kids identify themselves as Americans?

Devine: Yes.

DePue: Not hyphenated Americans.

Devine: Not hyphenated Americans. Yes, they would see themselves as American. It's interesting, when they fill out these scholarship applications, one of the children, she always put herself down as minority, Asian-Pacific or minority, because, hey, that gives you a little edge in getting a scholarship or something. But our older daughter just never does that. She always checks herself as white, because she thinks that our family is doing well enough, and there are lots of families who need a scholarship more than she does. She always just checks herself as white. So, you know, kids have different opinions about their own identity. But, culturally, I think they all identify as Americans.

DePue: Are there some aspects of being a Korean that you very much want to embrace and hold on to in your own life?

Devine: I don't know. That's a real tough, tough question. Koreans have this very enmeshed relationship. They are very dependent on each other, emotionally, and in the operation of their day-to-day life. They go back and forth. The alumni network from primary school through middle school and high school and college and graduate, and also the network through work places—all these are networks—and they all have, more or less, more enmeshed kind of relationship quality about them, more than in United States. In U.S., you belong to alums and alumni association, and you belong to workplace groups, but you keep your individual, private, privileges and your own private life separate.

But, in Korean life, at the individual life, tends to get shared a lot more with other people, not only within the family, but outsiders, like those in these alum works and everything. So, there's a lot more enmeshing of relationships. I, in a way, admire that. They are seen as being warmhearted. For example, they would loan money to relatives. That happened all the time. That still happens all the time. They would loan money to friends. That's an example of an act of enmeshed relationship. Americans don't borrow money from relatives and brother-in-law and sister and that much. You go to the bank. But Koreans, well Koreans do that, too, now; they go to the bank. But still, you know, there's a lot more borrowing of money, which is an example of this enmeshed relationship. That kind of shows warm feeling that they have for one another. They're not individuals, just out for themselves, but they are connected. If one hurts, another hurts too. And, therefore, they would loan the money to get them out of difficult situation. There's a lot more situations that make you feel like they're warmer people. Their relationships are so much closer, compared to American relationships that can be considered by Koreans as cool relationships, relatively speaking.

So, in a way, I do admire that aspect of Korean affective life. But then, it also can be very destructive, too, because they would want to borrow money from you. They would want to come and stay with you for a month. (laughs) There's a lot less respect for privacy. And so, it has some pros and cons. If I liked any aspect of Korean culture, I suppose that kind of emotional bonding that goes on, that is admirable, which has some negative side effects, too. What else?

DePue: Well, a different subject here. But I'm sure you're aware that, in the last couple of presidential election cycles, one of the issues, very much in debate, is the United States' immigration policy, especially as it relates to illegal immigrants.

Devine: Right.

DePue: I wanted to get your impression of that debate.

Devine: [sighs] That is a tough one. That is very tough. But, one thing that I would say is, these immigrants, if they voluntarily and willingly came to this country, whether illegally or legally, they need to assimilate into the culture more readily. I know some groups, Hispanics maybe, they like to keep their own heritage. They want to save money and send it home, and eventually they want to go back. That's their goal. In some instances, they don't even want to learn the language, English, as well as they should.

My understanding is, there's Vietnamese and Asian immigrants coming into this country; they're so much more eager to assimilate. They're so much more eager to have their children assimilate into this culture and become successes, compared to some other immigrant groups that have some resistance to assimilation.

Assimilation does not mean they should forget their own heritage; they can keep their own heritage. But, in terms of everyday life, of learning the language and being able to develop into fully functioning member of the society where they want to live in, then they need to assimilate. That's my view. If you choose to live in this culture, then you need to assimilate. You can keep your own heritage, as much as you want. The assimilation does not, should not, interfere with that.

But some groups seem to think that assimilation means abandoning their own background and that they don't want to do that. That causes problem for them and for the rest of us living in this country, too.

DePue: How about the issue, the very contentious issue, of amnesty for illegal immigrants? Now, we're calling them undocumented.

Devine: Yeah. I think U.S., as a country, is strong enough, in terms of its resources, to be able to absorb these illegal immigrants, who are already here. You know,

they can try to limit future immigrants, but those who were even born here, they need to get amnesty and get made into fully participating citizenship, I think. I think U.S. is strong enough to absorb these people, if they really want to. It's a matter of not wanting to that's causing this problem, I think.

DePue: What else would you like to comment on? This is our fourth session. I think we've got over eight hours now, easily.

Devine: (laughs) Well, I think we covered just about most of the important things. Last time we were talking, you wanted my birth mother's name. I still have to find that for you. [Added after the original transcription: It is Whack-Sill Jeon. Her first name, Whack-Sill, means "Certainty" and describes her perfectly. She was an iron-willed, opinionated person, from all the accounts of my birth brothers, and their wives, who knew her well.]

DePue: Okay.

Devine: And, after you go through some of these notes, transcriptions, if you think of any other questions, don't hesitate to ask me.

DePue: Well, let me finish with this one. Have you learned new things that surprised you, in the process of writing the book and, especially, in promoting the book?

Devine: Surprising things—

DePue: Not necessarily about the culture that you were writing about.

Devine: Right. Yeah, I am finding that the promoting part is just very, very distasteful. I wish I didn't have to do that. I wish my book had been picked up by a big publisher, like Random House or Simon and Schuster and William Morris. My erstwhile agent, Tim Seldes, had sent the book to places like St. Martin's, and William Morrow and Random House, but I didn't have any luck at that time. I was still revising. But the promotion work: Even these big publishers, they don't do as much for the author's promotion as much, now, with their limited budget. But their name recognition, by itself, will cause a rise in the sales of the book, if it was picked up by a big publisher like that.

I am suffering from the fact that this was published by a small publisher that has offices, both in United States and in Korea. So, I am having to do a lion's share of promotion work myself, and I am spending inordinate amount of money and energies and time into promoting the book. I want to work on my next books. One of them is a novel or a book of poems, about Korean comfort women, who provided sex services to Japanese soldiers during World War II. I have no time to do any of that work, now. So, promotion work is… I don't want to do it, but I have to do it.

DePue: Are you motivated to do the promotion work, because you want to see this—

Devine: Yes.

DePue: …becoming a financial success, or because you're committed to getting the story out?

Devine: Right. No, financial success, no. I don't even dream of that, no. I just want the story out. I'd like a greater number of people to understand Korean traditions and Korean people, what kinds of things motivated them to do certain things and what kinds of things are motivating them to do the same, similar kinds of things, not in the same form or to the same degree, but similar kinds of things, even now, today.

A lot of the world audience knows a lot about China and Japan, but not so much Korea. Korea is stuck between the two cultural giants, and Korea just needs to be known better to the world. Even while I was writing this book and passing this around among agents, some agents said, "Well, if this book was about China, this would sell." I'm sorry; the book is not about China; it's about Korea. And, in a way, in my book, I tried to distinguish Korean culture from Japanese and Chinese culture. I did that, partly, from the foods that I describe. Korean food is distinctly different from Chinese and Japanese. Don't you agree?

DePue: Yes, definitely so.

Devine: Definitely, food, music and also the language. Korea has a distinctively different language from Chinese and Japanese. I showed the distinct Korean language in this novel, by using, maybe up to a hundred old sayings that Koreans say, over and over, every day as they go about living their everyday life, explaining why they are doing certain things and why they feel certain ways. They express these feelings and actions through the everyday folk sayings that they repeated among themselves and for others to hear.

So, yes, I would like the world to know more about Korean culture and people, as distinctly different from Chinese and Japanese. When I talked about it at a presentation, one day in Washington, D.C., a person critiqued my presentation by saying that, in this day of globalism, it's not so cool to talk about how different Koreans are from Chinese and Japanese.

DePue: (Laughs)

Devine: Yeah, and I disagree with that. I mean, you know, we have a lot in common with Chinese and Japanese, because we shared many religions and philosophies, like Confucianism and Buddhism and Taoism. All these were common. But we, distinctly, had our own folk religions and folk beliefs and folk sayings, folk literature that made us distinctly different from one another.

So, in this novel, I tried to bring out more of the folk religions and beliefs and literature, the language, so that the world audience will know Koreans, as distinctly different from Chinese and Japanese.

DePue: Well, I would hope that this interview will help get the word out even more, that it will certainly be around for a long time. We're committed to that. So, even people finding this fifty or a hundred years from now, might find it a revelation to them.

Devine: Oh, well, thank you, Mark. Bless you, Mark, for such an insightful summarizing remark.

DePue: And thank you, Maija. It's been a pleasure to have the opportunity to talk to you.

Devine: Oh, you're welcome, and thank you. Let me know if you have more questions. I'll be available.

DePue: Okay.

Devine: Okay. Say "hi" to Su Youn. [Mark DePue's wife, also from Korea.]

DePue: I will. Bye.

(End of interview)