

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Maija Rhee Devine

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Immigrant Stories Oral History project

Interview # IM-A-L-2013-071

Maija Rhee Devine, who, as a young child, grew up in war-torn Korea, then married an American Peace Corps volunteer in 1970 and emigrated to the United States, was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Immigrant Stories* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Aug 29, 2013 Location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield

Date: Aug 30, 2013 Location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield

Date: Aug 30, 2013 Location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield

Date: Oct 3, 2013 Location: Telephonic interview - Maija in Kansas City residence

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Pam Bruzan, ALPL volunteer

Edited by: Jan Culp and Rozanne Flatt, ALPL volunteers

Total Pages: 143 pgs

Total Time: 2:29 + 1:16 + 1:45 + 2:35 / 2.48 + 1.27 + 1.75 + 2.58 = 8.08 hrs

Session 1: Background of Korean culture and growing up during the Korea War

Session 2: Life in post-war Korea, education in Seoul and the U.S., and marriage

Session 3: Early years in the United States through family's years in Springfield

Session 4: Experiences in Wyoming, at Truman Library, and writing her novel

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on December 12, 2013.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

© 2013 Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

Abstract

Maija Rhee Devine, *Immigrant Stories*, IM-A-L-2013-071

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Maija Rhee and her twin brother were born in Manchuria, China in May, 1943 to Korean refugees. Due to the family's precarious life, Maija was given to a family friend, who took her to Seoul, South Korea, and then gave the infant Maija to a childless couple, who adopted her. (Maija did not know she was adopted until she was an adult.) In 1949 Maija's parents were distraught that they had no male heir. Friends and relatives finally convinced her father to take a mistress to serve as a second wife. He did so, bringing her into the home. She soon became pregnant. In December, 1950, the family fled from Seoul in front of the Communist Chinese. Maija spent the next three years in Masan, South Korea, near Pusan. She and her mother were separated from her father and his second wife.

After the war, the family moved back to Seoul. Maija's mother insisted that Maija get the best education possible, and she proved to be an excellent student. She graduated from Jung Shin Girls' High School (a Presbyterian school) in Seoul in 1961, then received a scholarship and enrolled in Sogang College (a Jesuit college), also in Seoul. In 1965 she came to the United States, doing graduate work at St. Louis University, majoring in English literature. She spent several months at the University of Minnesota before returning to Seoul to work at the Soodo Women's College (now Sejong University) in 1968.

In 1970 she met Michael Devine, a Peace Corps volunteer, then teaching at Sogang College. They were married later that year and soon returned to the United States. Over the next several decades, Maija raised five children as the family moved frequently, including Ohio, Maryland, Springfield, Illinois, Laramie, Wyoming, Seoul, China, and Kansas City, Missouri, where Michael works as the director of the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library. Maija taught English as a second language for many years.

While in Springfield, she taught freshman English at Lincoln Land Community College. In 2013 she published a novel, based on her own experiences, entitled *The Voices of Heaven* and a book of poems about China and Korea, *Long Walks on Short Days*. The novel centers on the trauma she and her family experienced because of the very strong, paternalistic traditions of Korean culture. She talks at length about the Korean War, Korean culture, religion and the impact of Korea's patriarchal system.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Korea's patriarchal traditions; life as a child during the Korea War; mistresses in Korean culture; Confucianism; life in the U.S. as an immigrant; impact of Christianity in Korea; Michael Devine; Sogang College; Soodo Women's College; life as foreign student at St. Louis University; *The Voices of Heaven*; *Long Walks on Short Days*

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

COPYRIGHT

The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955