

Dear Reader,

When I was young, my mom would always tell me this story about how she and her siblings were separated from their parents during the Korean War. Sometimes she would say they were lost for weeks, sometimes a month, sometimes it would be raining in her story, sometimes it was just really hot, but the premise of the story remained the same. Four little kids walking night and day on the roads of Korea, looking for their parents. I have to admit, it was always more of a tall tale to me—the long, difficult journey, the miraculous reunion. It was more of a family legend, kind of like the magic fish myth my father would tell me, how our Ha ancestors were turned into golden carp to save them from evil invaders. Or how my parents loved to tell me supposedly “true” scary stories about evil Korean monsters who like to eat naughty children named Ellen. So, you can understand why I might have been a bit skeptical about the lost children story.

But then nearly ten years ago, my aunt came from South Korea to visit my mother in New York City, and after dinner the two sisters became nostalgic. I listened in fascination as they reminisced about a memory that was over sixty years old. My aunt, who is the eldest, would correct my mother’s version of this epic story and just like that, what had once been an unbelievable tale became a historical family truth. I suddenly realized that this miraculous journey was real, and I was overwhelmed with a burning desire to write about it and memorialize it.

I began my own journey into researching the Korean War, and soon it became clear to me that I couldn’t only write my mom’s story. The subject matter was too complex and too emotional. And as I puzzled over this dilemma, I became aware of what was

happening in my own community. Swastikas and racist graffiti were being found in schools all over my city and my children were suffering. But how to tie this all in with a story about the Korean War? What I found myself doing was listening to my father's voice. He passed away several years ago, but I still talk to him in my heart. I can hear him telling me his stories. I can hear his voice and his wise words that remind me of how important it is to pass on the stories of our elders. So that we will always remember where we come from. And suddenly the story began to form.

Without a doubt, this has been the hardest of my books to write, the most deeply personal. In many ways, I feel very exposed by what I share in this book. But I am also proud of this story. It is both truth and fiction, historical and contemporary. It is my family's story and the story of my motherland.

I hope that you enjoy Junie's journey, and I thank you for reading.

With deep gratitude,
Ellen Oh