

Seo-woon Chung, a Korean survivor

Herstory

An animation directed by Junki Kim
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[Narration in the voice of Seo-woon Chung]

I had a comfortable life. I was born into a wealthy family. My father was so against what the Japanese government was doing in Korea.

One day, the Japanese police came to our house and hassled my father for refusing to contribute our brassware. "Over my dead body! When I'm dead, you can. I will not!" he told them.

My father took all the brassware and buried them in the rice field with the servants. Tens of rows. At night. They dug rows and rows and buried them in the field. But someone went and told the police about it. And that's how my father got taken away.

I went to the prison to see my father one day with the town foreman. My father yelled and scolded me. He told me, "This is no place for you to visit! Do not come back here! If you come back again, I will not see you. You must not come back here." He was very upset.

A few days later, the town foreman came to our house and told me "If you go to work at the Thousand-Person-Stitches factory in Japan, for just two to two and a half years, in exchange, your father will be released from prison the same day you leave for Japan." I believed him. I even volunteered to go.

I was taken to Semarang Indonesia through Jakarta. I ended up in Semarang with 13 other girls. I realized then that I was not in Japan but in another country farther away.

That night, a Japanese officer came in first. He was very drunk. So scared, I was shaking in fear. Was just 15, I was. I was the youngest of the 13 girls there. I was raped. That's how it began.

I resisted, kicking and pushing. Then, the soldiers injected me with opium. So, I became addicted.

I can't even count how many soldiers came in, especially on the weekends, lining up, still in their uniform. There's just so much to tell.

Two of the girls died. The soldiers buried those girls like they buried dogs. No funerals.

They were giving out Malaria pills. I managed to gather 40 of them. Two, three pills at a time from a medical officer because he was Korean. I swallowed all 40 pills at once. But, even dying, I couldn't even kill myself. I woke up 3 days later. People told me that I was bleeding everywhere through my mouth and ears.

Once a week, we were taken outside for a medical check-up. There was a field hospital on the compound but there was a regular and bigger hospital outside. There I would see the local

Indonesians. I liked that very much. They looked different, darker skinned, but still I was so glad to see them. Man after man. Seeing others just made me so happy, made me want to cry.

We did not know Japan had surrendered. 3 of the 13 girls were dead by then 10 were left to be taken to the bomb shelter. They only took a few girls. The shelter wasn't big enough. I learned later that they were taken there to be slaughtered. Out of the ten, four or maybe three that were taken to the bomb shelter first were killed.

There was a local Indonesian who comes to pick up the officers laundry. a soldier, Korean, who was drafted by the Japanese military wrote a letter to the allied forces. He rushed the laundry man to deliver the letter to the allied forces. That's how the allied forces found where we were. If they had come any later we would have all been killed in that bomb shelter.

I became an orphan. My father had passed away. My mother had passed away. All the servants were gone. I went home and there I quit opium. It took me about 4~5 months. All by myself, there. Alone at home.

I kept telling myself that I just have to stay alive they may have killed my body, but not my spirit. That is how I survived.