

## Kim's Story



Born in Northern Taiwan, moved to Miyoko island, moved to Okinawa, moved to Tokyo, moved to the US



This is a picture of my parents, myself, my sister Mitzi, and her daughter Jane

## Kim's Life Experience's

### Beginnings

I always felt I have experienced so much- happiness and sadness- and thought of writing down but I wasn't sure I wanted to expose myself. However, with my husband's encouragement, I finally decided I'm going to put my story in writing.

I was born in Taiwan during WWII. Japanese administered the island of Taiwan. I was born a town called Takao, later Chinese called Kaohsiung. My father was stationed there as a naval officer. We lived in military housing with two older brothers and three sisters. My parents has a total of 7 children, however 2 girls passed away before I was born. When I was three years old, my mother gave birth to another sister named Takako. (Because she was born in Takao). My other sister, Michiko (Mitzi) was six years older than me. Since my mother was sick most of the time, I followed my sister around like her shadow. We had a Taiwanese maid and gardener. He grew beautiful flowers but he would get irritated with me and say "No Picking" as I would pick the flowers. My memory of growing up in Taiwan was a happy one.

My mother Yoshiko died when I was about 3 ½ years old. I don't have many memories of Mother's death, but I remember my sister was crying when she told me of Mother's death.

I started kindergarten at 4 or five. The morning I started school, my father told me to go report to your mother that you are starting school. The Japanese custom is Kamidana where as a Japanese custom, the oldest son, has the responsibility to maintain the family ancestry. So even though my mother was dead, I reported to my mother that I was starting school.

When I was 5 years old, our stepmother, Yoshi, came. My father and I met her at the train station and returned to the house in a rickshaw. My brother and sister did not accept her well. As I did not have many memories of my biological mother, I accepted her. One day I called her "mother" and I was told by my sister, don't call her mother, "She is not your Mother." When she became our mother,



My father. He was a Japanese naval officer stationed on Takao, Taiwan

we had a 2 year old baby sister named Takako. Our stepmother took her as her own child as she never had children of her own. I feel she really paid a lot of attention to Takako and gave her love.

Our stepmother was college educated and former home ec teacher and very strict. My sister disliked her. I think she didn't like to be told what to do by her new stepmother. She didn't like change. I don't think she ever really accepted her.

### War move

One day our father told us we have to leave Takao. We are to go to a safer place as B-29's were dropping more bombs around our housing. People would look up and shout "B-29, B-29" and run for shelter. Everyone had a shelter to run to. At some point, the planes left and we returned to our house.

The military built temporary housing up in the mountains. I remember my Mother cried, leaving all her lifetime of accumulated things, like silk Kimono's and beautiful furniture she had brought with her. We thought, eventually, we would be coming back. About 30 families, mostly women and children, traveled by train to the assigned place.

As a six-year old child, the new place was full of fun and adventure. However, the new place was so different with no indoor water system. What a shock!! The toilet was primitive.

My sister and brother did not like the new place with no decent school, etc. My oldest brother, Hiroshi, did not come with us as he was taken to be a young soldier. The houses were built by a large river at a place called Ischikawa. I enjoyed the place. Most places were surrounded by rice paddies but this place has many different kinds of fruit and my Mother was able to exchange rice and vegetables. The Taiwanese people were kind and showed how to make shrimp traps, etc. Days were spent swimming or shrimping with no school.

Later, my older brother Hiroshi arrived being very thin and ill. Apparently, he was released due to illness. He died in the mountain village where we lived.

Evidently, he had contracted TB. At that time TB was a death sentence. His death affected me very much, I still feel sadness. I have many wonderful memories of him, he was tall and good looking and smart. As my father said later, Hiroshi was planning to go to medical school. He used to take me to Chinatown to eat Chinese food and also, he cooked some fried rice for us.

While we were in Ischikawa, we didn't have school so all of the neighborhood kids got together and went to explore the upper part of the river. We all thought the river water was clean and pure but we found a small Chinese village upstream and we saw an older man washing his "Honey Bucket" in the river. That was a shock. We all came back and reported to our mothers. My mother's answer was that from now on we could only drink tea.

#### Move toward Ki-ran

My Father came home and told us that we had to make a trip to Ki-ran on the north end of Tai-Pai where there will be ships to take us back to Japan. When the train was getting close to Tai-Pai, it suddenly stopped and most of the men got out of the train. They raised their arms and shouted "Banzai, Banzai." I asked my brother Masao what that was all about. He said that Roosevelt had died. The train ride was rather tiresome but we were able to buy some snacks from local Chinese. We finally arrived in Tai-Pai. By the time we arrived at Tai-Pai, the war was ending. We saw that most Japanese stores and houses were abandoned. Some Japanese men were out in the street trying to sell or trade their merchandise. Many houses were empty as the Japanese left and the Chinese hadn't moved in.

I don't know the reason we stopped at Tai-Pai but we moved into a beautiful house. While we were in Tai-Pai, my 4 year old sister Takako died. In the middle of the night, I heard my mother crying. When I asked why, she told me your sister just died. I remember crying along with my mother. It must have been so hard for my Father to accept so many deaths. He never showed his emotions. My memories of Tai-Pai are not happy ones. One day we went downtown Tai-Pai. There were no Japanese around, all were speaking Taiwanese and spoke loudly, which was quite a change for us as we were taught to talk quietly. Chinese people

liked to eat outdoors and some sat on the street to eat. That was very foreign to us.

WWII ended in 1945 when we were in Tai-Pei. All the Japanese to leave Taiwan were to be in Ki-ran seaport. Again, the train rode toward Ki-ran from Tai-Pei. My sister told me we will be on the last ship to go back to Japan. Finally, we arrived at Ki-ran. We were placed in a large warehouse and many Japanese families were there. There was an elderly Japanese man who took a place next to us at the warehouse. He was with his wife and 2 beautiful daughters. One day, he became tearful and stated he lost 2 sons in the war. I don't remember how long we stayed there, just until ship was available. It was a fun place for a 7 year old child. A lot of children played together. The most fun thing to do was to slide down a chute. We climbed up to look over all the ships in the harbor. We slept on a concrete floor with a thin mattress. When mealtime came, they came around with rice in a large family bowl. Often, our mother did not eat with us by saying she is not hungry. Many years later, I realized we did not have enough for all.

Finally, a ship came and we were all to get on the ship to go home. It was a large American ship. It was here I saw my first Americans. How different they looked. And they all looked the same. When I saw a blue-eyed man, I wondered if they see everything in blue. We were to stay in the lower part of the ship, but I enjoyed being on the deck, watching the flying fish and all the different Americans. One GI gave me an apple. It was the most delicious apples I had ever eaten. To this day, I think that was the best apple I ever had. I was used to having all kinds of fruit on Taiwan, but this apple was special. I went down to the lower deck and told this to my parents and they scolded me and told me never to go on deck again.

We were to go back to Kobe, Japan, but my Mother convinced my Father that since we had 5 urns of ashes, we should get off at Miyako Island. The urns should be placed in our ancestry tomb which was on Miyako Island, then go back to Japan. Things did not go that easy. The Ryukyu Islands were governed by the American Military. And we did not have money to make the trip back to Japan.

## Kim's Story Chapter 2

We settled in Miyoko Island. Our family included my Father, my Stepmother, my brother Masao, my sister Michiko, and myself. Father's younger sister's family lived on the island and they provided us a place to stay. We had the ashes of mother Yoshi, older brother Hiroshi, and three sisters in 5 urns. We went to the cemetery and placed the urns in the ancestral tomb.

As usual I enjoyed Miyoko Island. I explored the places, especially the beach. I went swimming with my cousin who was about my age. Elderly islanders spoke native Miyoko language. I picked up their language pretty quick. Even though I could speak the native language, I wasn't really accepted by native school peers because of my accent, even though they all learned and spoke Japanese in school. I attended elementary school where we were kind of behind, especially my sister. She suffered from missing 3-4 years of school. The teacher who taught us math was not qualified. I think to hide his inadequacies, he was verbally abusive. My memories of school in Miyoko are not pleasant.

My Father found a job on an American ship, the LST 618. The ship rarely came to Miyoko Island, and meanwhile my Mother taught school and we lived on what she earned. Soon my Brother Masao graduated from High School, and left to Okinawa for a job opportunity.

Japan has a 6-3-3 system. 6 years elementary-three years middle school-and three years high school. If I remember correctly, I think about the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of middle school is when the whole family moved to Okinawa. I started school in Okinawa and I remember Okinawa was hot and we had to study inside a tent that was provided by the Americans. I strongly remember the oily smell of that tent.

My father lost his job on the LST due to the Korean war. The ship was needed for the war effort. I remember my father started a photography business, going places where tourists are, to take photos. When by Father was busy, my brother Masao helped on weekends. He set the camera up on a tripod and sometimes I went with him. Transportation was very poor and often we rode on the truck with the boxes of merchandise.



This is 1955 high school picture of some of my Senior HS classmates. The man in front without a hat is a student teacher. I was the second tallest girl in this particular section. There were about 500 students total in my senior class.

My sister graduated from High School. To help with finances, my mother and sister started making dresses to sell wholesale. The sewing machines were foot-operated. Eventually my sister didn't want to continue this business and began looking for other work.

Okinawa also has a separate native language. The same thing happened that happened back on Miyoko Island. I picked up conversations quickly. My situation was the same as on Miyoko Island, they did not accept me. In Japan, to attend High School, you have to take an exam and pass. I passed the exam without any problem and it seemed like everyone accepted me after starting High School. I even developed a close friendship with one peer. I spent a lot of time with her.

During my first year of High School, my brother Masao left for Japan to attend college in Tokyo, Japan. In order for him to attend school, my sister had to give up half her pay in order for him to attend college. My sister had gotten a job working on base, first as a sales person at the PX, and eventually she worked in an office as a typist.

My fathers photo business did well and we moved permanently to Aza village. He built a house with a studio in the front and we lived in the back room.

I enjoyed High School but I never felt that I was accepted. Talk about prejudice, Okinawans looked down on people from other small islands.

My brother graduated from college and remained in Japan. We talked about selling the business and moving to Japan but it didn't happen. My brother found that the American government would give scholarships to Okinawans to attend graduate school in the United States. He took tests and became eligible and left for America. He was to stay 2 years. If I remember correctly, I graduated in 1956 and Masao was still in the US.

My parents told me I was to attend college. Japan's school system is different and we started the new semester in April. We women didn't have much choice of what to study. It was either home-ec or elementary education. I hated either one. What I was really interested in was the study of fashion design

1957



This is a dress I designed and made myself in 1957 right after I graduated from High School. As I dreamed of being a designer, this was a dress I made.

because I have always had an interest in clothes, but they did not have such a program. Besides my Mother laughed and said you can't get a job with that kind of study. So, I majored in elementary education. The school was an International teacher's college called Kokusai Kyodai.

I did not enjoy living in Japan as it was cold. I was born and raised in warm countries. Every morning I walked to school and sometimes the streets were icy. I looked forward to going home to Okinawa and having the summer off.

During my first summer home, my sister told me she was dating an American GI. Most Okinawan girls involved with Americans dated on base. My parents didn't know about it. My parents worried about us getting involved with Americans. When my sister went out on weekends, my mother made me her chaperone while I was home from college.

My sister continued to see him and I had no choice but to keep it a secret. It was through him that I met Bob, who was an information officer. Bob seemed interested in me but I hardly spoke English and I knew how my parents felt about us being involved with Americans. Eventually my sister married Taylor-san. My parents kept her marriage from their friends and relatives. My brother was still in America studying.

I went back to Japan for the second semester. At that time, college students were very much involved in politics and wanted America to give up Okinawa and bases in Japan and were demonstrating, shouting "Yankee go home!, Yankee go home!" I did not get involved in this activity. Students felt that demonstrating in college was accepted and society forgave them their activities during college.

### KIM'S Story Chapter Three

While the college student's demonstrations were going on, my sister's American friend, Bob, came to see me. This made an awkward situation for me. Some of my friends started distancing themselves. I had to explain that he is just my sister's friend. I was not dating or anything. I was upset and not in a welcome mood when he came. I kept telling people he is my sister's friend, not my boyfriend. This awkward situation continued and finally I said to myself "What the heck, who cares what people think?" I told him my dream of studying fashion design but no such classes existed then. There were art classes but I wasn't interested.

For the first time, I felt that someone really listened to me instead of laughing at my "Impossible" dream, like my Mother did.. I hated what I was studying in Japan. I was homesick and hated cold weather. Bob said there are many good designer schools in the US that I could attend. I laughed and told him that financially, I could not afford to go to the US and attend school. I started to dream about attending design classes in the US.

Bob proposed to me and when he proposed marriage, I accepted, even knowing how my parents felt about my interaction with Americans. I took a ship back to Okinawa and we were married secretly at the American Counsel. My family did not know my situation. I was afraid to hurt them and kept my marriage secret for about 3 months. Finally, a counselor wrote a letter to my parents that I was not attending school. I was living in military housing in Okinawa. I felt very guilty but did enjoy the comforts of easy life.

Eventually, I visited my parents and told them of my marriage. Eventually, my brother Masao met Bob. My brother did not approve of my marriage. He told me that my mother said it was not too late to come home. I was enjoying a comfortable life.

About a year later, I had a baby girl. We named her Bunny Patricia. She was beautiful and I spent most of my time with her and never thought of my dream of attending design school. I was 21 years old. We had a maid that came 5 days a



Here I am as a college sophomore

week. I took cooking and flower arrangement from a Chinese lady who gave classes. She was a tall and beautiful lady. She was supposedly a socialite back in China but she was married to a Voice of America executive. I attended many social functions. Bob wanted me to be more active in our social life. In the 60's, to attend a social function, we often had to wear a hat and gloves. How time changes things. I enjoyed my time with Bunny. Okinawa has beautiful beaches. Bob enjoyed playing tennis after work so most of the time Bunny and I were alone.

I also had a good friend, Kiyoko. During the day, I had a maid to take care of Bunny and Kiyoko's husband, Joe, was at work. We had free time, 10-3 every day. During the day Kiyoko and I spent lots of time together, going to eat in downtown Naha, window shopping, or going to the PX. We continued this lifestyle until finally it was time for her and Joe to return to the US. I was lost for a while.

Bob was always a gentleman with me and he loved Bunny. However, he did not want any more children. I wanted more but for the time being, I loved being with Bunny and that was enough for me. Meanwhile, Bob tried to get me to take lessons in tennis and golf. I was never into sports. I was enjoying motherhood.

Looking back, I must have been a very immature person and never thought of the future. I never dated during my school years and Bob was the first man I ever spent time with. Sometimes when we went out to restaurants, I saw lots of young good-looking officers, and I became more conscious of Bob and my age difference. He was 17-18 years older than me.

After Kiyoko left, I began to get reacquainted with several of my high school classmates and we began to socialize. One day at the O club I met this young Marine Lt. And I did become involved with him, his name was Charlie. He had a magnetic personality and attracted many peers. He always said when he got out of the Marines, he would take three months off and go to Europe. He did not know I was a married woman and didn't know about Bunny. I kept many secrets. I was afraid if I told him everything, I would lose him. I didn't think I was lying to him. Later, I've been told that was lying by omission.

I filed for divorce. The hardest part of the divorce was that I had to give up Bunny. Bob told me that I wouldn't be able to keep Bunny. I also believed that it would not be good for Bunny for her to grow up in Okinawa. Japanese people called half-American children "Aienoko" and they didn't have a good reputation, and the word means an "illegitimate" child. Often American servicemen left babies behind, maybe not even knowing.

I had an amicable divorce from Bob. In the meantime, Charlie went stateside. We corresponded, but eventually my dishonesty caught up with me and Charlie and I decided we would go our separate ways.

## Kims Story Chapter 4

For a while, I don't think I went into depression but more like a nervous breakdown. I cried a lot. My friends that that I should go and stay with my parents for a while. But I couldn't face my parents after doing all the things they disapproved of. But I needed money to support myself. I was still lonely but I got a job. That helped by recover from my near breakdown.

The job was with American Bottling company based in North Carolina. They provided soft drinks to the American military bases. They needed a secretary who could type and could speak English. I enjoyed my job.

I had two good friends, named Midori and Kozue. One evening, Midori, Kozue, and I were invited to Midori's birthday get-together. They were meeting with a couple of Marines Lts., Jerry Nugent and his friend Dave Breen. So, it turned out there were three girls and only 2 men. Even though it was about 9:00 at night, Jerry decided to call his friend, Lt. Harry Stimson. It was about a 30 minute cab ride from Camp Hansen but Lt. Stimson showed up in a half-sleep state.

Kazue asked Harry to dance and they danced one dance. Kozue was very short and after one dance, she came back and said that Harry's too tall and dancing with Harry would make her neck hurt and could I dance with your friend, Dave Breen. I said OK as Dave really wasn't my boy friend and they went to dance, leaving Harry and me sitting looking at each other with not much to say. Harry was quiet and we didn't carry on much conversation. I thought he was nice looking and tall and was very attractive. That was the beginning of our relationship.

We dated several times, including going bowling. One night we sat on a swing set and talked and that was our first kiss. I was beginning to really think about Harry, even at work. Suddenly, Harry disappeared from my life. All I knew was that he was gone from Okinawa without saying good-bye to me or anything. I thought maybe he had gone back to the US. Later I found out he had mounted out for the Tonkin Gulf crisis.

For the next 6 months, I kept busy at work and with Midori and Kazue. We often went to downtown Naha to eat Japanese food and window shopping. It was enjoyable and I tried not to think about Bunny. It was impossible and sometimes I would cry when I was alone.

My brother Masao moved to Japan permanently. He eventually became an assistant university professor. My parents moved to Japan to be with Masao. My parents built a house in Chiba. I remained in Okinawa where I had my job and friends. I did date some but I think it was mostly to have something to do and be with my friends. I met a girl named Lilly. She was an aienoko and she was a beautiful girl. One time I went swimming with her and she had a beautiful figure. When she colored her hair blond, she looked like a California girl. Later, I saw her in a playboy magazine as a centerfold girl.

About the next June, I found out through the grapevine, at the beauty shop, that Harry was back on Okinawa. I was so happy to see him again. We spent as much time together as we could. As we spent more and more time together, I began to have strong feelings for Harry. He was stationed in Sukuran with the Military Police. We visited places together, like visiting the Japanese war memorial site and also the cliffs where Japanese women jumped to their death as the war ended.

It was a most wonderful time. We spent most weekends together. There were numerous well-known entertainers who were coming to entertain the American military men and their dependents at that time. We saw Frank Sinatra Jr., Lou Rawls, and Brenda Lee. We both remember sitting in a small cocktail lounge and a lady walked by with a drink in her hand. Somehow, she tripped and fell forward and for an instant, there were her legs pointed in the air. Then she got back up, and gracefully walked away, with her drink still in her hand. Harry and I chuckled and we still talk about it many years later. Those times we spent together left a lot of wonderful memories.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, my company had an all-employee party for the 4<sup>th</sup>. I invited Harry to join us and I was so proud to introduce Harry to everyone.



Working as secretary at Bireley's



*Winner of the Life on Okinawa  
Lucky Winner Contest is  
Miss Kim Sagawa, an employee  
of Bireley's, shown receiving  
her check for \$100 from Ex-  
ecutive Editor Jan M. Cayton.*

By a happy coincidence, John picked up some old copies of "Life on Okinawa" magazine and it contained this picture of Kim.

Once again, he mounted out, this time for Vietnam. He left in early August, 1965. He would be in Vietnam until June, 1966. We corresponded and I missed him so much, I wanted to hear his voice and touch. He was always a gentleman. I did date sometimes, trying to forget the loneliness. Even if I was double dating with Lilly and her boyfriend, in the back of my mind, I wondered what Harry was doing. What was it like to be stationed in the boonies. My imagination ran wild. All I can say, come home no matter what. No need to be a hero.

My ex and Bunny had left for the US and he did not leave any address or means for me to tell where they were. He did write a letter once and said he had married his college friend and Bunny was very happy and doing well. I was happy to hear that she had a Mother figure in her life. Bunny has told me later that her stepmother was a nice lady and she really liked her. I thought how ironic it is that we both grew up with stepmothers and we both loved our stepmothers.

Meanwhile, I paid a lot of attention to what was happening in Vietnam. The Vietnam war was heating up and I did worry about Harry. My roommate was a Catholic and I went to church with her on a Sunday and prayed for his safety. Being a long distance apart and not being able to express my real feelings is hard, as English is my second language.

## im's Story Chap 5

In June, 1966, Harry returned from Vietnam. In the meantime, Lt. Stimson had been promoted to Captain. He stopped in Okinawa for several days preparing to return to the states. That was a weekend!!!. My roommate and I were cleaning house and Harry was there at the doorstep. I couldn't believe it. What a joy to see him. He looked wonderful. He had lost a lot of weight and I went over and hugged him. His 10 months in Vietnam was so hot and humid that it was very hard on GI's.

I was still working at the bottling company. I requested time off, but the company refused. For several days, I didn't go in to work as I wanted to spend as much time as I could with Harry. As a result, I lost my job.

We spent as much time together as possible. As he talked about his future plans, I wanted to be included. I was sad and I felt that it might be a love that could never be realized. He was to be discharged from the Marine Corp in August and was accepted in Iowa law school. He was so looking forward to the future.

Before he left, he left me airline fare to come to the US. He said "come to the US and see how you feel about living in the US". It was June, 1966. He left from Kadena air base and my friend Lily and I saw him off. I was very happy because I was going to see him in a couple of months.

I went to Japan and spent about 2 weeks with my parents. As I think back, it was an awkward feeling as I realized that my parents were getting old. My father cried.

I had to spend about a month getting a passport and visa. To get the visa, I had to go to the American counsel. It wasn't easy because at that time, I had to have a chest x-ray and health records. Finally, I had all the necessary papers to go to the United States on a tourist visa. My sister was my sponsor and she lived in Plano, Texas.

My entry point into the US was in Alaska. The weather was beautiful, cool and dry and so different from Japan and my first impression of the US was

wonderful. The immigration officer asked many questions but the one I remember was "Are you going to meet your boyfriend?" I said no. From there I flew to Dallas and spent about 10 days with my sister, Mitzi. She and her husband and daughter and son were happy to see me. It was now the middle of the summer and it was unbearably hot. What a difference.

After 10 days I took a Greyhound bus to Denver to visit my best friend Kiyoko and her husband Joe. It was a long drive and I fell asleep. . It was a long drive and when I woke up, I found I was still in Texas. I realized just how big America was. The reason I took Greyhound was in the advertising in Japan it said it was a wonderful way to see America. Was I ever disappointed! But I did see some of America. Finally, I got to Colorado and met Joe and Kiyoko. They treated me like a dear old friend. I was so happy to see them as it had been almost 4 years since they had returned to the US. Joe was retired from the Military. They had one daughter, Eileen, and she had become a young lady. They asked about Bunny but I had no information after our divorce.

After spending about a week in Colorado, I took the Greyhound again to Iowa City to stay with Lloyd and Dorothy, Harry's brother. My first impression of Iowa was of green trees and dark soil. I arrived at the bus station at 2:00 in the morning. I thought it wasn't right to call Lloyd at that hour and waited until about 7:00. In the meantime, there was another young lady there and we spent the evening talking.

I stayed at Lloyd and Dorothy Lee's about 3 days and they drove me up to see Harry's parents. Dorothy Lee was talking a trip she had taken earlier and she said they had stopped at Cedar Rapids but I heard "See the rabbit". I couldn't understand what was so important about the seeing the rabbit. Later I found it meant Cedar Rapids.

When I met Harry's parents, his father wasn't home but Grandma Effie and her son Paul was there. Paul was intellectually challenged, and for a minute, thought he was Harry's father. But after I found out Paul was Harry's uncle, I came to realize what a sweet and gentle person he was. Harry's mother and grandma

treated me with their first sweet corn from their garden. I didn't know the difference between sweet corn and field corn.

Grandma Effie was very talkative and a wonderful lady. She talked so fast that I couldn't get what she was saying she didn't understand me either. We both nodded and made like we understood each other.

Dorothy Lee was so wonderful planning the wedding, making arrangements, sending invitations, and doing all the things necessary for our wedding. Our wedding and reception went smoothly with Dorothy Lee's help and planning. Harry and I really appreciate it.

Harry & I were married Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1966, at the First United Methodist Church, Independence, Iowa.

Harry & I were married Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1966, at the First United Methodist Church  
Independence, Iowa



Kim and Harry at their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary