



Yi Yong Nyeo

<http://politicsofrauma.wordpress.com/>

Born: 1926, in Yeosu, modern South Korea
History: Taken to Burma in 1942 where she served as a "comfort woman" for more than 3 years

Yi Yong Nyeo was born in 1926 in Yeosu, Gyeonggi Province, during the period of Japanese colonization of Joseon. She was the second child in a family of five kids. Her family was poor, and her father was constantly in debt. Her older brother received an education, but in her case, from the time she was 8 years old, she was sent out to work as a maid in another family's home to bring money in for the family. At age 11, she went to Seoul to work in factories and at times in a drinking house. Her family's poverty was never alleviated, and her father lost their land gambling, after which the family lived with relatives in Seoul.

When she was 14 and working at a factory, one day her father sent her brother to call her home. There was an obviously wealthy elderly woman there waiting who told her that if she went with her, her parents would be better off and she would be fed and clothed. Her mother turned her back and stared at the wall and said nothing while her father told her to go with the woman. She felt she had to go. She found out later that the woman loaned her father money to build a small house, and she had to work to pay off that loan.

After working in this woman's restaurant for some time, she was told she would go to Japan to work. She agreed to go given the promise of food, clothes and money, as her family had always been poor and she had never had those things. She was taken to the port and loaded on a ship with some other girls. They didn't head to Japan, but rather went south on a long voyage. She understood Japanese from having worked for a Japanese family as a maid for two years, and she overheard Japanese soldiers on the ship say they were to become "comfort women," but didn't know what that meant. They ended up in Burma, where their lives as "comfort women" began.

She was given a Japanese name, "Harata Youjo", and taken to a building in a village by a Korean couple. The women all cleaned the building, and were given western-style clothes to wear. It was a

"comfort station" where they had to receive Japanese soldiers for sex. She received between ten to twenty Japanese soldiers per day. They were tested regularly for venereal diseases by army doctors. She became sick many times and was treated in the military hospital. Many other women killed themselves. This went on for about three years.

When the war ended, she was taken back to Korea by ship with other refugees from the war. She eventually found her family, who had moved. She discovered her father, who had lost all the family money gambling, had died. When she saw her mother, her mother fell down and cried, but she felt nothing, feeling betrayed by them. Her family, especially her sister-in-law, did not welcome her back or treat her well when she stayed with them, and so she left to live alone and find work. She moved around Joseon, working here and there.

Eventually, after the Korean war had started, she went to a city called Cheongju. There a police officer detained her and took her identity papers, saying it wasn't safe for a woman to travel alone. He took her to a small room, and later a young woman came and took her to a millhouse. A wealthy landowner in that district owned it. That night he came and raped her, telling her she would stay there from then on. She lived with him, his wife and his children, working as a maid and forced to be his mistress. He held onto her identity papers until she gave birth to a son, and when her son turned one, he gave back her papers. She stayed with him for more than thirty years. He also had a gambling problem, and eventually lost everything. When he passed away, nothing was left for her or the two sons she had with him.

In 1991, after a long difficult life, she saw other former "comfort women" testifying on TV and came forth to tell her story. She now lives in the countryside outside of Seoul.