WHEN IT WASN'T FUN

(THE KWANGJU INCIDENT OF MAY, 1980)

By Charles Betts Huntley[41]

All the years in Korea were good years. Our children grew up there. We ministered there. But there were years that were not "fun." Park Chung Hee had been assassinated in October, 1979. The whole country went into shock. And there was a political vacuum of power. So there were people all too willing to fill that gap. The first inkling that things were not right was a battle that occurred on the streets of Seoul on December 12, 1979. Soldiers fought it out. The sides, as best as we could tell, were the sides of those who wanted to democratize South Korea, and the others who wanted to follow in Park Chung Hee's steps. We were not long in finding that people with the unassailable opinion that they are the ones in the right can cause havoc in the lives of other people. During the early months of 1980 we saw students and others demonstrating for the reinstitution of democratic institutions and a democratic government. The powers that be, or were, saw the demonstrations as lawlessness and anarchy. It all came to a boil in May. Our family went up to Taejon to see Mary in a play, *The Sound of Music*. On the train going up from Kwangju the cars were filled with soldiers, some of whom got drunk and obnoxious. The next day, Sunday, martial law had been declared. I remember the taxi ride back to the Mission Compound passing groups of students with banners asking for the return of democracy and for the ouster of a general named Chun Doo Whan. When we got back home we were besieged by telephone calls from friends asking if we knew what was happening. All that Sunday, people on the streets were attacked by martial law troopers, who beat them and carted some off to prison. And since a great number of people were simply on their way to church that morning, a great number of these believing Christians were attacked without warning by these troopers. May 18 was to be a sad day in Korean history. It was also the day (actually it was Monday, May 19 in Charlotte) that my mother had died at about 11 pm Sunday night following the car accident in April that led to her death. It was a strange, unreal

41) Rev. Charles Betts Huntley 선교사는 1980년 당시 광주기독병원 원목실에 사역하면서 호남신학교(호남신학대학교의 전신)의 강사로 재직하였다. 광주를 떠나라는 통보에도 불구하고 5.18 기간 동안 광주 시민들과 함께 하며 철저히 고립된 광주의 진실을 사진으로 기록하여 해외에 널리 알렸다. 2017년 별세하여 양림동 호남신학대학교 구내에 있는 선교사 묘역에 잠들어 있다.

thing for me that Monday morning. All that day I kept hearing her voice saying in my heart, "Let me go." Then about noon I no longer heard that voice. My Dad had called Monday to say that Mom was not expected to live, and Tuesday he called again to say that she had passed away May 18. I did not try to go back to Charlotte for her funeral. I had flown to Charlotte when I heard about the accident, but this time it seemed best to stay in Korea. It was to be a wise decision.

In Kwangju, Sunday's beatings continued into Monday. It seemed to us that the city was simply attacked by soldiers of the ROK! Many of them were commandoes. On Monday people started coming to the hospital. They were ordinary people who bore huge bruises all over their bodies, attesting to the beatings they had received. They had no idea why they were being attacked. And they were angry! On Tuesday there was an uneasy silence over the city, and Mr. Chung, our diver, and I went out to see what had happened. There were signs all over the city that a fight had occurred. There were burned out taxis, bulldozers pushed into a hole that later became an underground shopping center, the Cultural Radio Station had been trashed and burned. And saddest of all were the shoes of young people who had been carted off by the soldiers. Some of the shoes had belonged to young women. Where had they been taken? Why? Who sent these troopers? Those were the questions that the people of Kwangju were beginning to ask.

By now the anger of the city had boiled over, and the next day, Wednesday, the shooting began. One of the sounds we heard the most during those first days was, "To City Hall!" And on Wednesday morning there were these thousands of people, gathered to protest what had been happening. The troopers, nervous, or acting under orders, began to fire into the crowd. Not over their heads. Not at the ground in front of them. No, right into the crowds! The people of the city, some nervous, some scared, some very angry, went and raided the arsenals for the use of the Reserve Army in town and in the surrounding villages. When the shooting started, it was in both directions. That was when the hospital started receiving the bodies of civilians and civilians with gunshot wounds. Perhaps this day was the worst day for us. We could not believe that the Army of the Republic of Korea was actually shooting our neighbors! And the neighbors began to shoot back! To this day we do not see the necessity of that little war, which lasted until the following Tuesday morning. By now Honam Seminary was closed, but the Kwangju Christian Hospital never closed. There were fewer patients, since there was no public transportation for several days. We got the wounded, the dead, and those who could walk to the hospital. That Wednesday night we had several families who came to

our house for sanctuary, which we of course, gave. The deaf mute families came. The vice-director of the hospital and her husband (in the medical school of Chonnam University) came. The sons of minister friends came. At one point there were 22 of these people in our house! The wife and baby son of one of our surgical residents was in our bedroom and spent the night there on the floor at our feet as explosions and gunfire ripped the night, and the telephone rang as friends called all night to inquire about our safety. Frightened people came to other houses on the compound too. Some went to John and Jean Underwood, asking for sanctuary. He said that they would take them in, but it would be impossible for him to lie and say no one was there. They thanked him for his honesty, and came to our house. Would we lie for them? We sure would have lied! We would have done literally anything to keep those frightened people alive, even sacrificing some integrity for their lives! That ability to lie became one of my personal casualties of the conflict, and I haven't forgotten it. Lying does not come easy for me, not since I tried it once on Dad when I was about ten years old, and got my legs switched for the effort (not that it hurt that bad; I pulled down my knickers over the exposed skin on my legs). But I reasoned that it would be easier to be forgiven for lying to save a young man's life than to be forgiven for letting a young person be carried off to an unknown fate! And I would do it again!

A strange thing happened on May 19. Mother had been injured in April by a person who ran a red light and crashed into Mother's car while Dad was driving. When I heard that, I immediately took a flight to the United States, to Charlotte. There for 10 days I stayed there with Dad and Mom and brothers Bill, Reid, and John. Our aunts and cousins joined our vigil. When she seemed to be getting better it seemed to me time to return to Korea. We stayed in contact with Dad and Mom on the telephone, but Dad called on Sunday the 18th to say that Mom was much worse and not expected to live. By then the Kwangju Incident was well underway. The next morning, May 19, I kept hearing in my mind Mother's voice, saying, "Let me go. Let me go." Then about 1 pm I didn't hear the voice any more. I was not surprised when Dad called on the morning of the 20th that Mom had died. I have since wondered about the significance of hearing Mom, then hearing no more. During that time I also kept hearing Susan's voice saying, "I'm scared. I'm scared." Later I talked to her about it and she said that she had gone in her closet and had been crying. By now Jenny was the only child with us, as Michael had gone with the Petersons up to Taejon, where he wouldn't have to listen to the gunfire. The Petersons made the drive up, then returned to be with their people (our people) during whatever was to happen. He had to talk his way past a soldier who kept his M-16 trained on Arnold until the talking was over.

At the hospital most of our patient load changed from the ordinary sick to the wounded in the battles. We had policemen there, whom the hospital protected. One of my own greatest shocks was to see the X-rays of the wounded. The bullets being used by these Martial Law troopers were breaking apart on contact with a person's body! Instead of remaining in one piece, the bullet would break into inoperable fragments in our patients' arms, legs, and spinal cords. A normal military round stays in one piece and passes through a human body, wounding the "enemy" soldier, but not killing him, or her. One of these will pass through trees to reach the enemy soldier. But these frangible little bullets, if they were traveling at close to muzzle velocity, fragmented. There were also bodies! We still have pictures of some of those bodies. And we remember those dead nameless people on occasion. The pictures remind us of humankind's unlimited ability to be inhuman to humankind.

One of the memories of those days was of the faces of our Kwangju Christian Hospital's employees. They were in shock, as were all the people of Kwangju. But they responded very well to such a disaster, and were soon dealing with the injured. The hospital's leadership determined that response, and I soon realized that they made a big difference. That includes our chapel staff. They circulated *II Chronicles* 7:14 around the hospital: "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." I was proud of them for that. Now years later, I realize that that spirit of praying for repentance, and praying for those who had mistreated them, contributed to the healing of the city over the next years. I realize now too that my idea of "reformation yes, revolution no" comes from that time. When I would ask my friends,
"Don't you want to punish Chun Doo Whan?" they would say that that would only lead to more suffering and pain. What they were praying for was a gradual change in the government. That is indeed what happened, and it was an answer to prayer. I also realize too that when the time comes for North Korea to be opened to real freedom of religion, it will be that attitude of reformation, not revolution that will lead to real healing in North Korea. Yes, our friends in Kwangju taught us a great deal about basic Christianity.

And then came the press. We had people coming from all over the world to report what was going on in Kwangju. We saw them in town, and they came to our house. We spoke freely, because we wanted the whole world to know what was happening in Kwangju. As it turned out, the whole world knew, but the rest of the Republic of Korea did not know what

happened until months, even years, later.

There were lots of rumors in the city during those days. I guess that people under that much stress tend to hear everything, and pass everything on. One friend of ours called it the "Rumor Newspaper." We heard, truthfully, that representatives of the different Christian denominations were meeting together with each other and whomever they could find of the city officials, together with the Army command. The Army command promised to acknowledge the brutalities that had led to the incident. There were leaflets dropped on the city, acknowledging the atrocities. The brutalities were never acknowledged by the government, and it even became illegal to have in one's possession a copy of the leaflets!

By now there was very little traffic in the city. Most of the private cars were hidden, many of the school busses and the city busses had been damaged, so people rode bicycles or walked. Seung Gon and I rode bicycles downtown and showed our faces around town as much as we could during those days. We were asked over and over to tell the world what was happening. And we have indeed told what we saw and heard.

All things come to an end, even bad things. The orgasm of violence and the cacophony of gunfire faded. People were taking the guns back to the city's armory. And the city found itself inside a narrowing ring of tanks and other big weapons. The helicopters flew higher, out of range of shooters on the rooftops. And some of our guests went back home, feeling safer now that the worst of the violence was over. So it seemed.

On Sunday, May 25, we went to church at the Yangnim Church. Pastor Cho spoke on the role of faith in a time of terror. No one was bored. The rest of the day passed uneventfully. On Monday, May 26, we had another telephone call. A nurse friend called to ask if a friend of hers could stay in our house. When they brought her, they related that in the house next door, in the middle of the night they had heard several bursts of machine gun fire. The next morning they discovered that the whole family next door had been killed, except for one child hiding under bedcovers. The friend's friend thought the gunfire was meant for her, since she had come down from Seoul. So they came to our house! As soon as she was settled, there was a telephone call, asking for her. So I slipped downstairs and listened to the conversations. A rough male voice spoke to our friend's friend, Miss Kim. She said she was terrified. He told her to stay put! When she finished I hung up and went upstairs. I asked her where the telephone call had come from. She said it was from the Blue House! The Blue

House? Yes, from the President's house. We could not call out long distance, but they could call in. It turned out that her older brother was on the President's bodyguard staff. So now we knew that the Korean government knew where one of "their" people was staying. That knowledge made us feel a bit more secure. But we also put signs on the front door and the backdoor, identifying ourselves in Korean as Americans. And we put an American flag out.

That night I shut off the gas, and battened down the house as best as I could. Meanwhile our cats were out caterwauling (in heat) all night to add to the atmosphere of chaos those nights. At four in the morning we were awakened by gunfire close by outside. We got everybody down into the first floor, which was the safest place in the house. Seung Gon later told us that while it was still dark, just before the shooting started, he saw a trooper walk past, machine gun in hand. The gunfire was up on the hill. Helicopters roared overhead, some so low and close that I could look down and see the pilots! The gunfire stopped after a half hour or so. And then it was deathly quiet. No one dared move. When it became fully light, I heard the voice of a friend over at the hospital, Lee Suk Soo, calling out that it was okay to come out, calling the hospital employees to work!

That night, Tuesday May 27, the city was back under the complete control of the ROK Army. Troopers were all over our "missionary compound," guarding. That night the adult missionaries were at the Underwood house, having a prayer meeting and comparing notes. Jennifer told us later that an officer came to the door and knocked, looking for possible students to take away. Jennifer kept her cool (the boys were still upstairs) and said that her parents were not there. She also asked him not to shoot her cats! He laughed, but he left and did not return.

That was the end of the violence, but not of the terror. The South Korean Army had shot its way back into the city. Now we started having other visitors. Missionary colleagues drove in from Taejon and Soonchun, bringing bread, thinking we had gone hungry during the ten days. The press kept coming to interview us or to get our help in interviewing people. And the police came too, to interrogate the wounded in our hospital. The head nurse of the hospital soon realized the real possibility of our wounded being injured again during the interrogation, so asked me to sit in on the interrogations, which I readily did. The police were not always happy with my presence. One asked me, with his nose in my face, "Are you afraid we will hurt them?" Somehow the Lord gave me the confidence and wit to answer, "They are afraid of you. They think you might hurt them. So I am staying." Then they left me alone.

Soon they came from the Air Base for Miss Kim, our visitor from Seoul. They helicoptered her out of Kwangju. Before she left, we told her to tell what she had seen and heard. She said she would, but added that the President was surrounded by a ring of security people who might not let her get that close. We still think she was a relative of the President Choi.

I also had chances to tell the State Department what I had seen. I showed them pictures of X-rays and pictures of fragmented bullets. They were to look into it. The answer was that it was an internal matter, and the U.S. government could do little about it. A year later in Atlanta I showed the same pictures of X-rays and fragmented bullets to Colleen Townsend Evans. She said that she would show them to Mark Hatfield. I never heard anything about it again.

Sometime about the beginning of 1981, officials of the German Evangelical Church came to visit and to inquire what had happened and what could they do to help. We met with them. They were good, honest people. They also gave me about $5000 to give to the victims of the incident. They said not to keep records of it, but just to use it for the victims as I saw fit. I appreciated their concern and generosity. I kept it in my darkroom, and when I heard that any of the victims or their families needed medical or scholarship help, I gave them what was needed. When we left Korea for the last time in 1985, there were just a few "Won" left in Korean currency. I guess that the Lord knew just what was needed.

In 1981 we returned to the United States for a year of home assignment. We were carrying Martha's book (typed) in a briefcase. The customs people looked at my cameras, wanted to take one of my unexposed rolls of film to see if anything dangerous was on it. I said, "Go ahead. Be my guest." They didn't take the films. Then they looked at her manuscript.

That got them going! They looked through the pages, found a chapter on "conflict," and wanted to read the whole thing! They asked her questions about the history of Christianity in Korea, which she answered, of course. So they either realized that the manuscript was about 80 years before, or they thought it would be too much trouble to detain us and go through the book. So we boarded the plane and were off.

Martha and I kept hearing that the Korean government was coming to interrogate us. They never did. We would have loved the opportunity to tell them what we thought of the incident, which we felt to have been manufactured by the ROK government. I also laid out some decoy pictures for them to "find" in our house, in case they came to search the house. The worst pictures, the most "embarrassing" for the government, of course, I had long since sent out of the country. We still have them, and have shared them at appropriate times to people who might help. Now, twenty years later, with Kim Dae Jung and now a new President, Mr. Noh, in the Blue House, nothing more needs to be said about the incident. It's over. But some memories hang on in my mind: the sounds of gunfire when people are shooting at each other, the broken bodies of the innocent and not so innocent, the sounds of a city in terror and mourning, and the forlorn banners of a Baptist revival that was to have begun May 18, 1980, flapping in the breeze. The next year Martha wrote an article for the *Presbyterian Survey*. They used some of my pictures taken at the hospital and others that were circulating through the media. The cover shot was one I took of a little boy who had been paralyzed by the gunfire. We still have the magazine. It brings back memories. Those are the memories of the incident that put the nails in the coffin of any naivetè we might have had before "The Incident." It was one of the experiences in life that a person divides his or her life with the time before and the time after the incident. Since then we have not been naïve about human greed and what John Calvin called depravity, nor have we been surprised at how ordinary people can do great things under stress.