

There was an ongoing scorn among American troops, and there may still be, of Korean people.”

Korea got under Cleary’s skin, influencing him for a lifetime, although he only lived there for a total of three years. In Korea, Cleary writes in his webpage biography “life became wildly exciting and satisfying: The devastated third-world country, the eager, friendly students, music to create, the language to learn, our own church renewal of Vatican Council Two, teaching, traveling, writing: My first book accepted by a New York publisher.”

He was recently contacted by someone from Sogang University who is interested in putting the story of *Chun Hyang Song* into a history of the university. “It was a big deal at the time,” he said of the first production of the musical, because there were so few opportunities to enjoy any music or arts. The *Chun Hyang* story sticks with him because “it is all about women and the fact that women are powerful, and have great leadership ability and courage, and are never given credit for that.”

Cleary left the priesthood after



Performance of *Chun Hyang Song* at the Handong Global University Coex Center in Seoul in 2006.

leaving Korea and working in New York on a new church-sponsored agency to encourage publication by Jesuit writers. Roddy, his wife, was a religious sister, and a Ph.D. candidate at Fordham University when they met. In his website, Cleary refers to his wife as “the kind of intellectual who could combine great common sense and an avid

feminism with solidarity with the marginalized.” At their wedding, six priests and six nuns were their only witnesses, he said.

After their marriage, Roddy became a minister in the Unitarian Church, and was a co-pastor at a large Unitarian Church in Burlington for 12 years. “Roddy still goes there and hangs out with

the homeless and the politicians,” he said with a chuckle.

The two sometimes refer to themselves as “Catholic Unitarians,” he added. They have two sons. Tom and his wife live near them in Vermont. Neil, the younger son, lives in Los Angeles and writes commercial music for a living.

Interestingly, Cleary’s brother, became a priest, and later left the priesthood and got married to a former nun, and his sister, a nun, married a former priest. “At one point, I thought we were going to get the Apostate Family of the Year award,” he joked. It was a happy family life overall, except that he and his wife, as a former priest and former nun “we were left out, living in left field,” he added.

From New York they moved to Washington, DC, where he and a business partner, another former priest, established their film company Billy Budd Films, and produced educational films for children. His most popular one was entitled *Me and the Monsters*, which is still shown today, he said. They also established the bookstore in Washington.

In addition to championing women’s power at a time when the idea was virtually non-existent, Cleary has also championed other issues the Catholic Church considers controversial. He defends gay rights; he publicly questions the idea of celibacy for priests. He supports the views of some prominent Catholic women that the Church has let women down, and caused them to flee it in vast num-

bers. He calls on the church to close the seminaries, at least temporarily, and channel the funding it takes to run them toward helping anyone who was harmed by child sexual abuse by priests.

Christianity should embody the idea that everyone is important. “That’s faith,” Cleary writes on his website. “Nobody can be thrown away.”

A questioner never stops his questioning. Today, at age 85, he asks questions all the time, even when he is supposed to be the one getting interviewed. But not all questions have answers, and although Cleary has found some peace with that idea, the questions keep coming, even as the answers escape. “Though this book is about making sense of your life,” he writes in the autobiographical introduction on his web page, “my essential self, my meaning, still eludes definition, fading in and out like the misty Northern Lights that sometimes shine at night in these parts.”

While his body needs help getting around these days, his mind seems to be nimbler, balancing more ideas in paradox, absorbing more meaning from life than the younger priestly Cleary ever could. If Chun Hyang, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Ignatius Loyola and Bing Crosby could sit down together (and drink some *soju*), they would all find a soul mate in Bill Cleary. ●

Information on *The Jesuit’s Escape*, music from *Chun Hyang Song*, reprints of articles by Bill Cleary, and other information is available on www.clearyworks.com

Chang-mi Korean Dance & Drum: Performance of a Lifetime



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For all of us, this will be a once in a lifetime opportunity! We’ll have the honor to perform with the cities professional dance company and perform for South Korean government officials, as well as representatives from other countries from around the world. More than that, we, as Korean adoptees and children of Korean adoptees, will be able to show the people of South Korea how we have integrated a piece of our heritage into our lives in Minnesota.

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