



LITERATURE CONNECTIONS



WAR WOUNDS



BASED VERY CLOSELY on the life of its author, Sook Nyul Choi, *Echoes of the White Giraffe* is the story of a 15-year-old Korean girl, Sookan. As the war between North Korea and South Korea rages, Sookan, her mother, and her younger brother, Inchun, are forced to flee their home in Seoul. They become separated from Sookan's father and older brothers. Sookan, her mother, and Inchun find shelter at a settlement for war refugees in Pusan, a city in southern Korea. There, Sookan slowly begins to make friends, including Junho, a boy who sings with her in a church choir.

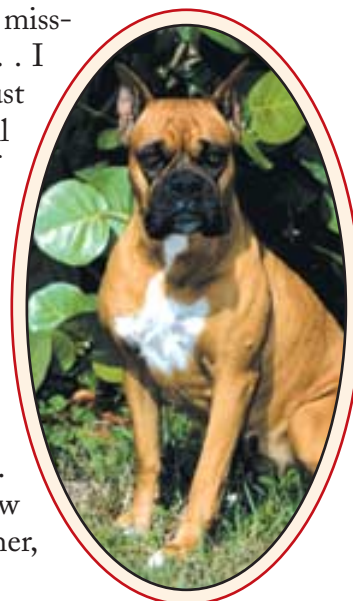
“Is that a picture of your dog?” Junho asked, looking at the pencil sketch of Luxy that rested on top of the bookcase. “You must miss it very much. . . .”

“Oh that,” I said, flustered and surprised. “Yes, that’s my boxer, Luxy.” I missed my dog, but I hadn’t talked about her with anyone since we left Seoul. . . . I frequently thought of how Luxy used to wait eagerly at the top of the stone steps in front of our house for me to come home from school. Then, at night, she would sleep at the foot of my bed. But I never talked of Luxy, for I was afraid that people might think I was childish and insensitive to mourn the loss of my dog when so many people were dead or missing. Junho was different, though . . . sharing my sadness. . . . I stared at Luxy’s picture, and I imagined how scared she must have felt when we all abandoned her. Suddenly the acrid¹ smell of bombs and sweeping fires filled my lungs, and the sound of sirens and planes flying low overhead buzzed in my ears. My mind raced back to that horrible day in late June when the dark airplanes roared through the skies and dropped a shower of dark, egg-shaped bombs from their bellies. . . . I shook my head and swallowed hard. . . .

“What is it, Sookan? What are you thinking about?” Junho said, looking very concerned.

“Oh, Junho, I was remembering the first bombing of Seoul. It was horrible. . . . All I could do was stand by the window and watch the bombs explode. Hyunchun, my third brother,

1. Harsh; foul.





came rushing into my room, shouting, ‘. . . Come on. Those planes will be right on top of us next. Let’s go.’”

“Did you all get out safely?” Junho asked anxiously. . . .

“Oh, yes. We put thick blankets over our heads and joined the throngs of people headed up Namsan Mountain. We stayed up on the mountain all night and watched the bombs erupt into flames in the city below. . . . As we were sitting there, I realized my brother Jaechun was holding a large bundle in his arms, which he rocked back and forth like a baby. I instantly realized it was Luxy wrapped in that bundle. . . . It was a good thing that Luxy was bundled up to look like an infant, for other people on the mountain would have been afraid if they knew a dog was with them. They would have panicked, fearing that a dog would go crazy with the noise and the crowds and might bite them. . . .

“The bombing finally stopped at dawn and we began making our way back home. We found our house half bombed and smoldering. We were hungry, and exhausted, and didn’t know what we would do next. We . . . started to unwrap poor Luxy. When we uncovered her, she gave such a loud, joyous bark. . . . She made us laugh and forget that we were sitting in the middle of a bombed city.”

Junho’s face brightened. . . . “Luxy was lucky to be so well loved and cared for.”

“Well, . . . Things got worse. About six months after that, we had to leave Seoul. I left her all alone. I don’t know what happened to her. . . . There were more bombs, and we had to run and follow the retreating South Korean and U.N. soldiers going south. . . . Mother, Inchun and I were separated from my father and my three older brothers. The three of us, along with thousands of other refugees, walked the whole day in the bitter cold snow to Inchon harbor. I was terribly cold and scared. . . . It was only once we were on the ship that I even thought of my Luxy. . . . I felt so guilty and ashamed that I never mentioned Luxy to Mother or to Inchun. . . .

“. . . Each time I see a dog or hear a dog bark, I feel guilty that I did not love Luxy enough to save her; she, my dog, who depended on me. I had thought only of myself. . . .”

Junho listened intently. . . . “You couldn’t have walked with her in that cold snow. She may still be alive in Seoul. You shouldn’t feel bad.”



Reading

THE LITERATURE

How does the author show how much Sookan misses her pet? What are some of the reasons Sookan doesn’t want to think or talk about her dog? Why does Sookan decide to share her feelings about her dog with Junho?

Thinking About

THE LITERATURE

How does the life of Sookan and her family change as a result of the war? Besides missing her pet, what other emotions does the loss of Luxy bring out in Sookan?

Writing About

THE LITERATURE

The title “War Wounds” has two meanings, one literal—the words mean exactly what they say—and the other figurative—the words have a symbolic meaning. What do you think are the literal and figurative meanings of the title of this selection?

About the Author

Sook Nyul Choi (b. 1937) was born in Pyongyang, Korea, and spent two and a half years as a refugee during the Korean War. She later emigrated to the United States, where she attended college and then taught school. She now lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Further Reading The first book by Sook Nyul Choi was *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*. It is a moving fictionalized account of Choi’s last months in Pyongyang under Japanese rule.