

PROPOSED TITLE

Comfort Women: The Generations that Follow

PROJECT SUMMARY

World War II's Comfort Women: The Generations that Follow By Cheryl Diaz Meyer

PROJECT PROPOSAL

"They say if your grandmother survived a war, what she survived or suffered through leaves an indelible mark outside your genes, an epigenetic expression, and thus affects how certain cells are translated," said Melissa Sipin, who was raised in California by her grandmother, the child of a former Comfort Woman and a Japanese Imperial Army soldier. She says her grandmother used to lock her in closets and dark rooms to protect her from "bad" men, leaving her with CPTSD or Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

My goal is to examine the profound and long-term effects of sexual slavery – effects that are still being reconciled generations later, through the eyes of the children and grandchildren of Comfort Women and other victims of wartime sexual atrocities by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II.

Four descendants have been identified: Sipin lives in San Francisco, California, a woman born of rape by the Japanese Imperial Army lives in Tacloban, Philippines, and two adult children of Comfort Women live in China. I will be traveling to the Philippines in April/May and will be meeting several surviving Comfort Women and their families.

Sipin's great grandmother and sister were taken as sex slaves by the Japanese Imperial Army in the early days of the war. Sipin's great grandmother gave birth to a daughter in captivity (Sipin's grandmother). She eventually escaped or was released from servitude, married and had several more children. Sipin's great grandmother married a Filipino soldier who was captured and tortured by the Japanese. The story of sexual violence, incest and rape continued in their family for generations as Sipin's great grandfather raped his stepdaughter as well as his own son from that rape. And that son was Sipin's father, who in turn raped Sipin when she was a child.

At least two hundred thousand women and girls, some as young as 13, were enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Army in comfort stations in Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, Singapore and Myanmar during WWII, serving as many as 50 men daily. Many more were raped as the war progressed. Three out of four women and girls enslaved died from injuries, illness, experimentation and harsh treatment. The ones who survived lived with Post Traumatic Stress, chronic depression, anxiety and other psychiatric disorders, and suffered rejection from their families. The children born of this violence were rejected by their families and communities, forever bearing the burden of their father's crimes.

A few of the Comfort Women are still alive today. The first part of my project will focus on their stories, as the women are frail and dying. The WHNPA Grant would help fund the second part of the project, focusing on the generational ramifications of sexual violence in conflict. The images, video and testimonies will inform people worldwide of the devastating generational effects of sexual atrocities committed against girls and women in the context of war, which unfortunately continues today. This project could help facilitate the healing of psychological

wounds for family members of Comfort Women, as well as advance the efforts for recognition and restitution of women and girls worldwide who have suffered sexual atrocities and sexual slavery.

The final story will be published in the news media. The San Francisco Chronicle has expressed interest in the story, as well as NPR, who is already partnered on the first part of the story on Comfort Women.

SIGNIFICANCE OF PROJECT

The images, video and testimonies will inform people worldwide of the devastating generational effects of sexual atrocities committed against girls and women in the context of war, which unfortunately continues today. This project could help facilitate the healing of psychological wounds for family members of Comfort Women, as well as advance the efforts for recognition and restitution of women and girls worldwide who have suffered sexual atrocities and sexual slavery.

FINAL DESTINATION OF COMPLETE PROJECT

The final story will be published in the news media. The San Francisco Chronicle has expressed interest in the story, as well as NPR, who is already partnered on the first part of the story on Comfort Women.