

Resurrection of the City of Angels

By **K.W. Lee**, editor
Korea Times

The following acceptance speech was presented by K.W. Lee, editor of the Korea Times English Edition, on Oct. 8 at the 20th Annual John Anson Ford Awards Luncheon at the Music Center.

Lee was among 13 awardees honored by the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission. He was recognized in the media category for "promoting intergroup relations, through journalism and through community involvement, using genuine portrayals of real people to foster genuine understanding."

Thank you for your kind and generous words. This honor bestowed upon this lone English-language voice for silent and struggling Korean American immigrants comes as a great consolation and solace to the weary hearts of my people.

Let me here pause and pay tribute to your skeletal crew of professionally dedicated staff members, names like Larry Aubry and Jai Lee Wong. Our people under siege have found them to be true peacemakers. And "peacemaker" nowadays is a politically incorrect word in the eyes of the local media, especially commercial TV stations who thrive on violence, hatred, race mongering in the pursuit of the Nielsen ratings and maximum profits. And you cannot see too many cameramen here because peacemakers are blessed, but they are not blessed in the eyes of the media.

Since the six months have elapsed, since the four days of fire, fury and madness, we Korean Americans in the Southland still remain stunned, bewildered, confused, abandoned and terribly lost.

Few ethnic minorities have been so devastated in such a single blow since World War II, singled out for destruction as the newest scapegoat for all the ills—imagined or real—of the murderous inner cities of our countries.

It's been the year of our economic Holocaust. Almost every member of my people, nearly a quarter million immigrants in the Southland, have been decimated by this madness and calamity. It's as if we have committed an unpardonable crime of being born Korean. We look up to heaven and ask, "Why us, why Korean Americans, why Koreatown?"

The history of newcomers from Korea is as young and fledgling and innocent as 15-year-old Latasha Harlins, but it is literally being written in blood, tears and sweat.

Each day a new chapter unfolds.

And my small newspaper is here to chronicle their struggle, telling the untold story of our people—with warts and all—in their full



K.W. Lee

“
We are here to live and die in the urban trenches because we have given so much of ourselves and gained so much in freedom in return. This is our last home on this earth.
”

human context, not only for the outsiders, but for our future generations.

The impact of the local media's race mongering has been instantaneous and devastating when it comes to our relationship with our Black brothers and sisters, especially in South Central. Even before they had a chance to know each other—who they are, where they've been and their common struggle, their common souls of the past—both Korean Americans and African Americans were pitted against each other in the local media as enemies in the shouting sound bytes and the screaming headlines.

And our newspaper has been trying our damnest to undo the accumulated neglects and wrongs of the past years, but it's like a cry in the wilderness, a whisper in the wind.

Internally, our paper is also developing an ongoing dialogue among the diverse and disparate elements of my subterranean community—between children and their parents, the Korean born and the American born, the newcomers, the latecomers and the early comers.

But the Korean-speaking parents and the (English)-speaking children seem to march to their own drums. It's like two ships passing

each other in a dark night without even exchanging a signal. This is our particular sorrow.

Above all, my paper is committed to serving as a bridge to our ethnic brothers and sisters. And we have run hundreds of stories about Korean merchants trying to live as good neighbors in the non-Korean neighborhoods.

We have also taken the initiative of having exchanges with such respected newspapers as the Los Angeles Sentinel, Jewish Journal, Rafu Shimpo and others. We have visited our counterparts in South Central to get to know them. Their columns and editorials grace our newspaper most regularly.

Again, when it comes to relations with our ethnic brothers and sisters, we try to adhere to the highest standards of accuracy, fairness and balanced reporting. Every copy is being scrutinized because we know the lives and limbs and livelihoods are at stake.

May 2nd, the day after the three days of burning and looting, was our finest moment.

While the buildings along the streets were still smoldering, a sea of more than 30,000 Korean Americans, young and old with their children, held the largest Asian American demonstration of peace in this nation's history.

Young and old alike, with (Anglo), African American and Latino supporters, marched while chanting for peace and racial harmony.

It was our glorious Martin Luther King Day. And we shall overcome hatred and fear, the mother of all violence. It was the day the torch also was passed to our American-born, English-speaking children, our second generation.

And the Korean Americans are no longer here as sojourners or guests. We are here to live and die in the urban trenches because we have given so much of ourselves and gained so much in freedom in return.

This is our last home on this earth.

On a final and very personal note, may I add that I believe in the resurrection of the City of Angels.

You are looking at a living and breathing example of the magic miracles performed quietly in this so-called never-never land of murder, mayhem and madness. I am recovering from a recent liver transplant operation at the UCLA Medical Center, where hundreds of health care people of all colors are bound together to save fragile human lives from the terminal diseases with transplants.

My new liver may have belonged to an African American or a Latino or Anglo. What does it matter? We are all entangled in an unbroken human chain of interdependence and mutual survival.

And what really matters is that we all belong to each other during our earthly passage.