

Rekindling Their Love

Written by Lai Yi-ling
Friday, 11 April 2008 14:55



In 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea and destroyed the delicate stability of post-World War II Asia. The invasion triggered the U.S.-Korean War, but it had other ramifications as well. One such ripple effect occurred in Taiwan, where the United States began to station troops in an effort to prevent the expansion of communism in Asia. For over 30 years, trendy American goods and aspects of American culture seeped into Taiwanese communities near U.S. military bases. The prosperity and affluence seemed like a dream come true to those in the traditional agrarian society of Taiwan. Given such an influence, it wasn't surprising that many young local women fell in love with tall, strong, attractive American military personnel stationed in Taiwan.

One such woman was Lin Li-hua, a young barber from the countryside of southern Taiwan. She married an African American officer and emigrated to the U.S with him. It was not an easy marriage. For more than 30 years, Lin harbored much grievance and resentment toward her husband and their marriage. Things changed when she was introduced to Tzu Chi. This is her story.

The smiling couple in the black-and-white wedding photo radiated happiness. The bride, Lin Li-hua (林麗華), was only 18 years old. She was already pregnant then with their first child.

This was no typical Taiwanese wedding. The man Lin was marrying was I.W. Harper Jr., a U.S. Navy officer stationed in Taiwan. He was also African American. Although not unheard of, marrying across cultural and racial lines over 30 years ago was not common. If Lin was to survive, she knew she needed to embrace her marriage with great courage and willpower.

Lin grew up in a poor family in the countryside of southern Taiwan. Because the traditional cultural view at the time favored boys over girls, Lin, the oldest daughter, was told to start working before she even completed elementary school. "Grandma said that schooling was of no use for girls. She told me to quit studying and work as an apprentice barber," Lin recalled.

A few years later, one of Lin's friends helped her get a job at a barbershop near a U.S. military base. This is where she met Harper, a young naval officer from Arkansas. They spent time together after she got off work and soon fell in love. Half a year later Lin discovered she was pregnant, and she and Harper decided to get married.

Many of her friends and relatives considered it risky to marry a foreigner, especially an African American, but Lin was determined to make the marriage work. She made up her mind to follow and settle down with her husband no matter where he went. When the Navy transferred Harper back to the United States, she packed up their newborn baby and all their possessions and went dutifully with him.

A miserable marriage

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