The infectious smile and sunny attitude of new resident Kyungcha “Margie” McGuire belie the hardships of her childhood in war-torn Asia. Since moving into her spacious apartment located close to the koi pond at Independence Hill Retirement Community, Margie has charmed everyone from dining table companions to staff. Never one to sit around, she’s a regular at exercise classes and social events.

Margie grew up in Korea, the second of many children. Her family moved to Japan in the early 1940s for her father to work mining coal, while her mother cooked for the miners. One of Margie’s earliest memories as a very young child was awakening to a bomb blast. She remembers being terrified as the building shook, windows blew out, and she hid to escape glass shards flying around her. Later she realized what she had experienced was the aftermath of one of the atomic bombs dropped in 1945. Thankfully, she was far enough away that she escaped any residual effects.

The family returned to Korea not long after WW II ended, but their situation was little improved. While her older brother was able to attend school for a time, Margie needed to work to help the family make ends meet. Margie sold apples in the street market in the town of Pusan. Later, she sewed in a factory. Always resilient, she taught herself how to read and write. Life was hard, and Margie left home early. It was in Seoul where her life changed. In 1959 at age 20, she met John McGuire, who was stationed at Camp Carroll Army Base in Waegwan. They overcame many obstacles to secure official documents so they could marry and leave the country together.

Margie and son, George, stayed with John’s family in Freeport, Texas, while John was stationed at Fort Hurd. She remembers his parents as being “sweet Christian people.” This was the first of several times Margie was welcomed in their home as John’s 20-year Army career necessitated several postings without dependents.

Margie, George, and daughter Mary did accompany John to Germany for two years, where youngest child Marline was born. Margie remembers Germany as being cold, how they shared only one room in a German house and decorated their Christmas tree with popcorn.

When they returned, they stayed once again in Freeport while John went to Vietnam Margie taught herself English and learned to drive in 1967.

During John’s postings, Margie and the children were able to visit Korea, where she reconnected with many of her family members. Over time, three brothers and a sister joined her in the states. Like Margie, they are all hard workers. One of her brothers ran a tailor shop in Houston that was patronized by George and Barbara Bush. Margie cooked in a restaurant in Freeport, cleaned houses and worked in the church nursery until she turned 80. She was still volunteering for Vacation Bible School and watching grandchildren until her San Antonio move.

John retired as a first sergeant in 1979, then took a job as a maintenance supervisor at the Texas Department of Corrections. Their children grew up, married and had children of their own. The couple was married 40 years, until John’s death 18 years ago. Margie and John proudly watched George graduate from Texas A & M University, pursue a military career, and retire himself as a lieutenant colonel from the U.S. Army. It was George and his wife who encouraged Margie to join them in San Antonio.

“My daughter-in-law told me I should do some fun things in my golden years instead of taking care of the house and cutting the grass,” Margie said. “So she packed up her favorite mementos and moved to Independence Hill. Now with free time, she goes out shopping, plays games and talks with new friends every day. And she’s still planning to help out in the church nursery in San Antonio.”