Year of Impossible Goodbyes

By: Sook Nyul Choi
Year of Impossible Goodbyes is a historical novel about a family’s courage, love, and determination to find freedom, based on the author’s childhood experiences in Korea near the end of the Second World War.
Setting:

- 1945-1946 Kirimini, a village in Pyongyang, North Korea.
Point of View:

- First Person Point of View, it is told by Sookan, the protagonist.

- Protagonist: Sookan, a ten-year-old girl whose family bravely endures the cruelty of the Japanese occupation forces.
Conflicts:

- Main Conflict: struggle between the Japanese military and Korean civilians (representing the forces of dictatorship and repression versus freedom.) This struggle is played out in several conflicts between members of Sookan’s family and Japanese officials.
**External Conflict:**
An additional external conflict materializes when Russian Communists occupy North Korea and threaten Korean civilians.

**Internal Conflict:**
The protagonist’s main internal conflict is one between fear and courage as she faces the Japanese, the Russians, and her flight into South Korea.
Themes:

1. Family love makes people strong enough to endure terrible adversity.
2. A cruel dictatorship may take away a family’s material wealth, but not the values of hope and determination to survive.
3. Freedom is worth fighting and dying for.
Main Characters:

1. **Sookan**, the narrator, a ten-year-old Korean girl.
3. **Mother (Hyunsuk)**, formerly active in the Korean Independence movement.
4. **Captain Narita**, a cruel Japanese officer.
5. **Kisa**, the narrator’s cousin.
Haiwon, young, energetic worker in the sock factory.

Aunt Tiger, the narrator’s aunt, lives with her sister’s family; Japanese killed her parents and babies; her husband is fighting in the war.

Inchun, narrator’s brother, almost 7 years old.

Narita Sensei, Captain Narita’s wife, teaches first grade at a Japanese school.

Guide, unnamed man that leads the children to a house at Yohyun.