

Me & Korea News

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Greetings to Mosaic Alumni and Me & Korea Friends

By Minyoung Kim, Executive Director

How will you remember 2020? Wearing pajamas all day long, staying cooped up in front of the computer, or getting sick of cooking? 2020 was a year full of unexpected events, including the decision to postpone this year's Mosaic Tour—unavoidable but still unfortunate.

However, right before the pandemic hit, we were able to hold the “An Orphan For You” conference in late February in Berkeley, CA. The conference was a great opportunity to learn more about adoption in the ‘70s and ‘80s, and moreover, I’m extremely thankful that many alumni attended and had a chance to create unforgettable memories together right before the world went into lockdown.

Thanks to the Korean government and San Francisco Consulate office, we were able to mail out packages of masks to approximately 154 adoptees in America, distributing a total of about 7,700 masks.

During this challenging time, we launched “Me & Korean,” a language and culture program for alumni. Beginning in August, we held biweekly sessions—a “teaching” session on Sunday and a review session on Saturday—along with one-on-one sessions throughout the week. Interacting with adoptees who were so passionate and dedicated about learning Korean was heartwarming and a big source of motivation for the

volunteer instructors. I especially enjoyed the one-on-one sessions where I could get to know each of you better. Likewise, we plan to teach English to the Angels’ Haven children in 2021. As of now, seven children have signed up. My hope is that one day the kids learning English and the adoptees learning Korean can converse with each other.

We skipped our annual online fundraiser this spring, but proceeded with our holiday gift drive in order to deliver gifts to children, single moms, and elders in need in Korea. I was not sure how the COVID situation would impact our fundraising since many people were facing job losses and pay cuts. To my surprise, I’m proud to say that the 2020 holiday gift drive was the most successful it has ever been.

If there is one thing that this pandemic has taught me, it’s the true meaning of community. Earlier this fall, I received a photo from a Mosaic alum who was participating in a Korean study group with other alumni. Seeing them support and teach each other left me with an indescribable feeling—these adoptees who had been total strangers just a couple of years



Mosaic Alumni dinner in Oakland, CA, February 2020

ago are now like family. Nothing has made me happier than seeing alumni stay connected during this unprecedented time.

This sense of family has always been something I have strived to create within Me & Korea, and it fills me with a special sense of accomplishment to have witnessed it this year. Although everybody has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, be it financially, emotionally, or physically, these acts of kindness and support have given me the energy to continue forward. No one knows what 2021 will bring, but regardless, I hope that everybody stays healthy and safe.



Left: Eunice Oh prepares mask packages
Right: A group of Mosaic alumni self-study Korean



An Orphan for You: The Rise of Korean Adoption in the 1970s and 80s

By Meeja Fortie, 2019 Mosaic Tour Staff/2018 Mosaic Tour

In cooperation with Mu Films, Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies (UC Berkeley), the Oakland Asian Cultural Center, and Overseas Koreans Foundation, Me & Korea co-hosted the “*An Orphan for You*: The Rise of Korean Adoption in the 1970s and 80s” conference in February of 2020 in Berkeley and Oakland, California.

The conference's title was inspired by the two decades that South Korea sent the largest number of children overseas for adoption—more than 112,000 out of an estimated 200,000 globally, leading some to refer to the country as “the land of orphans.” However, many Korean children, possibly the majority, sent overseas were “social orphans”: children who had no adults actively looking after them, but still had at least one living parent and, in some cases, an intact family.

Ninety percent of the around 200 attendees during the two-day conference were Korean adoptees from over 16 states, with scholars, parents of adoptees, and adoptee

advocates making up the rest. “An Orphan for You” sought to explore how Korean adoption, which began primarily as a rescue operation for mixed race children following the Korean War, expanded during the ‘70s and ‘80s. Speakers and guest panelists shed light on the powerful economic, social, and cultural forces that led to the children's separation from their biological families and subsequent relinquishment to families in the West.

Events included a panel of birth mothers from Korea who shared their stories about being forced to give up their babies. There was also a screening of “*Geographies of Kinship*,” a film by Deann Borshay Liem that followed the journey of four adult adoptees raised in foreign families as they sought to reconnect with their roots and the homeland they never knew.

“‘An Orphan for You’ was an emotional but meaningful experience for me,” said Sunny Marshall, 2018



‘An Orphan For You’ conference at the Brower Center, Berkeley, CA

Mosaic Tour alum. “I learned what Korea was like back in the ‘70s and ‘80s, which helped me to better understand why so many of us were sent overseas for adoption. My favorite part of the conference was hearing the stories of the Korean mothers forced to relinquish their children. I will never forget their courage, sacrifice, and willingness to be vulnerable as they shared their heartbreaking stories of loss.”

In addition to being educational, interactive, and touching, the conference helped many adoptees assemble the missing pieces of narratives they have been told most of their lives.

My Return to Korea

By Darlene Wirrick, 2019 Mosaic Tour

As a shy person, traveling to South Korea as a member of the 2019 Mosaic Tour wasn't something I ever imagined myself doing. Moreover, I hadn't given much thought to my Korean heritage. I knew I was Korean: that was clearly written on my adoption papers. But with no memory of Korea and being told numerous times that I did not look Korean, I didn't identify as such and had only a passive interest in my heritage. However, this all changed when one of my sons made plans to study abroad in Korea.

I was both elated and nervous after receiving the call that I had been selected for the 2019 Mosaic Tour. As a 1967 adoptee, I had no real expectation in finding new information regarding my adoption, but I was nonetheless excited to see Korea and learn of its culture. Soon after arriving, my jetlagged senses were overwhelmed by a colorful, bustling city, signs written in Hangul, Koreans speaking their native language, all the new faces of our tour, and a packed itinerary. What I enjoyed most was experiencing this with others, as this

was my first adoptee event. I also loved eating Korean food every day!

What I didn't expect to experience was a deep feeling of loss when I saw evidence of a past I couldn't remember. To be in Seoul 7,000 miles away from my home, and to actually see for myself an adoption file housed at Holt Children's Services; to stand on a street in Busan where I had once lived for three years as an orphan and to receive a picture of myself attached to an orphanage record that I had never seen; were all very strange experiences.

These remnants of my past awakened emotions I had tucked away like the adoption papers stored in the metal safety box buried in my parents' closet. Before this trip, I only acknowledged one truth: I was chosen, wanted, and given a good home by a loving family in the U.S. This newly discovered evidence revealed there was more to me: a Korean heritage, a country, a culture, a language, and a family that had all been erased from my memory.

There is a sadness in coming to terms with what I've lost, yet it also brings a pathway to recognizing who I am as a Korean and embracing that heritage. The 2019 Mosaic Tour not



2019 Mosaic Tour members at the banquet

only helped me reconnect to my birth country, it introduced me to the Me & Korea extended family and alumni, some of whom I remain in contact

with today. For that, I am grateful and forever changed. I hope to visit Korea again one day, and perhaps, also speak the language.

What it Means to Me to be Korean

By Susan Kas, 2019 Mosaic Tour

"I am Korean." Long before I can even remember, I began reflexively reciting this answer on practically a daily basis to the inquisitive peers and adults I would encounter—despite having no idea what "being Korean" meant. Although Korea has always been inscribed on my outward physical shell, this place was nothing more to me than a blurry backdrop to my own untold, buried history. With no memories of my birth land, I had no way to form a picture of Korea, let alone a picture of Korea that included me.

Upon reaching the middle-aged milestone of turning 40, I decided to seek some sense of this peculiar relationship between me and Korea. I joined the 2019 Mosaic Tour along with 25 other adoptees returning to Korea, hoping to see, hear, feel, and taste what I had forgotten. Through a unique mixture of jetlag, soju, and the sudden consciousness of our shared han, we became a steadfast circle of kindred spirits, bound together on an expedition to reclaim our connection to Korea.

As fortune would have it, Korea was waiting to show me my history, one I'd thought was forever lost. With the help of Me & Korea, I was given the tremendous honor of rejoining my first family. I was able to reunify with my omma, my five onni's, and through them, our appa who had passed away in 2011. We ate, laughed, and cried together for the first time in almost four decades. Through bits of conversations and translations of our appa's poems and omma's letters, I started seeing the outlines of our family's story, which had been shaped by our entire country's tragic and triumphant history. To be Korean, I discovered, is to share this collective history with our families, our ancestors, and Koreans around the world.

This year, as the COVID pandemic quieted life around me, I often find myself using the extra moments of solitude to scroll through tour photos of Joseon's beautifully restored Gyeongbokgung, the DMZ that continues to scar our peninsula, the Han River where a post-war miracle



2019 Mosaic Tour members bonding over dinner and drinks

was born, and the people in Korea who left an indelible mark on my heart. More than just treasured memories of an unforgettable trip, through these images I at last see a picture of me and Korea that, after 40 years, has finally started coming into focus.

The Kindness of Strangers

By Alice Stephens, 2019 Hapa Family Tour

Returning from the 2019 Me & Korea Hapa Tour, I had a lot to unpack. Literally. Along with my dirty clothes and souvenirs, there were the many gifts: books, elegant mugs, colorful paddle fans... The gift that I most treasure is a rather odd one, a framed cutting of a few rusty inches of DMZ barbed wire, given by the city of Paju. It is emblematic not just of the story of modern Korea, but of adoption.

Transnational adoption began with mixed-race Korean children like me and my Hapa tourmates, most of older than fifty. As illegitimate children fathered by foreigners, we could not be entered in the national family registry, and were essentially *persona non grata* in our own land, ineligible for public services such as they existed back then in a desperately poor country.

As I got older, I came to understand my birth mother's relinquishment of me as an act of love due to the impossibility of a normal life for me there. And if I squinted very hard, I could even see how my birth father would abandon his own progeny, for in those days it was understood that what soldiers did while stationed abroad was an acceptable consequence of military hegemony; that what happened in Korea stayed in Korea.

But I could not reconcile myself to my country of birth. South Korea did not want children like me, and made sure to get rid of us. The government was complicit in the prostitution that flourished around army camps, not only to keep the US troops happy, but also to introduce much needed foreign currency into a struggling economy. After callously using these women for the country's own gain, the government separated them from their

children and then abandoned them, denying them the benefits of rapid economic advancement that had been built, partially, off their backs.

I almost didn't go on the 2019 Hapa Tour because the day when the adoptee was taken to a place meaningful to their history had been dropped from the itinerary. But then Minyoung called and offered to meet me and my husband a day early to search for clues about my origins.

First, we visited Korean Social Services, and I had an interview with a social worker where I heard the upsetting news that the name I had treasured as my mother's was probably not her real name. There, I cried the first of many tears shed over the tour. Then, we went to Uijeongbu, where I was born. We started at the now-shuttered army base and tried to find the address that was listed in my papers as my place of birth, stopping at a municipal office for help. A city employee ended her lunch break early and spent several hours accompanying us in my search. Complete strangers took the time to stop and look at the photo of my birth mother and search their memories back more than fifty years. At one point, in a warren of alleys that housed women who had made their living around the base, there was a small parade of elderly women leading us from door to door, just as eager to find my Korean mother as I was.



Alice and her husband, William, with a city employee in Uijeongbu

Adoptees must often depend upon the kindness of strangers, starting with the family who adopts them. During the tour, we received these kindnesses daily. The luxury travel bus that took us from one coast to the other was donated by the owner of the company who personally chauffeured us some days. The city of Bupyeong hosted a lavish banquet for us, complete with entertainment and speeches from dignitaries. The city of Paju has built a park dedicated to adoptees—the first of its kind in the world—a lovely, peaceful spot graced with meaningful art and ringed by a lush fringe of trees. A local restaurant hosted us on two separate occasions, providing ample food and drink as well as cultural experiences. One morning, we feasted on hundreds of dollars' worth of king crab. The list goes on, and there are surely numerous donations of which I was unaware. And of course, this kindness all started with Minyoung Kim, previously a stranger to me but now forever in my heart, and Me & Korea.

In the end, we didn't find my birth mother. But we did find the place where I was born. I stood on the very spot where my mother had once lived, where my birth father had walked from the nearby army base to visit her, where I breathed my first lungful of air. It was a profoundly moving moment, given to me by complete strangers.

After I unpacked my suitcase, I did not hurry to unwrap the many presents I received because I knew it wasn't about the gifts, it was about the gesture. Though I did not find my Korean mother (yet), I found something precious and healing: normal, everyday Koreans who showed me love.

Disappointment Over Postponement of 2020 Mosaic Tour

By Aimee Harrell, 2020 Mosaic Tour

Being chosen for the 2020 Mosaic Tour is difficult to encompass in words. A sea of emotions that had been bottled up my entire life flowed out of me through my tears when I received the phone call telling me my tour member application had been accepted. The excitement to return to the country where I was born gave me so much curiosity and happiness. I started researching Korean food (I absolutely love food), beauty, fashion, and K-pop. I even watched my first K-drama, *Crash Landing on You*, which was insanely good.

At the end of February 2020, Social Welfare Services (SWS) located my birth mother and they passed along a letter to Minyoung, the reason for this tour's existence. In an instant, my

personal roller coaster doubled in size. My birth mother was not only alive, but she was willing to communicate with me. I never expected to find her.

When the tour was first postponed, I was devastated. Even though I knew it was the right thing to do for everyone involved, it didn't make the loss any less painful. The door to my birth mother had just been opened for me but now she was quickly drifting further and further away and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

When COVID-19 hit our world, I didn't think it was going to change everything to the magnitude it has. It altered my livelihood and destroyed plans that I have waited for my entire life. It's also been difficult to deal with

because my family and friends don't know what it's like to have something like this ripped away, while not knowing if it can ever be regained.

How can you comfort someone's pain when you have no idea how they feel? Despite it all, I choose mental resilience, with the belief that I will someday make it back to Korea on the Mosaic Tour, even though the unknown weighs heavy on my heart. I've waited my entire life for this opportunity; I can emotionally find a way within me to wait another year or two for my dreams to become a reality. When I do return, it will only be that much more meaningful, knowing the road it took to get to my destination. I look forward to that chapter of my story.

The Gift of Life—Jennifer Ribeiro's Story

By Christine Oh, Student Volunteer

On January 26, 2017, Jung Ji-Yeon, a 44-year-old wife and mother of two children was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia, also known as blood cancer. Despite being faced with the danger of death, she was more worried about leaving behind her two children and husband in this world.

Jung underwent cancer treatment right away. Day by day, her immune system got weaker and treatments harder to bear, but the most difficult news was that Jung had to do a bone marrow transplant in order to survive. The first step: find a bone marrow match. Through the Bone Marrow Registry, she found out that there were only nine people in the world who matched her bone marrow. Out of those nine, only one candidate was suited to donate at the time, and that candidate was

Jennifer Ribeiro, a Korean adoptee and 2014 Mosaic Tour alum. Through her faith and guidance in God, she happily volunteered to donate her bone marrow, an act that saved Jung's life, despite being in a difficult position herself. Three months prior to the donation, Ribeiro had lost her mother in a car crash and was taking care of her father who was in a comatose state.

The odds of having matching tissue with a non-family member is 1 in 20,000. On top of that, Ribeiro had the same blood type as Jung, and both were Korean, factors that significantly helped reduce the risk of side effects. Jung is now leading a healthy life, thanks to Ribeiro, who registered as a donor when she was 18 years old as part of a church campaign.



Jennifer (left) and her bone marrow recipient (right)

"There are many Korean people on the waitlist for healthy bone marrow," Ribeiro said. "Most of the time, they need a match of the same ethnicity, and family members don't always match. Sign up and take some time to do good. You may just save someone's life."

Learn more about donating bone marrow at bethematch.org.

The Miracle of a DNA Match

By Denise McCarty, 2016 Mosaic Tour

When I went on the Mosaic Tour to South Korea in June 2016, little did I think that four years after my trip, I would have a DNA match, but that's exactly what happened.

On September 24, 2020, I received an email from the South Korean National Police Agency, notifying me that I had a DNA match with an identical twin sister named Sang-hee and a birth mother named Lee Eung Soon. In the following weeks, I discovered my Korean birth name, Sang-ae, and my family's surname, Yoon. I also have an older brother and a younger sister but sadly, my Korean father passed away 20 years ago from liver disease.

On October 14, 2020, I met my Korean mother, older brother, and twin sister by video conference for the first time since June 1976. I was overcome with emotions during the meeting because it was the first time I saw family that looked and sounded like me.

I also learned that I was not abandoned by my family as I had been brought up to believe. While



Denise taking a DNA test during the 2016 Mosaic Tour

my mother and father were working, I got separated from my twin and grandmother during a visit to Namdaemun Market. From there, I traveled to St. Vincent's Hospital, a foster home, and then Kyong Dong Baby Home in Suwon City, until I was adopted by my Vermont family through Holt International Adoption Agency six months later. My twin was found three days later wandering around the train station and was reunited with our family.

Even though I never saw my Korean family again, they never stopped searching for me. Since the video reunion, I have video chatted with my twin a few more times and we



Denise (left) and her twin (right)

keep in contact every day using the Kakao Talk chat app to send messages and photos. She and I are also participating in a Twin Study with world renowned geneticist, lecturer, and author, Dr. Nancy Segal. The study will track and assess how nature and nurture impacted our economic opportunities, personalities, intellect, beliefs, and health, as identical twins who were reared apart in different families, cultures, and countries.

I look forward to traveling to Korea to meet my family when the COVID pandemic is over and it is safe to travel again. I can't wait to hug them and tell them I love them in person; after all, it's been 44 years.

My Birth Family and Beyond

By Mari Koons, 2019 Mosaic Tour

I was honored to be selected as a member of the 2019 Mosaic Tour. Shortly after acceptance, I started a second search for my biological family. My Holt social worker, Min-hyun, was wonderful and made several special requests to Korean Adoption Services (KAS). I learned that these types of requests were rare and it was something she'd never done before. Sadly, my biological mom had passed away in 2015 and there were no records of my father. However, I was excited to learn I had a large extended family and they wanted to meet me!

My reunion was less than 24 hours after I landed. While the rest of the tour was taking in the beautiful sights of the Han River, I was meeting nine (yes 9!) members of my biological family. To say I was overwhelmed would be an understatement. But none of that mattered when I was welcomed by my aunt's embrace and her telling me in English that she loved me. They showed me pictures of my **엄마** (mom), and I was finally able to see her face. At the end of our reunion, we took so many pictures and exchanged information on Kakao.



Mari's reunion with her birth family

On my meaningful place day, my uncle drove me to the outdoor gazebo where my mom's ashes were spread. While I was there, I took a

few moments to tell my **엄마** that I was okay. I think that is the closest I have ever felt to her. I wanted her to know that I was not angry and my life was good. Afterwards, I visited my uncle's home, where they prepared a delicious home-cooked Korean meal. While I was there, I imagined what my Korean life might have been like. The day was perfect and I felt like an honored guest. I am so glad I visited Korea when I did. Later that fall, my biological uncle passed away.

I wish I could put into words how important and meaningful this whole experience has been. I am so grateful

that my family and friends were supportive of my reunion. Sadly, my adopted mom passed almost 10 years ago. I wish I could have shared this experience with her but I know in a way she was there, just like my **엄마**.

Due to COVID, I do not have plans to return soon, but I am hopeful that my next trip will be later in 2021. Last Chuseok, my aunt sent me pictures of their meal preparations. My hope for my next visit is to spend an ordinary day with my family and be in the next family picture making **만두국** (dumpling soup) right beside them.



Gazebo where Mari's mother's ashes were scattered

Never Give Up Hope

By Carrie Shin, 2018 Mosaic Tour

On February 20, 2020, my birth mother got on a plane for the first time in her life, from Seoul, to meet me in San Francisco. When my fiancé and I arrived in California from Utah, I felt like throwing up and fainting, thinking about coming face-to-face with the person I have wondered about for 40 years.

A flight of stairs in front of me to the door felt like it was miles away. I took a deep breath and knocked. The door opened and I was greeted by Minyoung Kim, which added to the grand reunion. I saw my mother walk toward me with her arms outstretched and there were tears: an unforgettable moment.

I was hugging the person I didn't think I'd find, the person I thought about and wondered if she thought about me, too. I didn't take for granted the chance to study her, to see my genetics reflected back at me. We both examined each other's faces and mannerisms. She touched my hair and held my hand. I

loved being able to identify myself in her, and hear my fiancé say, "You look just like your mom!"

It was a very immersive five days alone with my birth mother. We shared an Airbnb, went for car rides, and ate together. There were tears and laughter and she sang for us. She wanted pictures of us every chance she could get. I spoke to my aunt, grandmother and grandfather on her phone. I grew so much love for this family that was connected to me on the other side of the world. It felt surreal to hear their voices, and exciting to think about reuniting with them someday, too.



Carrie Shin and her birth mother in San Francisco, CA

I look back and know none of this would've happened without my hope and determination, and the heart and passion of Kyutaeg Oh when he ran into my grandfather during a visit to Korea. I'm still living in shock that I found my birth mother, and in retelling the story, I am reminded that miracles happen.

Connecting with Korean Adoptees

By Melina Sutton, 2019 Mosaic Tour

Getting to know Korean culture and history, its people, and our own stories may have been over a year and a half ago, but the emotions, friendships, and memories of the 10-day tour extend well beyond it. Incredible moments of joy, laughter, and healing brought us together, and became another piece for each of us navigating our journeys as Korean adoptees.

The tour allowed us to see and experience parts of Korean culture and history that I may not have sought out on my own. We started in Seoul—visiting a local fish market, taking a cruise on the Han River, touring Gyeongbokung, and having lunch at Tongin Market. In addition to sightseeing, we spent an afternoon with the children at Angels' Haven and explored various parts of Seoul with a host family. We then traveled outside of Seoul to visit the DMZ, took a few lessons in self-defense at the Central Police Academy, and taught at an elementary school in Pohang. When we weren't touring Korea, we were face-masking, eating bingsu, and taking pictures of each other sleeping on the bus.

For me, the most impactful events of the Mosaic Tour were the ones that allowed us to dig into our own individual histories. Every tour member



Melina as a one-day teacher at Pohang Jigok Elementary School



was able to visit their adoption agency, speak with a social worker, and listen to a panel of birth mothers who had relinquished their children for adoption. We then got a day to explore a place that was significant in our adoption history. For my meaningful place visit, I was able to see the exact room in the hospital where I was born.

The opportunity to become close with a group of Korean adoptees is one that I'll cherish forever. It's difficult to describe the feeling of being in a group where although our stories are unique, there are feelings that can be left unsaid and still understood. It's not always easy to talk about our stories or circumstances or pasts, however I continue to be amazed yet unsurprised at each person's strength. I learned something beautiful about every single tour member.

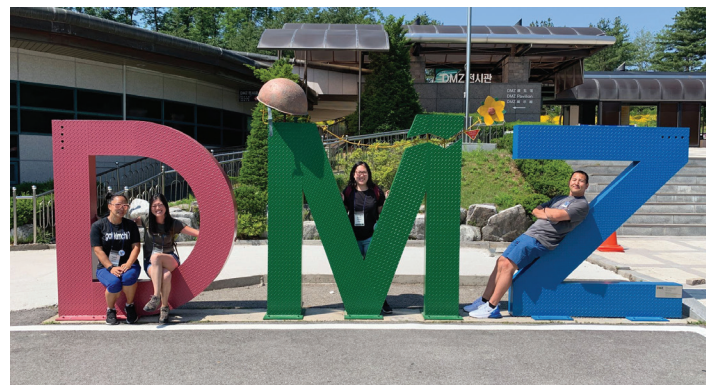
Thank you to Minyoung, her family, tour volunteers, and the people we met throughout the tour for providing opportunities to not only get to know Korea but to also feel connected to Korea on a new level. The experiences on this trip are ones that I may have not had on my own. You all will have a special place in my heart forever.



Melina (center) and her Mosaic sisters, Meeja (left) and Elaine (right)



Han River Cruise, 2019 Mosaic Tour



2019 tour members at the DMZ in Paju

Birth Family Searches Through 325KAMRA & DNA

By Christine Oh, Student Volunteer

Without any records or family members' names, Hapa adoptee and 2017 Hapa Tour alum Bella Siegel-Dalton began her birth family search in 2012 when she purchased a DNA kit and registered her information in the American DNA registry. A couple years later, she had enough DNA matches to locate her birth father, subsequently reuniting with siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles. In March of 2020, she matched with a nephew, who broke the news that his mother had two Korean-American sisters who were put up for adoption, finding the other half of her birth family.

In 2015, Siegel-Dalton and a group of friends decided to start 325KAMRA, an organization that aimed to help other adoptees have successful birth

family reunions through matching DNA.

"We realized that if we could get more Koreans in the database, then we could connect people," Siegel-Dalton said. "We tried to encourage Koreans to take DNA tests, especially if they were searching for family. Through 325KAMRA, we've tested over 6,000 people."

Out of the 6,000 people who registered their DNA, 300 found immediate DNA matches (mother, father, sister, brother, half sister, half brother, or first cousin). Another 150 matches have been made through further investigation by the 325KAMRA research team, who dedicate long hours to assisting adoptees in reuniting with birth families

and finding clues to their past.

"It's extremely rewarding," Siegel-Dalton said. "For those that are hesitant, I totally understand. It is a big journey, but like everything else that we've done as adoptees, every journey starts with one step, and the first step is trusting yourself enough to do the DNA test and being okay with whatever the results are."

Siegel-Dalton explains that the most rewarding and motivating part of the process is being able to call an adoptee with the happy news that their birth family has been located. 325KAMRA is willing to send any adoptee who wishes to register their DNA in the database a free testing kit.

< Me and Korea Alumni News

Mary Woodward (2013): George and I bought a house and I started a new job back in May.

Antonia Giordano (2013): Started a website for my photography, featuring original artwork on apparel and other lifestyle and home decor items.

Dawn Tomlinson (2014): Completed my Jerome Project Grant through the Textile Center of Minnesota.

Chae Norman (2016): New full-time job as an Office Specialist/ Membership Coordinator for a Union in Minnesota.

Dolly Regier (2017): Recently started an Artisan Small Batch Coffee Roasting Business and just moved into a local coffee shop in Madrid, Nebraska: Regier Coffee Roasters.

Dainen Penta (2017): I moved to Yakima, Washington. I'm working as a staff lawyer at Northwest Justice Project, helping low-income people with their housing and consumer legal problems, and helping formerly incarcerated individuals get back on their feet. We also adopted a new puppy.

Jennifer Stevens (2017): Still killing it in the baking biz! Macaron game is strong.

Young-wha Anne (2017): Got engaged in May and will get married in August 2021.

Shayna Larsen-Nordin (2018): Gave birth to a baby boy!

Carrie Shin (2018): Got engaged!

Victoria McGinley (2018): Gave birth to a beautiful baby girl in October.

Jenny Templeton (2018): Welcomed baby girl Willa Woo Templeton in August.

Marni Kanne (2019): Had a baby in September.

Another Successful Year of WINGS

By Eunice & Christine Oh, Student Volunteers

2020 marked a year full of unexpected surprises—some good, some bad. It also marked the fifth consecutive year of successful WINGS holiday drives, which, thanks to the support of donors like you, was our most successful drive to date, with almost \$20,000 raised. Taking extra safety precautions, this year's gifts were ordered and delivered straight to South Korea, wrapped by a team of local volunteers led by Boseul Kim, and directly distributed to Angels' Haven and Aeranwon by facility staff.

In a typical holiday season, our house is a mess. Gifts waiting to be wrapped carpet the floor, bits and pieces of wrapping paper lay on every table in the house, and goody-bags for the kids at Angels' Haven fill the living room. Luggage bags are wide open, ready for their annual mission—carrying these gifts to Seoul. But this year, things were different. Our house was unusually clean and we found ourselves reminiscing by looking at photos from last year's WINGS holiday drive.



Christmas gifts ready to be delivered (2020)



High school graduates and college students receive scholarships (2019)

For the first three years of WINGS, our Christmas season had been filled with photos of the Angels' Haven kids and their gifts. However, in December 2019, we found out we'd be able to deliver the presents ourselves. We could barely contain our excitement in the days leading up to Christmas. We still remember the smiles of the children. Each time we called out a name, we'd hear an excited voice exclaim "That's me!" and see outstretched arms, ready to open their gift the second it touched their hands.

Rather than head back to our hotel at the end of the day, we headed to Room 402, where we stayed with a group of 5-year-old girls. For five days, we spent every moment together—eating meals in the cafeteria, tucking the girls into bed, getting them ready for preschool, and more. At the end of our time together, we were admittedly exhausted; spending 120 hours with an energetic group of kids was challenging. But during those five days, the significance of Angels' Haven shifted in our minds. In previous years, Angels' Haven has been "a destination on the Mosaic Tour," but now we finally understood that this place is home—a home where each child feels loved, cared for, and appreciated.



Christine and Eunice with the kids (2019)



Halmonies with New Years' food baskets (2019)

We are continually grateful for and impressed by the community that has allowed us to experience such joyful holiday seasons. WINGS would not be possible without the combined efforts of volunteers and donors, and this year's successful drive gives us hope that the coming years will continue to be fruitful.

In addition to holiday gift drives, WINGS supplies birthday cakes and gifts to each child at Angels' Haven, and sends snacks during holidays throughout the year. When mothers leave the Aeranwon group homes, WINGS presents them with \$500–\$1000 grants to help start off their new life.

Building Cultural Connections to Korea

By Christine Oh, Student Volunteer

Author Woosung Kang's personal and professional mission is to build cultural connections—and that's just what he did last October when he published the *Korean Culture Dictionary*, an extensive guide to all things Korean.

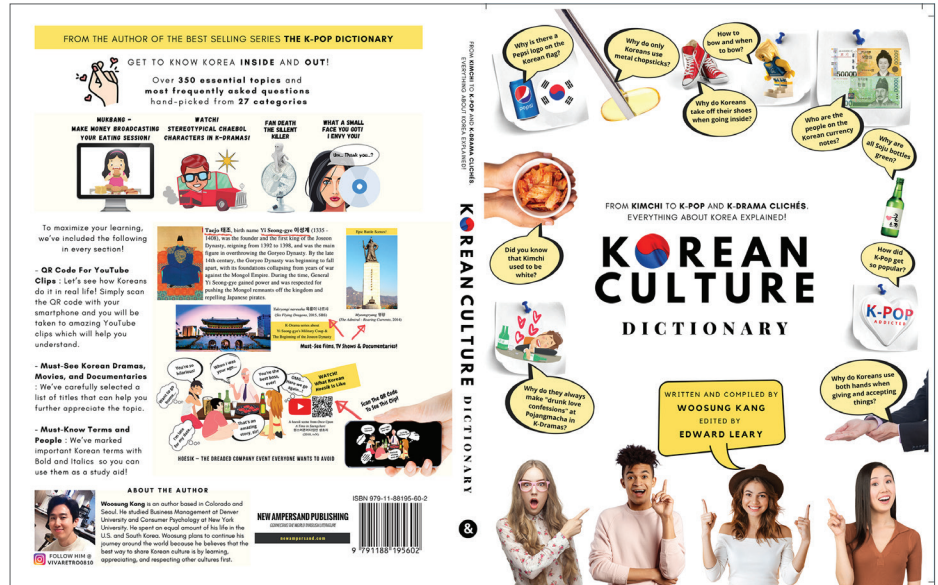
The 300-page book covers everything one would want to know about Korean culture, and Kang was generous enough to donate 20 copies to Me & Korea, as well as provide free e-book versions for the Mosaic alumni community.

"I had many Korean adoptee friends growing up in high school and college, so naturally, I heard their stories," Kang said. "It was a shame because I couldn't answer all the questions they had about Korea. That was one of the major inspirations behind this book; I wanted to do something for my friends."

Kang immigrated to Colorado with his parents in 1997 and subsequently studied business management at Denver University and consumer psychology at New York University. Through his book, he's achieved his goal of combining the two fields to create better and simpler methods of introducing Korean culture to others.

The *Korean Culture Dictionary* covers over 28 unique topics ranging from sports, the Korean War, lifestyles, weddings, holidays, common phrases, and more.

"Being Korean doesn't necessarily mean I'm an expert on everything Korean," Kang said. "Presenting inaccurate information is the last thing I want to do, so I spent a lot of time fact-checking, cross referencing, and researching."



Author Woosung Kang's book *The Korean Culture Dictionary* is available on Amazon

Kang estimates that the extensive process of researching, writing, designing, and editing took between three to four years. He utilized every resource where it was available including flipping through textbooks, digging up old news articles and research papers, and speaking to topic experts to get accurate depictions of Korean life. During that time, Kang noted that one of his biggest challenges was keeping himself motivated.

Kang had the opportunity to get directly involved with and support an adoptee organization in New York when he published his first book, *The Kpop Dictionary*, in 2016. However, he hopes the larger scope of the Korean Culture Dictionary can help adoptees strengthen their relationship with Korea through a knowledge of the culture. Kang discovered Me & Korea through a Google search, but it wasn't until after reading previous newsletters when he felt compelled to



Author Woosung Kang

be part of the program. Since then, he has continued to carry out his mantra of connecting cultures.

"This book alone won't reduce the physical distance between you and Korea," Kang said. "But what I feel certain of is that it can help reduce the emotional distance. Treat [the book] like a companion giving you a guided tour of Korea, and before you know it, you'll have learned a lot about your roots."

Me & Korean Language Classes

By Eunice Oh and James Kim, Student Volunteers

The silver lining of the 2020 Mosaic Tour being cancelled was the launch of Me & Korean, a language and culture course tailored specifically to Mosaic Tour members and alumni. As student volunteers for Me & Korea, we were given the very fortunate opportunity to develop and organize the curriculum for the course. With much meticulous planning over the summer, we were finally able to launch the course in August of 2020.

Our emphasis during the planning stages of Me & Korean was giving people an opportunity to interact with the Korean language—the goal being that tour members would have the confidence to speak Korean when they land in Korea. We began with learning how to read and speak, continued with the two number systems, and finished with basic sentence structure and vocabulary. We also included lessons to prepare future tour members for experiencing Korea, as well as give insight into the fun and interesting cultural differences between Korea and America.

Weekly lessons were held via Zoom on Sunday and the following Saturday, with each lesson lasting about an hour. For the first half of each Sunday lesson, we covered different facets of the Korean language and culture, while the second half was dedicated



The final review session of Me & Korean

to speaking and listening practice in small breakout rooms. We then uploaded resources for the students throughout the week before the Saturday session, where we would briefly review content before breaking off into small groups once again. We also set up an “office hour” system where adoptees could sign up for one-on-one practice with Minyoung.

Me & Korean was originally projected to be eight weeks long, but due to positive engagement, we decided to extend the course two more weeks. The time to slow down and review was necessary for a lot of people and allowed us to dive deeper into certain topics. It was very rewarding

to see students improve throughout the course, and the enthusiastic participation motivated us to make continual improvements to the course. Preparing and teaching Me & Korean has also allowed us to learn new things about the Korean language and culture.

Next year, we plan to launch an additional course, targeted towards intermediate learners who have completed the beginner course or have prior experience. We will also be offering the beginner course for anyone who missed the chance to join our first session. We look forward to many more joining us next year!

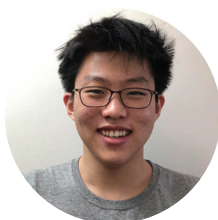
Welcome New Me & Korea Bilingual Student Volunteers



Daniela Barajas-Lee
Glenwood Springs, CO



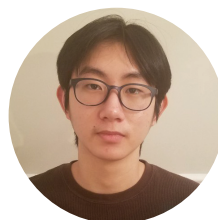
Raeeun Kim
Cary, NC



Taeyoung Lee
Wilmette, IL



Felicia Lee
Palo Alto, CA



Yongseung Cho
Suwanee, GA



Yewon Kee
Tampa, FL

What I Love About Learning Korean

By Katie Speckman, 2020 Mosaic Tour

I always felt that learning the Korean language would be an amazing way to start my exploration into my Korean culture. Wait... back up... what actually got me interested in learning the Korean language was my new obsession of watching K-Dramas on Netflix. So, when I found out that Minyoung Kim and Meeja Fortie from the 2020 Mosaic Tour were offering Korean language classes, I was all in.

We started out by meeting our new teachers, who unbeknownst to us, were four amazing, talented, high-school-to-college-age students, who'd put together this amazing curriculum under the direction of Minyoung. Not only were they super tech savvy, providing us with live Zoom classes that included accessible PowerPoints, recordings, notes, and study guides, but we also got to sign up for one-on-one tutor sessions with Minyoung during the week.

I really liked the flow of the classes. On Sundays, we learned new content, which consisted of a lesson on culture then on language. My favorite culture lessons were about food (I now have a list of all the street foods I want to try!), holidays, and drinking etiquette, hahaha. After the Sunday class, we all had a week to go over the material on our own, and on Saturday evenings we reviewed everything.

“ I like how explanatory the information was.

Sarah Salminen (2019)

“ As you know I've been at it for several years. For me it's difficult to stay interested and engaged. The Me & Korean class helps me stick with it.

Joe Meyer (2015)

Some of my favorite things were learning the Korean alphabet (Hangul) and how to read it in block formation, and learning that if a letter was in first or third position, the pronunciation could change. Practicing reading a sentence in Korean aloud, even if I don't know all the words yet, is very exciting. I loved when we'd go into break-out rooms from our Zoom session and practice with the volunteer instructors.

As the weeks progressed, we learned the two number systems (Sino and Pure-Korean), simple sentence structure, and three different types of verb conjugations: formal, polite, and informal polite.

I am learning everything, from the way people speak, to the order they pour a drink, to how low they bow to someone based on age and rank, as well as different levels of respect and honor that are exhibited to others.

The hardest thing to remember is all the little rules and exceptions that apply.

← Announcements

In 2021, there will be two Me & Korean courses available to all adoptees and friends/family who wish to learn Korean. Both courses will be 15 weeks long (February-May).

Level 1 will cover reading the Korean alphabet, simple sentence structures, the number systems, adjectives, and prepositions.

Level 2 will cover conversational Korean, emphasizing a new scenario every two weeks. We will focus on speaking and using Korean vocab and grammar in context.

If you have any questions about either course, please email korean@meandkorea.org. Registration will be available soon!

This class was amazing. It really covered a lot in a short amount of time. With working full time and helping my kiddos with distance learning, I wish there were just a few more hours in the day to study. I feel like I could definitely use the opportunity to go over everything a few more times. What an experience to both give and receive the gift of language!

“ It makes me proud to be able to really learn Korean in a way that I could someday actually use it in Korea.

Heather Milne (2018)

Behind the Scenes of a K-Drama

By Felicia Lee and Eunice Oh, Student Volunteers

Have you ever wondered how a K-drama is written? Soojin Choi is the writer of several K-dramas, including *Defendant* (2017) and *Heart Surgeons* (2018). We sat down with her to ask about Korean dramas and her experience as a writer.

Korean dramas are becoming more accessible around the globe—Netflix, Viki, and a host of other streaming sites make it possible for non-Korean speakers to watch K-dramas. Choi attributes this surge in popularity to global technology and says that she herself has watched many overseas dramas (German, French, etc) through Netflix. “Korean dramas are just fun,” she says, and it applies to all media out there: if the plot is fun and the characters are likable, there are no barriers to what you consume.

When asked what K-dramas best showcase Korean culture, Choi recommended two dramas: *Sandglass* (1995) and *Reply 1994* (2013).

Choi praises *Sandglass* as one of the best Korean dramas ever made. Set in the 70s and 80s, the drama shows the political uncertainty of the time period and follows three friends as they navigate life under a dictatorship. It’s one of the dramas with the highest viewer ratings in Korean history! If you’re looking for a depiction of influential historical events and activities, check out *Sandglass*.

Reply 1994 is a drama that shows the life of university students in the 90s. The show follows seven main characters—all from different districts of Korea—as they all gather in Seoul to attend college. It’s a peek into college

life, with many references to pop culture and a heartwarming glimpse into the lives of young Korean adults.

When writing a drama, Choi first asks herself, “What is the story I want to tell?” It’s an important part of her process to tell stories with impact.

For *Heart Surgeons*, she recalls visiting a hospital and learning about the declining rate of cardiothoracic surgeons in Korea. In order to let the general public know the importance of the occupation, Choi chose to write about cardiothoracic surgeons.

The dramas Choi has written are technical in nature—*Defendant* is based in law and *Heart Surgeons* is based in medicine. She tells us that the scriptwriting process is full of meetings with experts in their fields; observing surgeries, receiving advice on her scripts, and studying meticulously on her own.

Choi tells us about a scene in *Heart Surgeons* where the doctors use medical glue to hold together a patient’s heart. The scene in question received a lot of backlash from viewers who called it “unrealistic” and “over-the-top”. In fact, the scene had been directly inspired by a real story that a professor had told her about. The writing process, as Choi describes it, is full of scenes like this that have hours of effort behind them, yet face negative reception once broadcasted.

While writing a script, Choi first chooses 16 major plot points—the familiar cliffhanger endings to each episode—and works her way towards those plot points. And while writing, despite having a certain actor in mind



Ms. Choi’s two major dramas, *Defendant* (top) and *Heart Surgeons* (bottom)

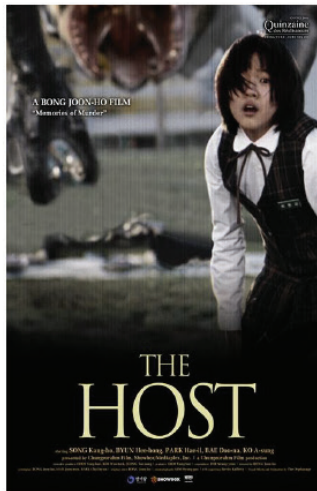
for the main roles, the possibility of casting those actors are very low. Choi compares it to the chances of a crush liking you back—rare, to say the least.

For *Defendant*, Choi had hoped that Ji-Sung would accept the role of the main character—the actor was a father himself, and would be able to portray her message well. Fortunately, he liked the script enough to request a meeting with the staff. Choi remembers that Ji-Sung showed up with a list of questions about the script and was able to completely immerse himself in the role of a father.

As big fans of Korean dramas ourselves, we were excited to be able to meet with Ms. Choi and learn more about the writing process. Korean dramas continue to receive international acclaim, and the complicated process of writing and shooting a drama is a testament to the dedication that the staff have towards their craft.

Producer Hyunchul Kim's Cultural Entertainment Recommendations

By Raeeun Kim and Christine Oh, Student Volunteers



In order from left to right, *Mal-Mo-E*, *The Host*, *Jewel in the Palace*, *Those Who Cross the Line*

Korea definitely wouldn't be complete without its entertainment culture! We had the opportunity to speak to Hyunchul Kim, a producer at MBC, a major broadcasting station in Korea, for his top kdrama, movie, documentary, and variety show recommendations for those who are itching to learn more about Korean culture.

말모이 / Mal-Mo-E: The Secret

Mission: Based on historical events, this movie explores the mission of a group of individuals attempting to keep the Korean language alive during the Japanese colonial rule. You'll be able to see the importance of the Korean language and how it persisted until present-day.

괴물 / The Host: Directed by the famous Bong Joon Ho, this movie showcases an American scientist accidentally causing the birth of an amphibious monster in the Han River. Throughout the movie, you can see the relationship between America and Korea develop as they work to resolve the environmental issue.

대장금 / Jewel in the Palace: A classic historical kdrama, this show will let you take a sneak peek into the Joseon era. Released in 2003, it's one of the first shows that puts the entire spotlight on a female character as the main lead.

커피프린스 1호점 / Coffee Prince: This entertaining 17-episode, award-winning show is a fun, refreshing youth drama from 2007. If you've watched "Goblin," you may recognize Gong Yoo as the main lead in this drama as well! You can even find your way to the coffee shop where this drama was filmed the next time you visit Korea.

선을 넘는 녀석들 / Those Who Cross The Line: If you're ever dreaming about a trip to Korea, you can satisfy your cravings through this exploratory travel variety/reality show. You'll learn a lot about the nation, as cast members travel to locations all over the Korean peninsula in an effort to understand the unique hidden histories and culture of individual locations and cities across the country.

휴먼다큐-사랑 / Human

Documentary Love: At the core of humanity is love, and this documentary illustrates exactly that—the stories of families and their experiences through hardships and emotional pain as they navigate these challenges with one another. It's a great opportunity to remember the importance of family in our lives.

Mr. Kim explains how video media is one of the best ways to approach others' culture, as he currently works at the Shanghai MBC branch in China and is learning the Chinese culture through media portrayals. Dramas and movies help you learn the language, while you can gain an insight into the native people's thoughts, emotions, and feelings through documentaries and reality shows. He strongly urges those who want to learn more about Korean culture to delve into documentaries—while lesser known than Korean dramas or variety shows, they're a great way to get a raw picture of what Korea looks like and how Koreans live their everyday lives.

< In Memoriam

Me & Korea would like to dedicate this page to alumni and friends who have passed away this year.

Sue-Je Gage

(1973-2020) was a strong advocate for Korean adoptees and had a particular connection with mixed-race Korean adoptees. She devoted a great deal of time volunteering her scholarship, perspective, and friendship as part of Me & Korea's service to Korean adoptees. Sue-Je and her daughter, Sarah, joined the 2017 and 2018 Hapa Tours. She was a guest speaker at the conference we held in Berkeley, CA in 2015, as well as a moderator at the conference we held in Seoul, Korea in 2018.



Pio Seo **(1929-2020)**

is called the father of Korean orphans. He was the director of the St. Vincent Home for Amerasians and Holy Family. During his career of 40 years, he was involved in sending more than 1,500 children for intercountry adoption. Since his retirement in 1997 and before his passing away, he had helped adoptees reunite with their birth families. He was the guest speaker at a conference we held in Berkeley, CA in 2015.



Sukshil Park

(1955-2020) was born in Korea from a Korean mother and an American African father and was adopted at the age of six to the United States. She was a member of the 2017 Hapa Tour and was always proud of being Korean and wanted to be connected with it. Her bright smile and sense of humor that shined during the tour will be remembered forever.



< Special thanks to the 2020 newsletter team

Meeja Fortie (2018)
Christine Oh (Student Volunteer)
Jennifer Schupp (2015)
Elaine Walters (2019)
Heidi Christiansen (2018)
Paul Kim (2018)
Kim Rolfe (2018)
Pat Kenny (2019)
Vincent Mui (Design)

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Minyoung Kim
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Me & Korea
P.O. Box 492
Santa Clara, CA 95052

www.meandkorea.org • info@meandkorea.org