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## Celebrating 10 Years of Me & Korea

Minyoung Kim, Executive Director

The pandemic undeniably affected all of our lives in various ways. It's almost unbelievable now to remember schools temporarily closed, essential items like toilet paper scarce, and heavily restricted travel. The pandemic's impact on Me & Korea was also significant, leading to the unfortunate suspension of our tours for a two-year period. Nevertheless, as I reflect on the past couple of years, I find several reasons to be grateful.

During the height of quarantine in 2020, we launched *Me & Korean*, a language program initially designed to equip our selected tour members with essential skills for their upcoming trip. However, as time passed, this program has grown to seven different levels, staffed by 70 bilingual volunteers and serving more than 270 participants around the world. Witnessing our participants' commitments to learning the language and culture of Korea has been immensely motivating for us to continue on our mission.

In 2022, we eagerly resumed the Mosaic Tour, aiming to make up for the lost opportunities by organizing two back-to-back tours. That summer, however, was far from ordinary, with lingering COVID-related restrictions. Regrettably, we faced several

outbreaks during the initial tour, which disrupted our original plans. Some participants had to endure being isolated in their hotel rooms. Yet, it was during these challenging moments I truly grasped the essence of the Mosaic Tour and came to cherish it as an exceptionally beautiful experience.

It was heartwarming witnessing our participants rally to support each other at their most vulnerable and frustrating moments, collectively tackling challenges. On a personal note, I too fell ill during this period, which in a way, served as a much-needed excuse for me to take a break. One day, as I opened the door to my hotel room, I was greeted by tour members who had just received negative test results and were finally released from quarantine. To my surprise, they were busy distributing food to their fellow tour members, affectionately known as the "Seoul Sickies." I was deeply moved by the genuine and radiant smiles on their faces. This memory remains the most cherished one from the entire decade of Mosaic Tours.

This past June, we celebrated our 10th anniversary with the Alumni Friends & Family Tour, a significant milestone on our journey. We organized three distinct tours, from Gangwon (exploring



[Minyoung Kim during the Alumni Tour](#)

the northeastern part of Korea) to Paju, to Jeju, with each drawing 70 participants. What stood out to me was the noticeable difference from the Mosaic Tour. The tour members were notably more relaxed and at ease, attributed perhaps to their heightened familiarity with Korea since their Mosaic Tours or the presence of their loved ones. It was a special time for me to witness the tour members' growth in their connection to Korea. Meeting their families and delving deeper into their stories were the highlights of the tour.





# Finding Peace

Sarah Graves, 2023 Mosaic Tour

Peace. At first glance, the concept seems simple, yet can quickly become complex. One of the simplest definitions I've found is "freedom of disturbance." I think for so many transracial adoptees on life changing journeys, we search far and wide before we realize this freedom is what we yearn for.

When I found out I would be traveling to my birth country with the 2023 Mosaic Tour, I was excited, nervous, anxious, and overwhelmed—feelings that stuck with me for six months. I was underprepared for the unprocessed trauma that accompanied returning to Korea for the first time. During that time, I replayed my life story in my head: one of misunderstood and misplaced identity. Classmates who questioned why I did not look like my parents. The Asian kids by whom I never felt fully accepted. The white people who always made sure I knew I wasn't white. The optometric assistants who told me to open my eyes "really big." The well-meaning people who excitedly asked about my "vacation" to Korea. A sense of belonging was always out of reach.

Me & Korea changed that. My trip was complicated and beautiful at the same time. It gave me the safest space I have ever known—a bubble inside Korea filled with 26 other strangers-turned-lifelong-friends, who understood me from Day 1. It gave me answers to questions I had been asking my entire life, like "What time was I born?" and "What does my hometown look like?" The signature piece of the Mosaic Tour is the Meaningful Place portion—a curated visit to a location particular to each adoptee's story. I traveled to Cheongju to see a hospital where I was potentially born. It didn't matter that no one confirmed this to be true; seeing it brought me a peace that had been missing for months, maybe my entire life.

I am eternally grateful to Minyoung Kim, her family, the tour volunteers, and my 2023 Mosaic brothers and sisters. I know this feeling of peace is temporary. Inevitably, there will be another microaggression, another email from my adoption agency or other bombshell, that may wreak havoc. Yet I departed the Land of the Morning Calm with a freedom and confidence to continue the personal journey of Sung Eun Choi *and* Sarah Elisabeth Trainor Graves.



Hanging out in Gwangjang Market



2023 Tour members join the Alumni Tour



## Like Falling in Love

Henrik Erngren Othen, 2023 Mosaic Tour

I suppose you know how it feels to fall in love? When you walk around all day with a sheepish and slightly goofy grin on your face, carrying an unreasonable and inexplicable passion for someone your whole being longs for?

Even though it's been several months since the Mosaic Tour ended, that feeling of infatuation best describes how I felt, and still feel, every day. Not just a crush but rather an unexpected and powerful feeling of deeper love and sense of belonging for my newfound sisters and brothers, and to my motherland Korea.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me tell you my story. It was more than 42 years before I had the opportunity to be on Korean soil again, and the journey back wasn't exactly straightforward. A seed of curiosity about my country of birth was born when I started my high school studies in Uppsala, Sweden, and my world suddenly expanded a thousandfold.

After all, I was a fairly uncomplicated and somewhat naive teenager from

a small rural village with barely 1,000 inhabitants where life was incredibly simple and where, somewhat improbably, there were also a handful of other families who had adopted children from Korea. I never felt excluded. Me, my older sister, and all the other adopted children were totally assimilated into Swedish society and I can't remember ever getting close to learning about Korean culture.

Ever since I first confronted my feelings about being adopted, the seed inside me has grown. I liken it to the Korean my adoptive parents planted when my older sister came to Sweden. I remember it being so small but today it is huge. I prepared for the Mosaic Tour with an open mind, ready to be honest, open, and accepting of any emotions that could arise. I tried to resist and tone down possible expectations, and instead promised myself to be as present as possible.

The Mosaic Tour was a transformative and fantastic return trip that resulted in unexpected, positive ripples since I



Henrik sitting in his orphanage

arrived home. Having the opportunity to spend 10 high-quality, intense, inspiring, and interesting days with other adopted Koreans is a milestone in my life.

Maybe it's what the Swedish author and poet Karin Boye once wrote in her poem, "*In motion*": "... it's the road that's worth the effort." Thank you Me & Korea, sisters and brothers, for an unforgettable and life changing journey. We will meet again!

### In Motion

*The sated day is never first.*

*The best day is a day of thirst.*

*Yes, there is goal and meaning in our path—*

*but it's the road that's worth the effort.*

*The best goal is a night-long rest, fire lit, and bread broken in haste.*

*In places where one sleeps but once, sleep is secure, dreams full of songs.*

*Strike camp, strike camp! The new day shows its light.*

*Our great adventure has no end in sight.*

Author: Karin Boye, From the poetry collection: *The Hearths* (1927)



Henrik with 2023 tour members and staff

## A Blessing Beyond Measure

Karli Champ, 2022 Mosaic Tour A & 2023 Mosaic Tour

I had the amazing gift of two Mosaic Tours.

My first was in 2022, Tour A. I had begun questioning my birth, uprooting my identity, and struggling with what it meant to be an adoptee. By the end of 2021, I applied for the Mosaic Tour. I was so excited (and terrified!) when I received the life-changing acceptance from Minyoung.

This was the opportunity of my lifetime! A birth land trip to Korea with fellow adoptees, a chance to find family, an answer to why I felt homesick even when I was home. And what an adventure it was! Along with so many kind new friends, I met Minyoung and the wonderful Me & Korea crew. I walked along Cheonggyecheon, ate fried chicken by the Han River, visited Changdeokgung's Secret Garden with my host mom, partook in a lovely Paju dinner...

...and tested positive for COVID.

I was devastated. Many of us were under mandatory quarantine. Despite it all, I am so thankful for all of the care, kindness, and treats we received from Minyoung, Me & Korea staff, and fellow tour members.

Skip to spring 2023: While I was



Karli during the Alumni Tour at Jeju Island

making grand plans for the Alumni Tour, I also learned I could join that year's Mosaic Tour. The evening I was to arrive in Korea was the same evening the previous year where I fell to COVID. I was given the astounding gift of picking up right where I left off. Returning to Korea for the 2023 Mosaic Tour was a blessing beyond measure. It was all I dreamed it would be, and more. The kindness of the Paju citizens, delving into deep discussions about identity and belonging, participating in a beautiful closing ceremony—all with my dear Mosies and the Me & Korea team.

I see the 2022 Mosaic Tour for “baby me”: the agency visit, and the struggles, grief, desperation, and yearning. I honor the adopted baby



Karli and her new friend

who had to adapt, burying questions until they finally burst out. The 2023 Mosaic Tour is for me now, seeing Korea with a heart that has had time to process so much. I honor the woman whose heart may be broken repeatedly over such feelings, but will keep rising anyway.

To Minyoung and everyone who made this possible: THANK YOU for your kindness and being an integral part of my life, for letting me experience Korea in the safe space you have created for adoptees. Thank you for letting me complete my journey.

## Feeling Newly Whole

Christina Stuiwe, 2022 Mosaic Tour A

The bustling city of Seoul stretched out before me, a blend of skyscrapers and ancient traditions. The 2022 Mosaic Tour, group A marked my first time returning to the land of my birth since being adopted to the U.S. As I stepped onto Korean soil, I felt a flood of emotions and uncertainty.

Fortunately, the journey back to Korea was not one I embarked upon

alone. Me & Korea was a guiding light, offering support and resources to adoptees who were seeking to reclaim their heritage. Walking through the vibrant streets of Seoul, Paju, and Busan, I was struck by the disorientation I felt. The Hangul, the spoken language, and the faces that mirrored my own were all reminders of how little I knew or understood about my origins.

During the Mosaic Tour, I ate beautiful foods in beautiful restaurants (and in the streets, too!), visited a palace, slept at the inspiring Forest of Wisdom, participated in traditional craft activities with Korean elders, gave a speech, and feasted at an elegant banquet. Yet it was the quiet in-between moments and the internal processing that transformed me.



Although I had no expectations, I remember sobbing when the Holt social worker was unable to reveal any new information about my origins. That was a depth of despair I never saw coming, yet a gentle hug from tour volunteer Stephen Hill provided immeasurable support.

Through Me & Korea, I met a diverse group of adults who revealed similar experiences navigating the complexities of identity and belonging. I saw reflections of my own struggles

and felt a deep sense of connection. I reveled in the shared excitement of rediscovering our homeland, our culture, and ourselves. Together, we mourned the life we never experienced. We cried, listening to birth mothers tell their stories of love and loss, contextualizing the loss and grief of both parties in the adoption constellation, and knowing that we were the epilogue to their narrative.

As I prepared to return to the U.S., I felt newly whole. I left my birth land

as an infant and while I “grew up” in another country, it is clear there was a part of me that hadn’t developed. Despite the anguish inherent to this experience, the enthusiasm, patience, and kindness of the Me & Korea team allowed for a safe laboratory where we could explore, restore, and mend those forgotten selves. Me & Korea is more than an organization to me; they are a catalyst for my growth.

## Mini Minyoung

Christine Oh, Volunteer

When Covid hit 2022 Mosaic Tour A by storm, I didn’t panic. I had faith in Minyoung (the tour leader, and also my mom) to still provide the best tour experience. That was, until she texted me the day before the meaningful place visit day: *“Christine. I tested positive. I’m okay, but you might be taking up a lot of work these next few days.”*

After receiving that message, time seemed to move faster than usual. I couldn’t imagine a tour running without Minyoung’s presence, and unanswered questions plagued my mind. *What would happen to Tour B in one week? What if more people*

*fall to Covid?* Yet, with a strong (and healthy) team of tour staff, we took things one at a time: rearranging meaningful place volunteers, communicating with the rest of the tour members, and more.

As we tackled task after task, I got a special glimpse into the never ending possibilities of the Mosaic Tour, this time through Minyoung’s eyes. On the meaningful place visit day, I typically sit in the lobby and wait for instructions from Minyoung on every aspect: where to go, who to take, and what to do. But for the first time, I was sitting in her shoes, directing other

volunteers into place. I remember getting back from Daejeon that day and breathing a sigh of relief as I returned to a group of other tour volunteers that had also successfully gotten back from their respective meaningful place visits.

Following the meaningful place visit day, I gained a new nickname while in transit to the banquet: “Mini Minyoung”. My mom texted me a long list of Mosaic Tour sponsors, friends, host families, and other important guests that I needed to greet in her place. As I made rounds to complete these greetings, flashbacks to banquets from previous years kept crossing my mind. My sister, Eunice, and I always followed our mom around like a puppy, bowing our heads when she told us to greet someone important, or briefly translating for a birth mother and tour member when asked to help.

While I actively felt the lack of their presence at this banquet, I found a new sense of responsibility and warmth as I reflected on my own personal growth throughout the years. While Minyoung watched the rest of the tour unfold from her hotel room, I experienced unparalleled leadership learning opportunities, a reflection on the past ten years of my interactions with the Mosaic Tours, and a new lens into what it takes to run a successful tour!



Christine leading a meaningful place visit to Busan

# Embracing Adoptee Friends Into Our Family

Kwonsu Yoon, Host Family

Hello. We are “Kwonsu’s Family” who had the experience of being a host family with Me & Korea. Our family consists of my wife, Dami Lee; two daughters, Jiyu and Seoyu; and myself, doting father Kwonsu Yoon. Last year was our first time participating as a host family. As of this year, we have met four adoptee friends through two host family experiences. The memories we have of preparing and planning out an itinerary are so precious to us, because we always want to give the adoptees a very special experience.

This past summer, I showed our adoptee friends what a typical father’s lifestyle might look like by taking them around my workplace, while my daughters showcased their hobbies. We danced, sang, and did artwork to give the adoptees an idea of what kids might do with their parents for fun in Korea. Additionally, my wife carefully prepared a home-cooked meal that brought joy to our mouths and eyes, making our time together as a family even warmer and more special. I believe all these memories have become precious for our adoptee friends who spent these enjoyable moments with us.

The host family experience has left a very positive impact on our family. My wife is still in contact with our adoptee friends. They check in with each other and share daily experiences, as if they are neighbors living near each other. My wife is very happy to have these special friends. Moreover, this experience has provided my children with an opportunity to clearly recognize that even though our adoptee friends use different languages, and have different clothing styles and cultures, they are Korean, just like us. At first, I could see the girls



Sharing a homemade meal together

being shy due to the language barrier, but they quickly became comfortable. One adoptee friend who visited our house asked me, “Do you really think of us as Korean?”.

I answered with certainty, “Yes!” because they were not different from us. Although they left Korean soil through painful past circumstances when they were little, the friends in front of me now were just like me, mothers and fathers of children, and individuals striving hard for their families. In my eyes, the pain in the

hearts of our adoptee friends had already healed. The new families they have created must have been the best treatment for their pain.

“Kwonsu’s Family” is getting ready to become a host family again. Fostering happiness within our family is our way of preparing for this experience. We eagerly anticipate the opportunity to meet adoptee friends who can share in creating new and cherished memories with us. You are always welcome here!



Taking a walk around the neighborhood



Visiting Kwonsu’s workplace



# Reunion of Three Generations

Megan Farmer, 2023 Mosaic Tour

It was the week of Thanksgiving in 2020. I'll never forget the email subject line: "Letter from your birth father." I couldn't hold back my tears reading his loving words on the translated pages. We spent the next two years introducing ourselves and our families through writing. We grew close to one another despite the thousands of miles and 30+ years that separated us. We promised to stay healthy through the pandemic with the hope of meeting someday.

Fall 2022 rolled around and a reunion seemed doable. But the more I thought about it, the more daunting it became. The language barrier alone made even the simplest plans seem impossible. Then I learned about Me & Korea. The timing was perfect. I applied and was accepted into the 2023 Mosaic Tour, and Minyoung quickly put things in motion for me.

The day arrived in May—I was going to meet my birth father. I had rehearsed my initial greeting: what I would say and how I would bow and show respect with proper hand placement. Yet all formalities disappeared in a blink, and we found ourselves hugging. We spent the next few hours

looking at each other through wet eyes, releasing emotions we'd held onto for 38 years. I had feared awkward silences and not knowing what to say, but instead found the quiet moments comforting. It all just made sense.

After the Mosaic Tour, my sister, husband, and our two children joined me in Korea. We traveled from Seoul to Busan where we planned to meet my birth father, his wife, and their two children (my half siblings). I didn't believe it would all come together, until it did. I was honored that my birth father's family not only acknowledged me but were also willing to meet me. We had lunch together and connected over soccer and food, exchanged birthdays, and even celebrated exciting news like my half-brother's upcoming wedding. Afterwards, my birth father's family returned home, and he took us



Showing birth father a photo album at the first meeting

sightseeing, shopping, and treated us to local street food. I was surprised how quickly and naturally the time passed. As the night wrapped up, I found myself sipping soju with my husband and birth father. We knew our goodbye was just until next time. And although some words were lost in translation, our feelings were not. My three weeks in Korea were transformative—as a daughter and mother, an adoptee, and a Korean. Thank you, Me & Korea, for this opportunity. Because of you, my life is fuller than ever.



Birth Father & his grandson



Birth Father & grandchildren



Birth Father, daughter, husband, and sister

## Two Sisters, No Longer Strangers

Jaeson Kim, Volunteer

In a bustling train station in Pohang, an older sister spots and embraces her younger sister who recently arrived from Seoul. There's nothing particularly odd about this scenario, and yet there is. Despite being siblings, the two had never met. The younger sister was adopted to the U.S. when she was only five months old. And in 2018, 34 years later, that sister, Naomi, realized she wanted to piece together lingering questions about her past, including finding her biological mother. Yet, as with many birth searches, there was no initial success.

The following year, a social worker reached out with the news that her biological sister had been located. Upon learning this, Naomi applied to join the upcoming Mosaic Tour, in hopes of meeting this sister in person. But like many other events, the 2020 tour was canceled due to the pandemic. In the ensuing years filled with shock, disappointment, joy, and apprehension, I met Naomi at what seemed like the finish line in



Jaeson, Naomi, and her sister

2022. At last, she would return to her hometown in Korea, where I would serve as an interpreter for the reunion with her biological sister.

I was only told that her sister would meet us at the train station as soon as we arrived. Seated beside Naomi on the train, I felt as unfamiliar with the surroundings as she was. The only difference was, she believed I knew more about what was going to happen. But she was mistaken.

When we got off the train and headed towards the exit, I pretended I knew where we were walking. Despite my confident demeanor, I was actually aimlessly surveying a homogeneous crowd, searching for a stranger. She recognized Naomi first. This stranger greeted us by asking in Korean if she was Naomi. I realized from the way the question was posed that she already knew the answer, and asking was merely a formality. She continued on, saying, "Her face, even with a mask on, looks just like our mom."

In my time with the two sisters, they shared laughs, tears, and stories big and small. They recounted and created memories. During those moments, I was reminded of the truth of the situation. This wasn't simply a relationship between two strangers; this was family. No matter the distance, the time spent apart, the hardships and the challenges, I hoped this was a bond that would endure—unyielding and everlasting.

### < Me and Korea Alumni News

**Dainen Penta, 2017:** Started a new job at a general practice law firm in Vancouver, WA

**Melissa Myers Gelwicks, 2022 B:** Promoted to Director of Program Management at work

**Jill Teagardin, 2022 B:** Moved to Northern California and started a new job as a Director for a Substance Use Disorder treatment center

**Carrie Shin, 2018:** Got married in 2023 and sent two kids off to college

**Mindi Wright, 2023:** Elected into Springville City Council and serving the city for the next 4 years

**Amy Winter, 2022 B:** Transitioned to a new position as the Executive Director of Educational Services for the South St. Paul School District

**Brook Mallak, 2022 A:** Appointed to the Minnesota State Bar Association Board of Governors & Ombudsperson Board for Asian Pacific Families

**Molly Sewell, 2015:** Celebrated a 17-year marriage anniversary

**Leah Parsons, 2022 A:** Started a new job teaching Social Emotional Resource at the high school level and am on track to finishing a second Masters degree in Technology Enhanced Teaching

**Emily Jones, 2018:**

Got married in July

**Michael Souza, 2022 A:**

Got married in September

**Kim Bouma Powell, 2022 A:**

Got engaged on Jeju Island in 2022

**Lisa Marks, 2022 A:** Got engaged to high school sweetheart and retired!

**Sarah Harris, 2018 Hapa:** Bought a home and started a new job at Loyola Marymount University

**Ashley Straight, 2022 A:** Moved to Michigan from California and son turned 1

**Minyoung, Kyutaeg, Soyoung, Jae:**

Suffering from empty nest syndrome :(



## ALUMNI TOUR

The Mosaic Alumni Friends & Family Tour was the first of its kind offered by Me & Korea. Participants could choose to attend a combination of the Gangwon-do Tour (June 5–7), Paju Tour (June 9), and Jeju-do Tour (June 11–14). With over 70 participants per tour, ranging from ages 4 to late 70s, the Alumni Tour brought together generations of Korean adoptees and their friends & family. Past tour alumni reconnected with their old groups, met new friends, and experienced new parts of Korea.



Jeju Island tour group



Bibimbap-making during the Gangwon tour

## Experiencing Korea With Omma

Laura Tonks, Alumni Tour Participant

I had the greatest privilege of being able to participate in the Alumni Friends and Family Tour this past June. It was beyond what I anticipated and blessed me in more ways than I could have imagined. Although I hadn't gone on a Mosaic Tour myself, I was able to join because of my brother, Brian Hall.

Brian went on the 2015 Mosaic Tour with the goal of searching for our family medical history. To everyone's surprise, on the last day of his tour, Minyoung and the Me & Korea staff located our birth mother. Brian stayed an additional three days in Korea so he could meet her in person.

After 40 years of separation, Brian came face-to-face with our Omma, and the extraordinary truth of our past. The story we'd been told all our lives—that our mother put us up for adoption because she couldn't take care of us after our father died—was inaccurate. The reality was that Omma had

traveled to Seoul from Busan to look for work, leaving the three of us with her older brother in Taegu. During that time, he decided it would be better for her and us if we were adopted to the U.S. So in 1975, he took us to White Lily Orphanage in Taegu, where he lied about Omma's whereabouts, allowing us to be adopted internationally.

My two younger brothers and I were quickly moved to Holt Adoption Agency, and within months, were sent to Michigan, adopted to our "forever family." Then in 2016, through divine circumstances, the three of us traveled to Korea to meet Omma in Busan. We also met several other members of our Korean family. Four years later, Omma came to the U.S. and spent three weeks with our family here, including three spouses and 10 grandchildren.

Three years after that, I was invited to the alumni trip and decided to come with Omma! I'm so thankful we were able to be a part of this trip, despite



Laura and her birth mother

not having prior connections. The group was very kind to both of us. It was so sweet for people to welcome her so warmly, even calling her their "Omma." She felt loved and we created more memories to add to our new relationship.

Special thanks to Minyoung for her foresight, passion, and dedication in planning the Alumni Friends and Family tour and bringing us all together.



# Alumni Tour



Showing thanks to tour volunteers



Chuncheon rail biking



Before boarding the plane from Jeju to Seoul!



Mother-daughter bonding on the Alumni Tour



Hiking at Ulsanbawi in Gangwon-do



Tour group at Jeju Ilchul Land



Making bibimbap together at Gangwon-do



A sunny day in Jeju



Tour alumni enjoying a foot spa at Jeju Ilchul Land



Tie-dyeing with Jeju indigenous dye







Attending concert with tour group



Enjoying delicious meals together



Playing games on the floor



Posing in Paju



Soaking up the sun!



Having fun at Jusangjeolli Cliff



2018 tour reunion at the Alumni Tour



Boat ride around Ilchulbong at Jeju Island



Handprinting at the Paju Omma Poom ceremony



Omma Poom visit



Hanging out at a Jeju bar



# The Intersection of My Past and Present

Peter Robinson, 2018 Mosaic Tour

My first return trip to Korea was during the 2018 Mosaic Tour. After another visit the following year and with a growing desire to experience life there, I moved to Seoul from New York City in August 2022. Ever since my first visit, I'd envisioned my family experiencing Korea with me, so when the Mosaic Alumni Tour was announced, it seemed like the perfect opportunity. I had been living in Seoul for about nine months, and while I had improved my Korean language skills quite a bit, it would have been an immense undertaking to fulfill the role of tour guide.

By joining the Alumni Tour, I eliminated the stress of having to plan activities, accommodations, and other logistics. Instead, I was able to enjoy the time with my parents and share a sense of what my new life in Korea was like. I was nervous about how my parents would cope with the language barrier, cultural differences, and unknown foods that were much spicier than they could handle. It turned out they did just fine by taking advantage of the abundance of convenience store ice cream and snacks everywhere we went. (On a



Peter with adoptive parents

more serious note, I do want to point out how Minyoung and the staff catered as much as possible to everyone's needs, dietary and otherwise.)

When I heard about the tour initially, I also expected it would be full of diverse experiences—enjoying beautiful landscapes, fascinating culture, and delicious food with the people of Korea. I was not disappointed. The tour was truly remarkable, with some personal favorites being the Gangchon Rail Park, our impromptu Ulsanbawi hike at Seoraksan, dyeing scarves in Jeju, the various markets we visited, and all of the breathtaking views along the coast and beaches of Gangwon-do and Jeju-do. It was also wonderful



Peter with his two moms

sharing new experiences in Korea with friends from my Mosaic Tour. Equally amazing was the chance to meet alumni from other tours and build new relationships in a place so meaningful to all of us.

During the course of the tour, my New York parents also met my Korean mom for the first time. Having my two worlds intersect felt overwhelming and exciting, yet it was also gratifying to see them express their appreciation for each other. Just as my first trip back to Korea with the Mosaic Tour gave me more than I could have ever expected or asked for, the Alumni Tour was just as special and I look forward to potential alumni tours in the future.

# Celebrating Our Children's Homeland

Rose Robinson, Peter's Mom

This past summer we had the opportunity to be included in the Me and Korea Alumni Tour. As parents of adult Korean adoptees, we can truly say this was an unforgettable trip. We were invited by our son Peter who has been living in Korea since the summer of 2022. Our trip took us to some amazing places, where the sightseeing, shared meals, and ceremonies allowed us to embrace the culture and history of Korea firsthand. We met so many wonderful people, too, including tour alumni and their friends and family.

We were also fortunate to meet Peter's birth mother, which brought with it an array of emotions and was an amazing experience on many levels. It gave us a true feeling of completeness and connection to his birth country and family. We want to thank Peter for including us on the tour. Visiting our children's birth country allowed us to create memories that will stay with us forever. And a great big thank you to the staff and sponsors for organizing such a wonderful experience!



Rose & her husband



## New Experiences With My New Family

Jennifer Schupp, 2015 Mosaic Tour

My first trip back to Korea as an adult was in May 2015, where I experienced the life changing magic of the Mosaic Tour: meeting best friends and learning more about Korea and its culture than I'd ever considered. Despite not knowing a single word of the language, other than a mangled pronunciation of "안녕하세요," I was enveloped into a country that inexplicably felt like home. The food, the faces, the sights, sounds, smells, and the people.

I didn't think I'd feel anything like that again. And then I went on this past year's Alumni Friends and Family tour. It wasn't identical of course, but it struck chords in my heart and soul for many of the same reasons. Not only was I older, I traveled with my partner, Maydon, and our 4½-year-old (that half year is very important, she'll tell you!) daughter, Zora. Maydon was born in the Caribbean and we'd taken Zora back to his home country twice.

Now it was her time (and his!) to visit my birth land.

As before, Korea didn't disappoint: enfolding us into the country and community, reconnecting with old friends and making new. As parents of a toddler, Maydon and I were concerned with the magnitude of this trip. Long flight, big time difference, and so much newness—a potential for sensory overload. Similar to my 2015 experience, but for a 4½ year-old with no real coping skills yet, it could be significantly more overwhelming.

But, she did great. A lot of credit goes to Zora (rolling with everything like a champ) yet so much gratitude goes to Minyoung Kim and the Me & Korea staff and fellow tour members. The group collectively engaged with, entertained, and truly welcomed Zora—and bestowed upon her the unofficial title of "tour mascot." That she was able to connect with her heritage in this way meant so much to



Jennifer, her partner Maydon, and her daughter Zora

Maydon and me, and helped us enjoy our trip more as well. She adored her time there and has requested to return several times. I have no doubt she will (hopefully with me!).

Once again, Me & Korea knocked it out of the park with a priceless experience. Their thoughtfulness, attention to detail, and sheer hard work ensured everyone got the trip they were looking for.

So many thanks to the team who helped make this happen and most of all, 김민영과 가족, 너무 감사해요.

## Sharing My Heritage With My Family

Kim Heikaus, 2022 Mosaic Tour B

My first trip back to Korea was in 2022 with the Mosaic Tour. When I heard that an Alumni Tour was being organized, I was still feeling the excitement from that trip and couldn't wait to return. I also thought it would be a perfect opportunity to visit Korea



At Omma Poom

with my husband and two kids. At 11- and 8-years-old, neither my daughter or son had traveled outside of the U.S. before, so being on a plane with them for 15.5 hours and traveling to the other side of the world felt scary to me. However, my worries were eased knowing there would be a great support system and an incredible itinerary planned for us.

We attended the Gangwondo and Paju Tours, where there were lots of family-oriented excursions planned, and my kids loved all of them.

My daughter said: "I liked the whole DMZ tour and thought it was cool. It was really interesting hearing about the DMZ and walking through the tunnel was fun." Likewise, my son also enjoyed that tour, saying of the Third Tunnel at the DMZ, "I liked walking down the tunnel. I had never done anything like that before."

Both kids also said they loved the bus rides because it was a fun time to talk, play games, and connect with others on the tour. By the end of the trip, my son announced he wanted to give tours in Korea when he grew up,

and my daughter decided when she got older, she would plan all the social activities outside of the tour excursions. One of the most meaningful times for me was visiting Omma Poom Park, where a special ceremony was held with beautiful singing and speeches to welcome us. Being at this very special

place dedicated to adoptees and their birth families helped my family gain a better understanding of what it means to be adopted and how important this trip was for me.

This tour throughout Korea with the support and love of my fellow Korean adoptees and my loving family, was

incredible and the perfect follow-up to my first trip. I hope there are many more Alumni Tours. My family and I would love to experience this again. We are so incredibly grateful to Me & Korea for the tremendous amount of work they put into helping us create these lifelong memories.

## Unexpected Joy and Fulfillment

Jamie Richardson, 2022 Mosaic Tour B

I never set out to find my biological family.

Adopted in 1986 at 5 months old, I always considered my life before adoption to be something of an eternal mystery. Each of my parents remembered contradictory details about what little the adoption agency had told them about my background, and that seemed like reason enough to assume I'd never get any definitive answers. Over the decades, I eventually came to peace with the rootlessness of my origins; some mysteries were never meant to be solved.

Fast-forward to some three months before I was to join the 2022 Mosaic Tour, when I received an entirely unexpected email proclaiming the following: 1) The adoption agency had much more information than they initially told my adoptive parents, 2) They had contacted my biological parents, and 3) They had informed my birth family of my impending visit, noting "They're excited to see you!" The email was accompanied by untranslated letters and a photo of a smiling family, with each member wearing what appeared to be different bits of my face.

My excitement about visiting Korea for the first time since my adoption



With my birth family

quickly turned to shock and anger. I had applied for the Mosaic Tour purely out of a desire to learn about my birth culture, inspired by my husband's connection to his parents' home country of India. I was in no way ready to meet biological relatives I wasn't looking for!

The only people more surprised about this development were my birth family: my biological parents, who called the orphanage six months after my adoption, only to be told that I'd died(!); and my elder brother and sister, who had never known of my existence, being only three- and two-years-old, respectively, when I was born.

I cannot imagine a more supportive context than the Mosaic Tour in which to visit Korea and meet my biological family. During that first visit,



With my husband during the alumni tour

my initial feelings transformed into fascination and gratitude: fascination with the culture—so confusingly foreign yet somehow deeply familiar—and gratitude for processing these complicated feelings alongside fellow adoptees. As the only person I knew of Asian descent for nearly my entire childhood, I never imagined I'd forge so many familial bonds, to my genetic relations, as well as the wider community of Korean adoptees.

This joy was only compounded in 2023, when thanks to the Mosaic Alumni Friends & Family Tour, I introduced my husband to both my birth country and my biological relatives. Together, after standing on the site where five generations of my ancestors are buried, we added one more family photo to what I hope will be a continuously growing collection.



# As I Wait for My Dear Friend, Eo-beo-beo...

Yongnam Lee, Local Volunteer & Sponsor

In every moment of life, the act of waiting brings excitement and hope. It is how I felt yesterday, and I'm sure I'll feel it all over again tomorrow. Each spring, I've turned this anticipation into a tradition, eagerly looking forward to the adoptees. This is all thanks to the U.S. nonprofit organization Me & Korea.

I am a documentary photographer recording the U.S. military camp town in Korea that has formed, along with the Korean War. The reason I started documenting the camp town is not only because I was born in one, but also because of my irreplaceable friend Eo-beo-beo, who one day suddenly left for his father's country. Eo Beo Beo's real name is Jang Maru. I learned it after he left. The name Jang Maru is derived from his mother's last name, Jang, and the name of our village, Jangmaru, according to my parents. People in the neighborhood called him Eo-beo-beo because of his habit of stuttering. Although he was one year older than me, we spent our days as close friends.



In front of photo studio



Welcoming adoptees to Paju

When I was young, an African-American child my age and his mother, Jang Gongju, rented a room in my house. The child's father, an American soldier, worked at a military base across the Imjin River and only came home on the weekends. The child—my friend Eo-beo-beo—was kicked out whenever his father came home. If he wasn't called home by sunset, he spent the night in my room.

One day, his father stopped coming home. It was 1964 and I was nine years old. Nearly every night, I heard Eo-beo-beo's drunk mother spitting curse words at him, making him cry. One day, I saw the cotton blankets of that room were stained red. Eo-beo-beo's mom was moved to a hospital and one day she left the hospital secretly. My friend stayed in my room and he waited for his father in front of the Imjin River bridge almost every day.

One day, in 1965, my friend told me he was leaving tomorrow for the United States to visit his father. He said that the next day, a lady who knew his father would pick him up. That night, we stayed up all night under the Imjin River bridge, throwing stones at marked numbers on the

bridge's columns. We stayed until the bridge's light disappeared. We made a promise, linking our pinky fingers, to write letters during his time in the US. Until now, after 60 years, my friend Jang Maru has not written a single letter. The day before my friend left for his father's country, under the dark bridge, he told me about his plans. "When I go to the US, I'll make my father make my face white. My mother told me the United States is a country where that is even possible..."

When the New Year comes, I wait for the arrival of adoptees who visit with Me & Korea. I can't help but hope to see my dear friend Eo-beo-beo who left for the US.. I observe even the fair-skinned adoptees attentively and sometimes approach them to see if they stutter. However, I haven't met any adoptees who stutter yet. In 2024, I still hope to meet my dear friend Eo-beo-beo. Every year, I eagerly await adoptees who visit their country with heartfelt anticipation.

*Translated by Sharon Lee*



# Drawn From the Heart

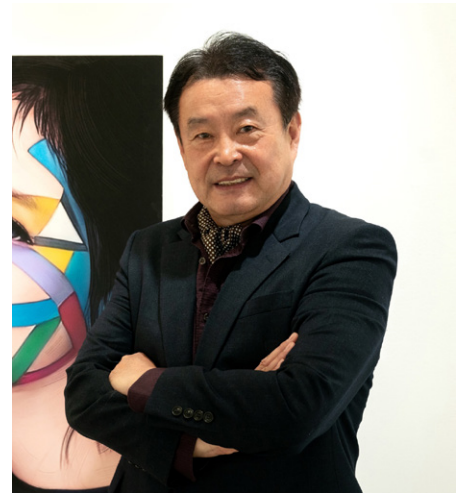
Daenyun Kim, Local Sponsor

My very first endeavor after retiring from public service—which I had devoted my entire life to—was creating illustrations and writing, and posting my work to social media. During the past five years in which I worked as a creative, my work for the 2023 Mosaic Tour with Me & Korea was the most meaningful to me. My task was to draw the faces of 26 overseas Korean adoptees as they currently look and at the time of their adoption. Capturing

their unique characteristics and feelings on canvas using only small reference photos was no easy feat.

It was also many adoptees' first time back to Korea after their adoption. Through my drawings, I wanted to convey my desire to embrace them warmly, making my creative process even more difficult.

However, this heavy burden soon transformed into joy. Sharing conversations with the people I had



Daenyun Kim

drawn in the photos became an experience of unity. As they shared the journey of their lives, I felt my heart—which supported their dreams of hope-filled futures—move, and sheet by sheet, the drawings were completed. Although my body grew tired as I stayed up night after night to work, my soul felt brighter. The day I spent with the overseas adoptees was short, but the powerful memories and feelings from then will always remain in my heart and constantly remind me of why I must exist in this world: I must continuously communicate with the world through warm drawings.

Even though a considerable time has passed, I still interact with them over social media. When I see the post titled 'Pictures drawn from the heart' on my Instagram account, I realize it was a good choice to become an artist who creates warm drawings.

Thank you photographer Yongnam Lee of the Field Photo Lab and Minyoung Kim of Me & Korea for giving me this precious experience. Also, I wish a happy life to those 26 overseas Koreans.

*Translated by Kara Lee*



Daenyun with 2023 tour members



Daenyun's illustration of 2023 tour members



# Feeding My Soul: One Korean Adoptee's Connection to Food in Korea

Kasya Willhite, 2023 Mosaic Tour

Have you ever had a gnawing in your stomach and a longing on your tongue for a flavor or texture you couldn't quite identify? Have you ever eaten, cooked, or baked something hoping to quiet the craving? And even after stuffing your belly with a variety of foods, knowing you are quite literally "full," still the hunger lingers?

This is what eating was like for me growing up in central Minnesota with third generation German American parents. Digesting countless meals made from family recipes, although not truly my family's recipes, nor foods that fed and nourished my soul.

Don't get me wrong, I have many fond memories of shared meals during my youth: freshly baked rolls from my grandma's oven at Christmas, a hot pan of my aunt's cheesy potatoes at Easter, canned chow mein with my mom on nights when my dad worked late. But looking back, I realize it was the people that filled my heart, not the

food. Happy though I was, the food sat heavy and dull in my stomach.

Contrasting those moments to the 12 days I spent eating my way through Korea on the 2023 Mosaic Tour, I am even more convinced of the power of ancestral nourishment. There is something special about eating food that sustains an entire culture and people, my people.

These recipes are in my DNA—DNA that my forebears have passed down to me. What they prepared in their kitchens is my connection to them through my blood and bones. My body recognized instantly the spices, sauces, fermentation methods, and flavors that I had just discovered. My cells knew this cuisine long before I did.

Food is used for so many purposes: to reward or punish, to drown sorrow or pain, to celebrate or mourn, to name a few. Being able to eat the food of my ancestors, in my homeland, to look up from a meal and see my features



Kasya sharing a meal with tour members

reflected back by new friends I now consider family, to make a meal with the people of Paju, to gather together around food and drink with community, my community, felt almost sacred.

For the first time in five decades, I felt sated day after day, meal after meal. My body hummed with each bite and my soul was happy. I felt connected. And when I need to feel that here in Minnesota, it is Korean food that I crave ... and of course, time with the 2023 Mosies, the Me & Korea staff, and Minyoung and her beautiful family!



# Understanding What it Feels to be Korean: Living in Korea

Jenna Antoniewicz, 2022 Mosaic Tour B

My family and I moved to Jeju-do the summer of 2023, almost a year to the day since I returned from the Mosaic Tour.

No one is more surprised than me. Two years ago, I never thought about being Korean. But because of preparing for and attending the Mosaic Tour, not only did this change, I also knew what to expect when my husband, two young children, and I arrived to begin our new lives. Most of all, I understood how it felt to be in Korea as an American, straddling the line somewhere between fitting in and not quite belonging.

I've begun to acclimate to several things that are "very Korean." I now wear a bucket hat and apply sunscreen to shield my face from the near-constant island light. My hair is always down; you won't find a "messy mom bun" anywhere in the country. I bow with a quick "Annyeonghaseyo!" when I see other parents at school. We've learned to live without boxed mac and cheese, to separate our

recycling into six different containers and our trash into two.

In 2022, I unexpectedly reunited with my appa, a sister, and all of my extended family. It's been surreal. We sit on the floor of my appa and his wife's kitchen, eating meals of fish, meat, rice, mandu, and so many varieties of pickled banchan. One day, my halmeoni asked for a brush and made a point to run it through my hair as we sat together. Never have I felt an expression of love quite like this one. When I am out with my girlfriends, we take turns treating each other to lattes. There is a genuine feeling of my children having 30 aunts watching out for them. Snacks are abundant. Picture-taking is the norm. And every day seems to be "children's day" here on the island.

When Koreans are *together*, they're together. You can feel the 정 (jeong). You're part of the greater community, and although there are moments I still feel incredibly American, I'm beginning to understand how it feels to be

Korean. The Korea I've experienced has been incredibly welcoming. It's full of warmth, service to others, and expressions of love. Korea is providing answers to questions I never knew I had about the world, my "self," and how I want my kids to be raised.

Of course, not every adoptee will have the same experience. It has its challenges. The language barrier often leaves me on the outside. We miss our family and friends in the States. And I am constantly balancing the joys of discovery and the sorrow of what's been lost over half a lifetime of not thinking about my roots. There's a sense of "catching up for lost time." I know my situation is unique. But I believe many of us share a similar array of mixed emotions as we prepare for or return from our tours.

I am Korean. I am an adoptee. I'm an American navigating the Korean language. I've reunited with my first family. I'm an expat living in Jeju-Do. And I wouldn't be here if not for Me & Korea.



Jenna and her father



Feeling Korean



Jenna and her family in Korea



# Paralleling My Existences

Carolyn Colman, Volunteer

Before 2015, I never really thought about what it meant to be Korean. I knew that I was Korean, but it meant something different to me than it does for most people. As I got older, I started studying Korean, and often, my language teacher's young son would sit in on my lessons and practice with me. I remember constantly comparing myself to him, wondering what was the point of learning the language if I was never going to use it.

To me, Korean was a language I spoke in my basement with my tutor and her son. It was what I heard small snippets of at the local Japanese restaurant run by a Korean family. To me, it was nothing more than the word after "half" and the beginning of a long and complicated back story.

Growing up, typical conversations would go like this:

*"But, what are you?"*

*"Half Asian and half white."*

*"Are you Japanese or Chinese?"*

*"I'm Korean."*

When I was younger, people didn't seem to know what Korea was (something that has obviously changed in recent years) and would



Carolyn during the Jeju Island Alumni Tour

ask me questions about its culture, questions I felt unqualified to answer. It felt like every time I met a new person, I was forced to share my life story.

In 2015, my mom, a Korean adoptee, reunited with her birth family, and suddenly Korean was the language I heard coming from my mom's phone, on video calls with her family. Consequently, I became more immersed, spending hours studying its language, consuming its media and food. I started feeling much more connected to the label of "Korean." I spent eight months in Korea during my gap year. During that time, I finally discovered the connection I felt was unreciprocated. People simply viewed me as a white foreigner. I was bombarded with the same questions:



Second generation Koreans on the Alumni Tour

"Do you have a Korean boyfriend?" "Do you like K-pop?" After learning of my "hidden Koreanness," questions shifted to, "Do you have an American father?" "Do you have family here?" "Why don't you speak Korean?" I also found myself the owner of a new label: "혼혈 (mixed race)."

I realized my existence in Korea paralleled my existence in the U.S.: I somehow owed every new encounter an explanation of my life, and by extension, my mom's. As I've continued exploring my relationship with the culture and what it means to be Korean, I often wonder how other half-Koreans feel. Are they also proud to be Korean and do they also feel Korea isn't as proud to be a part of them?

## Annual Ten for \$10 Fundraiser Is Successful Again!

The annual Ten for \$10 fundraising program was a great success for the 7th consecutive year! Since its inception, this fundraiser has been critical to support Me & Korea's existing programs and allows us to create new ways to support adoptees, their families, and related efforts.

In 2023, hundreds of people from around the world donated more than \$31,000, 104% of our goal! Due to this financial support, we'll be able to continue the annual Mosaic Tour, the online Korean language course, and Me & Korean, as well as expand the Wings gift program.

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who supported our fundraiser and shared our social media posts and emails with their friends and family. If you'd like to support Me & Korea at any time, e-mail [info@meandkorea.org](mailto:info@meandkorea.org)!

## Me & Korean

Me & Korean is a virtual Korean language course for Korean adoptees and their families. Since the fall of 2020, we have offered weekly lessons on Sundays in three different levels (soon to be four!) that include lectures, small-group breakout room practice with a bilingual volunteer, and one-on-one tutoring throughout the week. Wrapping up our seventh semester of Korean courses, we are proud to have worked with 270 participants and 70 bilingual volunteers. Registration for the spring 2024 semester is now open!

## The Gift of Language

**Paul K.**

"I am very impressed with the organization, planning, and implementation of the course. All the volunteers have been helpful and supportive. Presentations are offered in advance for review, and thoughtful feedback is provided if you submit the optional homework. It's been a great opportunity to learn more about Hangul and Korean culture."

**Miranda P.**

"I recently discovered Me and Korean language courses through a post in my Facebook KAD group after trying to learn Korean on my own for about two years. The registration was very simple and the communication from the staff is very professional and timely! I was between level 1 and 2 and quickly realized 2 was too fast-paced for me. Switching levels was so easy and I received an email and feedback with links, right away! Level 1 was just what I was looking for. From practicing my pronunciation skills, to the breakout rooms, to the office hours, to the variety of volunteers—high school students to adults—each with different voices and perspectives to share, has been invaluable. Everyone I have emailed or Zoomed with from Me and Korean has been so friendly, supportive, enthusiastic, and helpful! I'm so thankful for Me and Korean because it's filled in so many gaps from my self studies. I feel energized and excited about learning after each class. Being a busy mom myself, I know everyone's time is at a premium,

so special thanks to all who donate their time and expertise to help us on our quest to regain what we lost!"

**Annie E.**

"I love my Me & Korea language course! As a Korean adoptee, I've always wanted to learn the language to feel more connected to my culture but never knew where to start. Learning any language can be daunting but Eunice and all the volunteers have been helpful, insightful, and patient. I can't believe how much more comfortable I'm getting with the content after only a couple of months. I appreciate Me & Korea offering these courses; it has been a life changing experience."

**Jae C.**

"A fellow adoptee suggested I consider Me & Korea for learning the language of my birth country. Coming back from a visit to Korea only a month prior, I jumped into Levels II and III, thinking, 'It's sink or swim.' I was pleasantly surprised and impressed by the immediate practice and clarifications from the 1-on-1 breakout session after each lecture, along with the variety and skill levels of the volunteers. The weekly office hour option has been invaluable to tie up loose ends. No question is too basic or awkward to ask. Minyoung understands and is thoughtful with each explanation. I'm quite pleased to have taken this leap. 5+ stars for the Me & Korea team!"

**Kasey H.**

"This is my second semester of Me & Korean! I look forward to it each week.

There's something very comforting about learning with other adoptees, and I'm truly touched that so many volunteers are willing to help us learn. In addition to developing my language skills, it gives me a sense of connection to Korea I didn't realize I was missing."

**Becky K.**

"I went on the Mosaic Tour in 2015 and was stuck in a rut of repeating various beginner Korean language lessons on-and-off for more than five years. The Me & Korean course has helped me advance my Korean language skills, and learning alongside my fellow KADs has helped me stick with it. The volunteers also really set this program apart."

**Amy K.**

"I have found taking online classes from Me & Korean to be challenging, engaging, and fun. Minyoung takes care to prepare lessons, provide homework, and offer valuable office hours to help her students learn. The biggest advantage of these classes is the opportunity to practice speaking. The high school students are very sweet and accommodating to my needs. Their genuine desire to help me shows. I also enjoy the fast-paced nature of the class since it suits my competitive learning style. Because of the way these classes are conducted, I look forward to coming to class. As a Korean adoptee, I am grateful to attend these classes for free. It motivates me to keep learning Korean and become more fluent."



# ME & KOREAN

Want to learn Korean? Me & Korean is back with an **online Korean language course** tailored towards adoptees and families. In **Spring 2024**, we'll be offering four levels.



## \$30

per course  
registration fee\*

Classes are held **every Sunday on ZOOM**, through the following dates:

## Feb. 11 ~ May 5

12 total courses, with no class on April 14

Register at [meandkorea.org/learn-korean](https://meandkorea.org/learn-korean) by **1/17/24**

Email [christine@meandkorea.org](mailto:christine@meandkorea.org) with any questions!

\*The non-refundable one-time registration fee is to allow for our volunteer-run program to continue expanding while maintaining a quality learning experience. No additional textbook material is required. Includes weekly one on one tutoring for extra practice.

### Jenn C.

"I am so grateful for Me and Korean. I had been trying to find an appropriate Korean language class for my kids and myself for the past year. After investigating multiple books, YouTube videos, and classes, Me and Korean is by far the best fit. I appreciate the class structure, teaching methods, and practice it provides. Minyoung has taken the time to break down grammar in a straightforward and digestible way. I can't fully express how grateful I am for her and the volunteers who make these classes what they are, including lessons, breakout rooms, and office hours. Language has been a key piece separating my children and I from being part of the larger Korean community. As an adoptee, this program helps me take one more step towards connecting with my heritage."

### Louise W.

"The Me & Korean language course is by far the best one I have taken. It is

very structured and straightforward, which really facilitates understanding the Korean language. Also, the one-to-one practices have been extremely helpful and are unique. I am so grateful for Me & Korea offering this opportunity to learn Korean and found the course very valuable."

### Cindy M.

"Me & Korea has made a major impact on my life. The Level 1 Learn Korean class has changed my world. This summer my daughter was introduced to Me & Korea, and when she mentioned she would be learning Korean, I wanted to jump on board with her. I was so happy to see my daughter excited to learn more about her culture, language, and to really find out more about her Korean background. I am glad that I can be a part of my daughter's journey as well.

Though it has been a dream of mine to speak Korean for years through many websites, online tools, and

Korean dramas, I was not very successful or saw much progress. Here today, I feel empowered to push forth each week and dive deeper into my learning along with challenging myself to do better, and work hard. I have a long way to go, but I know each week will bring me a bit closer. Being inspired by my compassion to learn more of the Korean culture allowed me to take a step further at my school to introduce a Korean Pop Culture Club for our students to bring awareness of the Korean culture, traditions, and Pop culture that surrounds Korea.

So, thank you to those who make Me & Korea such an amazing resource for Korean adoptees and give them a chance to connect with their heritage, culture, and language through online classes and opportunities like the Mosaic Tours. As with a picture being taken, developed, and exposed, Me & Korea has become a Timeless Exposure for me."

## Mutual Learning: Volunteering with Me & Korean

### Chris Kim

“Throughout my two-year experience as a Me & Korean volunteer, I have grown both as a teacher and student. I still remember how nervous I was about talking, let alone teaching adults. I used to believe I was unqualified to teach, but it was my fellow volunteers, as well as the people I worked with in the breakout room sessions, who helped me break that misconception. Throughout the sessions, I’ve messed up multiple times, but it was the loving and caring people I worked with who always replied with a warm smile, giving me strength to pick myself up and continue onwards. Thanks to those who provided such a memorable experience, I was able to become capable of speaking thoroughly and teaching confidently. As someone who is part of the process of bridging the gap between two cultures, I am grateful for everyone’s effort in Me & Korean.”

### Erin Kim

“The sheer number of interactions I’ve had with people I wouldn’t normally see in my day-to-day life has improved my flexibility and belief in myself, as well as the opportunity to learn more about my culture. Adults always had an image of authority to me so when I began these classes, I was worried and concerned about leading breakout room sessions as a high school student. However, I soon realized speaking with confidence and reassurance gave them greater comfort, fueling their enthusiasm for learning their mother tongue without the barrier of an anxious teacher. Moving with the flow of each particular student was hard to keep up with at first, but with continued interaction and practice, I worked out my own rhythm to accommodate every person I worked with.

Beyond all these amazing lessons, I appreciated connecting to my culture on a deeper level. All the participants have such a strong desire to learn more about where they came from, an emotion I hadn’t felt before. The devotion they show to this program encourages me to appreciate the culture that surrounds me, one that I have taken for granted many times. Me & Korean has facilitated for me, as well as for so many other volunteers, personal advancement in our mother culture, while simultaneously exposing the beautiful nature of it to others who haven’t had the opportunity before.”

### Daniela Barajas-Lee

“It has always been an honor for me to be part of Korean adoptees’ journeys to connect to their birth country. I love hearing their unique stories and reasons for taking lessons with Me & Korea. Having worked with these determined and motivated individuals for years, I’m constantly inspired to always be the best version of myself. Volunteering with Me & Korean allowed



me to discover my passions for providing service to others. Meeting different people each week, I’ve learned to enjoy starting conversations with someone new and gained essential social and communication skills. Participating in this program and teaching others has also allowed me to appreciate and learn more about the complexity of the Korean language and culture, while gaining treasured memories and friendships.”



## Joyce Kang

“Throughout the past semester of Me and Korean, I learned about the power, beauty, and importance of language. It is a path to becoming more knowledgeable about a culture and discovering more about one’s identity. I was truly honored to be able to give Korean adoptees the experience of learning the language and exposing them to the culture as well. As I was teaching, I was asked new and interesting questions I hadn’t thought about before, helping me expand my knowledge even more. I’m fascinated by how simple yet expressive Korean is. Teaching adults was something I had never done before, and Zoom added to that new experience. I was extremely worried I wouldn’t be able to adjust and was unsure what kind of mannerisms or attitude I was supposed to have, but it was very enjoyable. I was able to look at certain topics differently and hear about opinions from a more mature point of view, which allowed me to diversify my own perspectives and think more creatively.”

## San Ko

“After teaching the Me and Korean classes last semester, I came to believe that language is one of the most important aspects of culture and identity. For these Korean adoptees, learning to read and speak Korean didn’t just mean learning a new language, it meant identifying and connecting with a part of themselves they may have struggled with for most of their lives. As an individual of any cultural affiliation, language can perhaps be described as the key to the gates, revealing everything beautiful and powerful the culture stands for. Watching these amazing people learn and push on with surprisingly fierce determination, I felt pride and respect for all of them.”

## Raeun Kim

“Being a part of the Me & Korean classes for the past years has been a precious experience. Hearing the stories of the adoptees and seeing their eagerness to learn more about their roots taught me to appreciate my culture and motivated me to educate myself more. Teaching Korean also improved my English fluency and made me a more approachable and outgoing person, which was very helpful in my personal life as well. For me, Me & Korean is not only about teaching a language, but also interacting with people from all around the country and the world.”

## Hamin Lee

“I always learn something new every semester in Me & Korean. The first semester, I learned about the backgrounds of adoptees and their personal histories. In the second semester, I learned about the larger adoptee community and more about the Mosaic Tours. In the third semester, I realized how much I grew individually and how dedicated I truly was to this program. Me & Korean became a habit to me; every Sunday I would do my best every session. It was a time of relaxation and a place where I received good energy outside of stressful high school life. Also, using my bilingual skills and the thought I was making an impact in adoptees’ journeys really helped my confidence. In addition, the Me & Korean community is so supportive and I love how the volunteers bond with one another.”

## Sungmin Kim

“I learned to better appreciate my connection to the Korean language as I explored it with different adoptees, and the privilege I have to have grown up with this as a Korean-American immigrant. I hope to keep sharing

this connection with other adoptees and learn more about their diverse backgrounds and aspirations in Korean culture.”

## Isleen Lee

“I learned that languages and culture are what connects people from various backgrounds. During the Me & Korean language classes, I was paired up with a different participant every week, and I could see how engaged and ready they were to practice speaking the language. I also thoroughly enjoyed giving feedback for the participants because I could see how it helped them clarify parts of pronunciations they were unsure about. In addition, I also found it very interesting to see how the participants’ understanding of Korean grew every week, but also, how my experience of teaching changed after each week as I thought of ways to make it easier for the participants to understand. One of my favorite parts of coming to volunteer every Sunday was getting to explain the culture lesson to the participants during the practice time if we had finished the material/slides. It was lovely to see all the volunteers, staff, and participants coming in unison to teach one another about Korean and our country’s heritage.”

## Clara Kye

“Being a volunteer for Me & Korean has not only allowed me to dedicate my time to spread the roots of my culture to other Koreans and contribute in helping them reignite their spark with their Korean identity, but it has also been a way for me to form connections with the participants and see how much they’ve grown over the past few months. Me & Korean has been an activity that I found much pride in doing, and I am excited to continue next year!”

## ◀ Upcoming Me & Korea Conference: “Korean Adoption and Its Global Legacies: 70 Years and Beyond”

### April 13-14, 2024: Conference Programming at Northwestern University

#### Friday, April 12 Evening: Me & Korea Alumni Gathering Dinner

Me & Korea is excited to announce that we will be co-sponsoring a conference with Mu Films and Northwestern University entitled, “Korean Adoption and Its Global Legacies: 70 Years and Beyond,” which will be held at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, on April 13–14, 2024.

The conference is in honor of Dr. Sue-Je Lee Gage and will look at Korean adoption over the past 70 years since its inception after the Korean War, bringing scholars, adoptees, and birth families together to discuss the origins of Korean adoption and its impact on families and individuals, including discussion of birth family search and reunion.

Me & Korea is currently finalizing the details of the conference and plans to open registration in January 2024. The conference will be free to register, with attendees given the option to purchase lunch and dinner in advance. We hope to see many tour alumni at the conference!

### Board of Directors

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## ◀ Upcoming Mosaic Alumni & Friends Tours

Me & Korea is excited to announce two upcoming Alumni & Friends Tours. Please see below for information and more details will be available soon.

- Fall 2024: Southern parts of Korea
- Summer 2025: Jeju Island & more



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