

INFUSION

Volume 16



Infusion

Volume 16

Infusion aims to capture the diversity of the Fulbright Korea experience by publishing work from Fulbright Korea Senior Scholars, Junior Researchers, English Teaching Assistants, and program alumni. We support artists in the creation of work which honestly engages with their grant year and their craft. The Fulbright Program aims to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries through cultural and educational exchanges.

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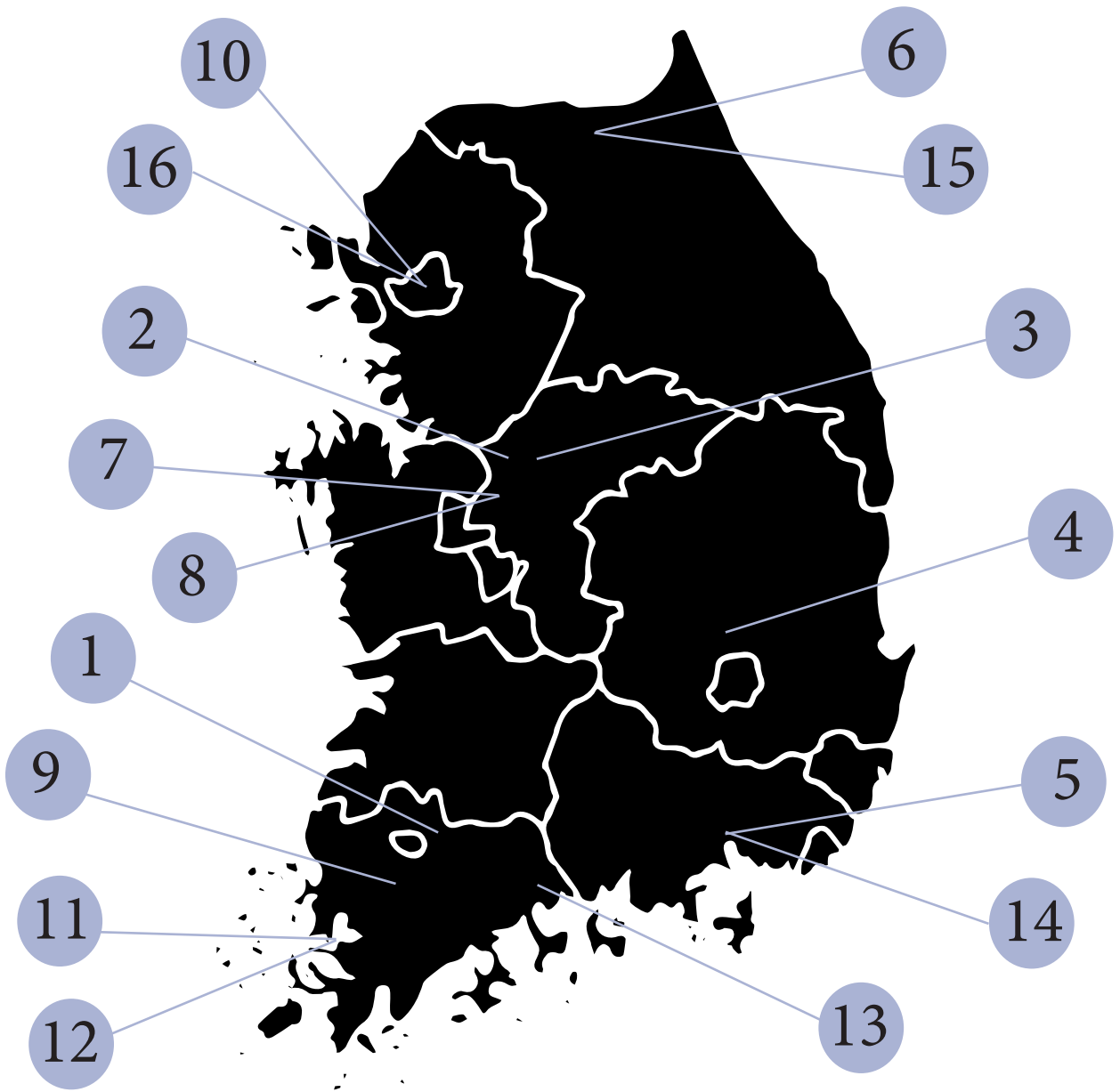
At the End of the Road, Tori Thiem, Busan, Gyeongsangnam-do

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Letter from the Director

Welcome to *Infusion* Volume 16! Each year at Fulbright Korea brings fresh opportunities to build, connect, and create change as new cohorts of dedicated students, scholars, artists, and professionals participate in the sharing of knowledge across communities as Fulbrighters. Crossing the Pacific in both directions, Fulbrighters serve as cultural ambassadors for their respective countries, garnering invaluable experiences and memories that will last a lifetime.

Significant to educational and cultural exchange in 2023 have been changes to some of Fulbright Korea's programs as opportunities continue to reopen post-pandemic. The relaunch of the American Studies Program for English educators from Korea expands impact on Korean K-12 students through the synergy created between programming for such English educators and their American English Teaching Assistant (ETA) counterparts. You will find images and stories from ETAs and their students throughout this volume of *Infusion*.

The newly launched U.S.-Korea Presidential STEM Initiative also marks a fresh level of growth in exchange. Expected to support 200 Fulbrighters in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, this initiative marks the largest number of grantees selected for STEM in the global history of Fulbright.

As we reflect on the future, we are grateful to the many Fulbright grantees, past, present, and still to come, who contribute to the discovery of commonalities, building of mutual understanding, and development of a greater global community. We are also grateful to the dedicated *Infusion* staff for the time and effort invested in bringing this current volume to successful publication and to the many authors and artists who contributed their talented work to it. We hope you will enjoy increasing perspective as you read the snapshots of experience presented through the pages of *Infusion* Volume 16.

Kind Regards,
Dr. Byungok Kwon
Executive Director
Korean-American Educational Commission



Letter from the Embassy

Congratulations on the publication of the 16th volume of *Infusion*!

It has been one year since I arrived in the Republic of Korea and have had the honor to join the Fulbright Korea community through my role as Chair of the Korean-American Educational Commission. Over the past year, I have been fortunate to witness tremendous developments in the relationship between the United States and Korea. This year, we celebrate the 70th anniversary of our Alliance, and what was once primarily a military relationship has been transformed into today's truly comprehensive global partnership. U.S. President Biden put it well when he said that "the alliance formed in war has flourished in peace."

For the past 70 years, people-to-people exchanges have been the cornerstone for the advancement of our relationship, as more than 7,000 Korean and American Fulbright alumni have played a key role in building bridges between the two countries. During President Yoon Suk-yeol's State Visit to the United States earlier this year, the leaders of our two countries agreed on the New Educational Exchange Initiative to further deepen our people-to-people ties and educational cooperation for future generations in the fields of humanities and social sciences, as well as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The multi-year, \$60 million educational exchange program includes the largest-ever Fulbright graduate program focused on STEM research. I am confident that this program will further advance Fulbright's role in making our relationship closer and more vibrant.

I hope that all of you will continue to advance your education and careers and promote our countries' close ties.

Robert Post
Minister-Counselor for Public Diplomacy
Embassy of the United States of America
Chair, Korean-American Educational Commission



Letter from the Editor

We were optimistic.

With glittering eyes, we embarked on our 2023 Fulbright grant year with ambitious goals. A fervor surged through us as we rushed to build connections in our placements. The local cafe became our favorite. New friends and neighbors quickly became our family. The students and school community became our joy. As our grant year comes to a close, these memories will be the most precious to us. In conjunction with the joys of living abroad, we also overcame challenges as we tried to acclimate to this new environment called South Korea.

Mirroring our encounters, both familiar and unfamiliar, this volume is structured into different chapters that represent the phases of culture shock one experiences when moving to a new country. Guiding us through this journey is our search for belonging.

Our volume opens with the chapter “New Home” as grantees are forced to reconcile with their new environment. Leah Yan Doherty’s “River Child” beautifully illustrates the merging of her background as a Chinese adoptee with her life in Korea. Brittany Scardigno also highlights this boundary of familiar and unfamiliar through contrasting acts of physical touch between her host mother and real mother. As Doherty and Scardigno discuss the collision between identity and host family interactions, they bring a whirlwind of emotions and memories as they search for a true meaning of belonging.

Once faced with these new possibilities, we move onto “The Honeymoon Phase.” Here, things are new and thrilling. Each interaction creates a burning memory. A fever dream. Martha “Cati” Pudner’s “Mangoes” captures this feeling exactly as she details an encounter with a mango seller in the countryside. Then, Isa Koreniuk’s *Connections through Coffee* shines a light on a special part of Korean culture: cafes and coffee. The chapter ends with two art collections, both memorializing different facets of the ETAs’ precious memories. Noé Toroczka’s *Landscape Reflections* depicts her travels in Korea through scenic digital paintings, and Elisabeth “Suds” Sudbey’s *When Words Are Not Enough* illustrates her experiences in her new placement city through a collection of frames.

However, the next chapter brings us to a pivotal change as “Reality Sets In.” Ky Pontious’ *At Summer’s End* brings us through a whirlwind of emotions as the seasons change. With such change, there often comes turmoil. Iris Hyun-A Kim’s *Between Belonging* and *Sunday BEEF* illustrate her conflict of identities throughout her grant year, while Brittany Scardigno’s *Twenty-One Twenty* tackles feelings of frustration when forgetting the code to her digital keypad.

Finally, we arrive at the last phase of culture shock: “Adaptation.” In this chapter, we see reflection on multiple aspects of our lives in this new environment. Maggie Backus kicks off this new phase with *Defining Moments*, portraying her local community and exploring the true meaning of “friend.” Then, William Landers travels through key points of his life in Korea with *Vignettes from the Metro*. Grace Moon Meharg’s poem “할머니” depicts learning about the generations of women in her family by living in their birthplace. We close this chapter of our journey with Kat Ray’s *the goldfish and a great lake*, an allegory about self-growth and self-care in a foreign environment.

Just before the reader finishes, you will notice the student contest placed at the very end, as if to signify us succumbing to a type of “Peace” with our journey. As you read the selected student entries, we hope it brings you a kind of peace as well.

Sprinkled throughout all these chapters are photos taken by our cohort. You will notice that every single photo is taken in Korea, immortalizing time in a photograph. This brings us to this year’s theme: Snapshots of Belonging. As we progressed through our grant year, we all searched to reconcile our identities with this new experience. We sought warmth and comfort by delving deep into specific memories and asking ourselves what it truly means to belong in a community. As you read, I encourage you to take part in this experience with us — to imagine yourself living in these snapshots of our memories riding the waves of emotions that come.

I am incredibly fortunate to have overseen this volume as Editor-in-Chief. This work would not have been possible if it was not for the dedication of our staff, writers, photographers, and Publishing Coordinator, Heidi Little, who tirelessly worked towards our goal of sharing the Fulbright experience. Additionally, we are grateful to the United States Embassy and the Korean-American Educational Commission for their continued support of our magazine.

It is with great pleasure I welcome you into the world of Fulbright *Infusion* Volume 16. I hope you enjoy looking into these snapshots of our lives.

Francesca Duong
Editor-in-Chief
1st Year ETA, Changpyeong, Jeollanam-do



Chapter 1: New Home



The River at Night
Tori Thiem
Seoul

River Child

By Leah Yan Doherty

I

They say I floated softly
down the Yangtze, a ripple-like shimmer
into their outstretched arms—
“our little river child”

Tears, freshly plucked
from the deepened crease
of patient smiles, crinkled around the edges
tasting of hope and roasted coffee.

At night
I would listen to tales
of shape-shifting monkey kings
and Chinese cinderellas

“... a bright child and lovely too,
with skin as smooth as ivory and
dark pools for eyes,”¹ she only had one friend,
a magical carp 魚 with golden scales.²

then, as always, came gentle sleep

Stories of my birthplace started and ended
with long-winded lectures on ancient calligraphy
and portraits of gray-bearded emperors
sitting behind mighty walls of stone.

To this faraway land, I was a stranger

¹ Quoted from *Yeh-Shen* by Ai-Ling Louie.

² In traditional Chinese culture, a fish represents wealth and prosperity because the Mandarin word for “fish,” *yú* 魚, is so close to the word for “abundance,” *yù* 裕.



II

We came from various orphanages
but an invisible string tied our lives together
like a red ribbon of fate, trailing after us
as dutifully as a kite

"Am I pretty?" asked one of my sisters³
as she pursed her faintly cracked lips and
lifted silver-studded brows—*don't tell my mom please*—
to a green mirror, covered in rust.

She widened those almond eyes
which reflected back
a set of canoes
looking for land to accept it

"beautiful," I thought.

Then she hushed me,
took me suddenly by the hand
and we started running
barely swallowing our grins

up, up, up.

Perhaps it is how memories paint the walls
like intricate murals of wildflower
and laughter stains the ceiling,
or perhaps it's something more?

How effortless it is,
my heart replies
to remember those days

³ My "China group" friend and fellow adoptee, one of twenty girls adopted from China's Jiangxi Province in 1997. She and the other girls became my real sisters, in every sense of the word.

III

I look just like them

Inside emanated sweetness and gochujang⁴
as I made my way through a small door
stepping over strands of leftover hair, black like mine,
strewn across the marble floor.

There sat a group of people, multiple generations
a middle grandson whose jelly-filled cheeks
duplicated in form down the wooden table
“Ohhh 맵다,” he sighed⁵

Outside my ears picked up
a gentle pattering of tiny feet on pavement,
and the lingering exhale of lush green peaks
calming a school of restless trout.

If you listen carefully
to the 북한강 river,⁶ a midnight shade of blue
you might be able to hear its twinkling
between the mountains' heartbeat

“From Korea?” my host aunt asked, mid-chew
My cheeks flushed a deep pink
as the few Korean words I knew took flight
like a couple of traitorous birds.

Looking down at the golden dust
which painted my piano-curved fingers
the way BHC chicken does, salty and sweet
I managed to sputter “중국제 미국인.”⁷

⁴ *Gochujang* (고추장) is a thick red chili paste often paired with Korean BBQ; a popular condiment in Korean cooking.

⁵ “Spicy” or “how spicy,” a common exclamation at meals.

⁶ In Hwacheon, surrounded by Ilsan, Byeongpungsan, Maebongsan, and Duryu, the *Bukhangang* River (북한강) flows southwest of the county.

⁷ “Chinese American.”



IV

Forever a river child

To this day, my head still spins
whenever I catch glimpses of her
an 'olive skin' girl with high cheekbones and
matted hair from one too many dye jobs

Did she have other brothers and sisters
whose likeness was brought up,
like clockwork, over a charcoal pot
of simmering broth?

It hurtled me back, her rattling cough
from years of trekking in fine dust
to tend to the soil and pick ripe mountain berries
I looked at my host mom in wonder

is this what it's like?

It started as severance,
severance from my birth mother's coos,
the pleas of Mandarin speakers on the subway, “你会说中文吗?”⁸
and secret talks between the Yangtze and its rolling peaks.

As painful as it was
I felt grateful for my imagination then
and in that fleeting moment, pictured myself
at a table several lives away...

their lovely river child.

From there, the smoky gray sky did
what I had wanted to do but couldn't
it started to pour

⁸“Can you speak Chinese?”

Motherhood

By Brittany Scardigno

My host mother always touches my hair. She looks at my face, brings half of my hair to the front, and fixes the curls with her fingers. Her fingers twist the strands and they coil into singular, smooth curls. She plucks any loose hairs hanging from my clothing and places them on a roll of tape she keeps on the counter to not dirty the floor. My host mother also prepares food and fixes it on my plate before feeding herself. She holds the food up to my adult lips and feeds me. Every night at dinner she tells me “더 먹어”¹ and “많이 먹어.”² Additionally, she frequently touches my hands, my arms, my face, and my hair. She fixes my clothing and straightens up my appearance.

The way a mother touches and grooms her child is something I had never realized I lost. It never occurred to me that I no longer had this. I felt foolish as a grown woman to feel the want to be groomed by a mother like a newborn pup.

The fluidity of what it means to be a mother is much more complex than what I thought before

arriving in Korea and meeting my host mother. I realize my own mother’s love is primarily shown through acts of service rather than physical touch. The way we love is different; it is not that I feel a lack of love from my own mother, but there was an absence of physical affection through neither fault of our own. The curls on our heads resemble one another, although mine are a bit tighter. Tears would silently roll down my round cheeks when she would brush it. Neither of us knew back then that you are not supposed to brush curly hair. The cold, metal pins of the large bows she would place on top of my head would scratch my scalp and give me headaches. This was when my mother still had time to touch me.

It makes me wonder if this is one of the bigger cultural differences, or if this is simply how my single-parent household needed to be. My mother taught me how to protect and nurture myself when she could not physically be there. Perhaps there was no more time for her to fix my curls, hold food up to my lips, or straighten the neckline

¹ “Eat more.”

² “Eat a lot.”



Autumn Foliage
Wendy Owens
Damyang, Jeollanam-do

of my shirt, so she taught me how to do those things on my own.

However, in Korea, I witness mothers show love so differently from my own mother at home. I feel an embarrassing tinge of jealousy when I watch a child's eager hand reach for their mother's as they walk downtown, and the mother's hand is equally as eager to clasp their child's. I watch with wide eyes as a mother and daughter exit a hair salon, the mother's hand resting on top of her daughter's freshly washed head before she helps her climb into the backseat of their car. From a distance, I observe how my host mother and my host sister — her real daughter — interact. Sometimes I try, unsuccessfully, to remember the very last time my mother brushed my hair.

After months of questioning what a mother's love looks like, a pattern started to reveal itself. I found understanding that whether it is through physical touch or acts of service, a mother's love is shown through their hands.

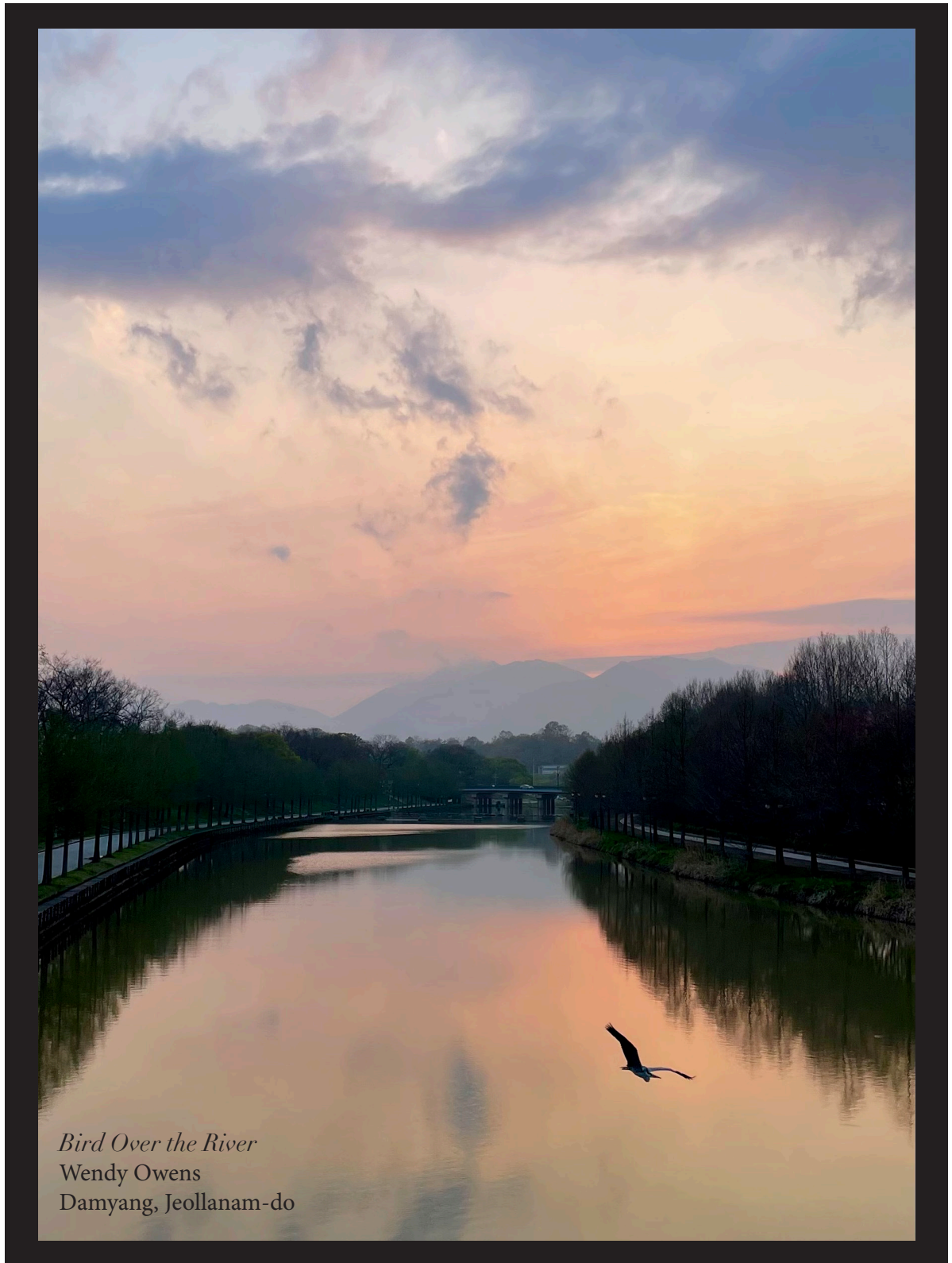
It is shown through the hands whose fingers weave through the knots in your hair, hands that wipe the crumbs from your lips, hands that lift your arms to clothe you with fabrics that do not irritate your skin, hands that remove the heavy bags from your back, and hands that hold yours as she clips your infant fingernails.

Love is also shown through the hands that form carpal tunnel from years of typing at work, making her left ring finger so numb that it turns purple; hands that learn how to write "happy birthday" in a new language. They are the same hands that picked up dust from the nursery floor as they crawled quietly beside your crib to not wake you.

While the love shown through some mothers' hands may be more visible, much of their work goes unnoticed. The invisible acts of love are not seen or felt by the child, but nevertheless, the mother's hands still do the work. It took me having two mothers to recognize invisible acts of love are no different, nor less worthy, than visible touch.



Chapter 2: Honeymoon



Bird Over the River
Wendy Owens
Damyang, Jeollanam-do

Mangoes

By Martha "Cati" Pudner

Wrinkled fingers shakily slicing,
Flies swarming the samples,
Blotches of angled sun streaming between the leaves.
There was a sign but no soul around to read it.

My hands came up empty
But it was already sliced, and handing it over
He swatted me away,
And him and his flies slid back into the rhythm of the trees.



Flower
Tansica Sunkamaneevongse
Sancheong, Gyeongsangnam-do

Connections through Coffee

By Isa Koreniuk

As one of the many, many avid coffee drinkers living in Korea, I often find myself in the following scenario: I walk into a trendy, inviting cafe and today's Brazilian roast fills my nose as I search for the comfiest seats with the most aesthetic background. Is the chair with the window view better? Or the sofa next to the painting? Ultimately, I choose the *window view*, even though I will be next to the *only* other people in the cafe. It is worth it for the Instagram story.

Eager to get my caffeine fix, I stroll over to the menu and see the same handful of drinks I could get at any other cafe. Although I understand the comfort of familiar flavors, I am always on the hunt for a new, interesting espresso like a maple brown sugar latte or perhaps even a lavender oat milk latte. As a recent graduate, I grew accustomed to the plethora of independent coffee shops in my college town.

Local, small business cafes in the US are home to coffee experimentation and offer a variety of flavors, syrups, and roasts. In Korea, iced americanos, vanilla lattes, and caramel macchiatos dominate the market. Yes — Ediya, The Venti, Starbucks, and other chains have rotating seasonal flavors. They are good! However, these pale in comparison to the options back home. Since I would be without unique-flavored coffee for almost a year, I decided to take matters into my own hands.

In 2020, mainly due to the pandemic, I learned how to make my own coffee syrups and bought an espresso machine. I learned to make pumpkin spice syrup, almond syrup, cinnamon syrup, sugar cookie syrup, and my fridge was always stocked with my favorites: brown sugar syrup and lavender syrup. Unlike other sweeteners, syrups are special in that they give off the illusion of being quite sophisticated and time-consuming to

make when they are really the opposite! Regardless of where I am in the world, mentioning that I make my own lavender syrup earns impressed “ooooos” and “aaaaaahs.” It is an ego boost, though I know I am lying by omission. In reality, the hardest part of the process is pouring the syrup into a jar without making the entire counter sticky. (A funnel would be a lifesaver — maybe one day I will save up and make the 4,000 won investment in one.)

My recipe has three ingredients. Yes, you read that right, three. In fact, most syrups have less than five ingredients and all start with the same base: sugar and water. Plain tap water is fine and everyday white sugar is standard. The fun starts with our final ingredient: any kind of food-grade lavender. Here in Korea, I ended up buying lavender tea bags off of Coupang, but loose-leaf lavender is preferable to use. There is no precise ratio, and you can add more or less lavender buds depending on your taste.



Paint, Aditi Kiron, Seoul

Ingredients

1 cup of white sugar
1 cup of water
2-3 tablespoons of lavender buds OR
2 bags of lavender tea

Directions

Step 1: Combine the water, sugar, and lavender in a small pot over medium-high heat
Step 2: Simmer and stir until all the sugar is dissolved
Step 3: Remove from the heat and let the mixture steep for about 30 minutes
Step 4: Remove the tea bags and pour into your jar OR strain the syrup into your jar
Step 5: Store in the fridge



Storage and Usage Tips

Storing the syrup is a beast of its own, though. Picture this: you have five minutes to get to school. You have made a decadent iced oat milk latte in your to-go cup. The final step is sweetening it with a spoonful of lavender syrup. Yet, you can not get the jar open because the syrup crystallized around the lid. You muscle it open but not before accidentally pouring half the contents onto your floor, your counter, your pants, and yes — your favorite leather boots... all because it was easier to buy a wide-mouthed jar instead of a swing-top bottle *and* a funnel.

So, let me impart this wisdom onto you: store the syrup in a glass jar — preferably one that does not twist open. If you have any empty pasta sauce jars lying around that are dying to be repurposed, then use those. Just be sure to wipe the top before closing it after each use unless you want to be frantically changing your outfit and scrubbing your floors before work.

Now that the syrup is made, what can you do with it? Ordered an Americano but it is a bit bitter? *Boom. Lavender syrup.* CU coffee tasting bland? *Boom. Lavender syrup.* Missing fancy flavored cocktails from home? *Boom. Lavender syrup.* Lavender works well in just about everything, but I do find it complements coffee the best.



COFFEE
TO GO



After Work
Tori Thiem
Changwon, Gyeongsangnam-do

How Coffee Creates Community

Coffee and syrups have a unique way of bringing people together, whether it be acquaintances, work colleagues, or close friends. During orientation with heavy eyes and tired smiles, English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) waited for the elevator — often debating if walking the eight floors to get a morning coffee would be quicker. I made small talk with my fellow coffee drinkers in the E-mart, sampling all of the pre-packaged cups of coffee because the nearest cafe was way too far from Jungwon University's campus. As we sipped our drinks and gobbled up our snacks, we talked about our parents' jobs, the differences between Standard Korean and the Jeju dialect, Tuesday's schedule, and everything in between.

After orientation ended, I headed to my placement city, Gumi, to start my new adventure. After lunch, I was trying to find a way to kill the extra 40 minutes I had since everyone here scarfed their meals down in five. I kept awkwardly roaming the halls during my first few weeks until one afternoon, I stumbled into the teachers' office next to my classroom, curious about what the other teachers might be doing. To my surprise and delight, I was greeted with smiles, questions about my hair — no, it is *not* a perm — and I was shown how to make Korean mix-coffee. Drinking coffee together in the office turned into walking to get coffee together after lunch. Then two people became three, and three became four. The conversations sway between English and Korean, but they always recap what I might have missed in Korean. Some days we are busy, and many times it is just me and the Korean language teacher. Regardless of how many people join, I always look forward to those 40 minutes, now confidently striding into the teachers' office.

Outside of school, I roam the streets of Gumi talking with fellow ETAs. We commiserate about our newfound “Gumi gal” life. We explore cafes together, passing around our different drinks, asking, “Do you care if I use the straw?” as if we had not used it every other time and ranking whose drink is best. Then, when friends come to visit, I share our special spots and recommendations. Across Korea, in Yeongju, Pohang, Seoul, Busan, and even rural Cheorwon, we always make plans to visit cute, local cafes. One of my favorites happens to be in Gumi, a 10-minute walk from my apartment to be exact, so I always take newcomers there. Nothing quite compares to that feeling of walking through the town with my friends in tow, following the curves of the street as buildings turn into farmland. I memorized this walk within the first few weeks and, just as it always does, the bright white cafe pops into view. The owner greets us with a smile and patiently listens as I stumble over the Korean pronunciation of americano, vanilla latte, caramel macchiato, or mocha. I check if my favorite seats by the window are open — they are! We plop down and start detailing the recent highlights from our lives.

These are the moments that make life such a joy. The great moments of life *are* the small moments, not to say weekend trips to Seoul and summers in Japan are not wonderful. Yet, finding the beauty in mundane routines makes life a bit brighter. The short hellos from students in the halls, the FaceTime calls from near and far, and, of course, the conversations over coffee at your favorite cafe.

Landscape Reflections

By Noé Toroczka



Autumn in Bulguksa



Flora Garden

These paintings came from meditative moments in my travels within Korea where I was captivated by my surroundings and existed solely in the present. No thoughts, only an overwhelming sensation of warmth and connection to my environment.

Snapping a picture during these moments does not do enough to convey the sense of inner peace and veneration for the surrounding nature that I experienced.



Field of Comfort

Going through the labor-intensive process of creating these paintings allowed me to get to know the environment on an intimate level. Painting is a way that I can show my utmost respect to these places, by spending countless hours getting to know every stone, leaf, branch, and flower that shared those moments with me. My hope is that these paintings provide an opportunity for the viewer to join me in appreciating the beauty of Korea's natural landscapes.

When Words Are Not Enough

By Elisabeth "Suds" Sudbey

This collection features moments spent with people that comprise my placement community, Andong. These six memories remind me of my journey towards improving my Korean language skills.

As a Korean adoptee, I grew up speaking English not Korean, celebrating Thanksgiving instead of Chuseok, and eating chicken fingers rather than tteokbokki. It is through the people I have met in Andong that I have been able to improve my Korean, a goal of mine since the beginning of this year. It is through language that I have been able to befriend local mart workers, ask a teacher about their trip to Mongolia over summer vacation, and insist on paying for coffee after someone bought me dinner. This is one of many six-panel pieces that I have created while living in Korea that represent the connections I have made. Similar to how we reminisce while looking at photos, when I see these drawings I am immediately drawn back to the memories from that day. Each one represents a different person who showed me great kindness and helped me improve my Korean speaking skills in those first few months living alone in Andong. When words were not enough, I illustrated the beauty of being back in my home country and the emotions evoked from it.



Left to right: Enjoying samgyeopsal at my first hoesik (dinner with coworkers); taking a break during a post-lunch walk with the gwahak seonsaengnim (science teacher); exploring the downtown stores and sijang (traditional market); passing the iconic Andong bus mascot on the way to the mart; sightseeing at Bongjeongsa, a Buddhist temple visited by Queen Elizabeth; and sharing kimbap on a bench before a hike at Dosan Seowon, a 16th century Confucian academy.

Chapter 3: Reality Sets In



Walking in the Sky
Tori Thiem
Pohang, Gyeongsangbuk-do

At Summer's End

By Ky Pontious

In Florida, the year passes in a humid haze. We eagerly look forward to and then reminisce about the handful of chilly days in an endless cycle. Everything is green. It is hot. We sweat. We blast the air in the car to cool our leather seats. We cover our eyes and squint against the sun as we lumber into the store. Then, hurrying back with our groceries, we try to outpace the beads of sweat perched on our temples. Our routines are as steadfast as the summer surrounding us.

In one unendingly vibrant season, a year can blend into two or three, slipping away. Unrooted, I forget to observe, drifting past opportunities to make landmarks in time and memory. As I circle the sun again and again, I have found that the most dismissible and cliché refrain is true: each year passes faster than the last.

This realization sits on my shoulders like a yoke.

And with the start of a new year, I find myself blown across the planet. My arrival to Punggi is frigid; the silent landscape a mystery that feels tightly closed against me. But as I move through it, I notice that I have traded crows for magpies. I look down and there are no small lizards skittering across the sidewalk, no squirrels scrambling up every tree. The howling winter wind pierces my coat with a determination I have never felt before.

Having been steeped in shades of green my entire life, the cold gray seems to linger. But as the ice eventually recedes, a new visitor arrives, bringing color. It is spattered here and there in the distance, then suddenly it is everywhere. Cherry blossoms line the roads and their petals collect in the gutters like snow. They turn familiar trees into strangers. Then, as abruptly as they appeared, they vanish. I wonder if I will remember the distinct sound of those bloom-laden boughs swaying in the wind. Their transience is a reminder that each experience has a first and last, with the timing of the latter almost always a mystery. Will I be here to greet them again next year?



Surrounded by spring, that lingering cold suddenly seems like a memory from long ago. I feel a new responsibility to keep every observation close. If I am to be under this yoke, heaving my memories through the years, I want my burden to be a heavy one.

This responsibility is bittersweet. In the open tranquility of the countryside, I find not an absence, but a bounty. I begin cataloging the plants, insects, and animals I encounter, each adding new meaning to the landscape. My walks become punctuated with pauses, and sometimes I even find myself running late. Had there always been so many kinds of flowers in the world? Just there — growing against the sidewalk's edge — a violet blossom I then learn is named the “balloon flower.”

While eating lunch one day, my co-teacher leans over and says, “This side dish is called ‘doraji.’” He shows me a picture. It is like seeing a friend I was not expecting. I lift it to my mouth and taste the root of that violet flower that had previously caught my eye, inspiring me to unearth its name.

So this is Punggi?

Neon spiders waiting in their webs and ripened persimmons breaking open on the pavement. Morning glories blooming in purple, blue, and red, then closing against the oppressive summer sun. Rows and rows of apple trees frame the fog-draped mountains. I greet them all as I walk by, despite never knowing when will be the last time.

This trip around the sun feels different. I am in a new place, but through its many changes, Punggi slowly reveals itself to me. The spring cuckoo outside my window, once as dependable as the early-rising sun, has gone silent. Instead comes the shrill unified hum of cicadas, always just out of sight. As I walk through town, I step on a single fallen ginkgo nut and feel that summer is ending.



Balloon Flower, Ky Pontious, Punggi, Gyeongsangbuk-do

Between Belonging

By Iris Hyun-A Kim

During my grant year, I attended a graduate school's virtual DEI session for accepted students in hopes of hearing some words of comfort, perhaps along the lines of, "There will be an H Mart opening in town!" — but to no avail. Instead, the PowerPoint opened to the first slide of definitions of DEI terminology before launching into an hour-long session on Why You Will Love Our School.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion. Attempting not to spell it any other way, universities and corporations have adopted DEI as a catch-all phrase for their institutions, working to quantify and optimize the patterns that promote belonging among their students, faculty, and alumni. But how does one truly measure belonging, and why is it defined with equally ambiguous acronyms that seem to point at each other in an endless cycle?

In Korea, the means of racial or ethnic identification are (thankfully) not a checklist. But they do feel almost binary: either Korean or non-Korean. Those in between, meaning part of the ethnic Korean diaspora, typically draw to one side more than the other. But even the between space holds another unspoken dimension of intra-diversity, where being Korean American can be further split depending on language skill, cultural knowledge, number of visits to the motherland, etc.

There were too many moments when I did not feel "Korean" enough in college, where I met Korean international students and other Korean Americans who were well-versed in the above criteria. While it ultimately helped form my understanding of what it means to be Asian in America, and ultimately formed the basis of my Fulbright research on Korean diaspora and belonging, I was brought back to this insecurity upon moving to Korea. Most of the Korean

returnees I encountered in Seoul, if not visiting for tourism or studying abroad, held strong ties to the peninsula. I asked some Korean American friends if they could imagine themselves living here for the long term, and to my surprise, most of them answered yes. Their family all returned to Korea, and the flexible F-4 heritage visa incentivizes Korean diasporic residents to stay as long as they want.

But when I asked if they felt like they belonged, it was the opposite answer. "I feel more American, especially in Korea," was one reply. "But there are a lot more privileges with being American in Korea than in being Korean in America."

Since when does one have to choose between belonging or comfort? I was perplexed by these answers. Yet, nobody seemed confused by these conclusions. There comes a point in all this wondering when I stop and ask myself if my research questions matter, if I am the only one asking these questions in the first place.

When the DEI event opened for questions, I asked the question swelling inside of me. "I get that DEI is important, and the way to improve DEI seems pretty straightforward. But what about belonging? You can diversify a student population, and you can improve equity and inclusion in a similar metric, but how do you really improve upon belonging?"

The DEI representative's answer was summed up into one simple sentence. Diversity, equity, and inclusion, when being worked on in their respective parts, produce belonging. I digested these words slowly, and over the week, I found relatable truth in her words. Despite their flaws and bureaucratic obstacles, American institutions that actively work on their DEI initiatives are



Reflection
Tori Thiem
Gangneung, Gangwon-do

addressing these questions for the sake of people who wonder if their questions matter, if they matter, thousands and thousands of miles away from the comforts of home. Because home no longer has to be a singular physical place, but one that can be called, constructed, and committed to.

In the words of the cheesy quote that I hung over my freshman dorm bed frame, “Home is where the heart is.” Comfort and belonging may not always come hand in hand, but there is always space to create belonging, whenever and wherever you choose.

Sunday BEEF

By Iris Hyun-A Kim

In the Netflix original series *BEEF* (minor spoiler ahead), there is an iconic scene when Danny, played by Steven Yeun, goes to church. Danny, a Korean American handyman embroiled in a heated revenge stand-off with a stranger, unexpectedly decides to attend Sunday service. He walks in during the timely performance

of “Come to the Altar” by the praise band. The camera flits between singing attendees with their uplifted hands and Danny’s slowly shifting facial expression from uncomfortable to emotional. At the musical climax, Danny bows his head and begins to sob.



Bridge at Seoraksan National Park, William Landers, Sokcho, Gangwon-do

In 1965, Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which may have come as a surprise to many Americans that their new neighbors hailed not from China or Japan, but from the tiny peninsular nation that was split in half just 15 years prior. Towards the end of the 20th century, the Korean diaspora community comprised the largest part of new immigrants in the United States, according to the “Boston Korean Diaspora Project” by Boston University. With them came the increased consumption of cabbage (for kimchi), a boom in Korean-owned corner stores and laundromats and the occasional *halmoni*¹ picking greens off the side of the road. But before any of those instances even materialized, there was the Korean-American church. Korean Christianity grew alongside the southern peninsula’s

¹ Grandmother.

post-WWII ideals of democracy and freedom and was quickly brought over by immigrants in the following decades. By the time Danny reached the multigenerational English-speaking ministry in the Californian suburbs, a particular sense of community existed within the Korean-American Church — uncanny details of which were portrayed in the *BEEF* church mise-en-scène. The sight of folding chairs and Danny munching on a donut after service brought me back to the long Sundays I would spend running around my own hometown church.

Whether religious or not, many recent immigrants found themselves in a Korean church on Sundays to meet the established immigrants, forming connections and ushering them into assimilation. There were plentiful opportunities to do so, as Sunday corporate worship was only one of the many events happening throughout the day, even more so the week: hiking trips for the elderly and interchurch sports tournaments for youth kids, summer camps and Saturday *hangul*² classes, early morning prayers and after-hours small group gatherings. Babysitting was always free, and kids could always find something to do in the back storage rooms of a building that never went dark. No matter where you were in your beliefs or immigration status, there was a place for you.

Like Danny, I found myself crying in the first church service I attended in Seoul for some inexplicable reason. I was fully surrounded by a cacophony of voices singing out, instruments reverberating the room. But despite the ongoing efforts to adjust to life in Korea, I could not help but feel the disconnect with that Sunday. While Danny cried and entered a strangely familiar and comforting community, I cried for the strangely unfamiliar, the discomfort of the land that my body left before it was formed.



Wishing for Good Fortune
Kierstin Conaway
Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do

² Korean writing system.

Twenty-One Twenty

By Brittany Scardigno

2-1-2-0*

The keypad lock on your apartment door beeps with rejection for the fourth time, setting off the alarm.

In the City

Tori Thiem

Busan, Gyeongsangnam-do



Even though it is an alarm, and its purpose is to let others know that someone is trying to enter a space that is obviously not theirs (because if it was their own, they would know the code), the sound only lasts for thirty seconds.

When the alarm stops, your fingers press:

2-1-2-0*

Again.

2-1-2-0*

You know this is not the correct code, yet your fingers keep pressing the same numbers. If you try the same numbers two more times, the useless alarm will sound and echo through the empty apartment's stairway.

You know this is not the code, because when you first moved in, you thought to yourself: "This code is so similar to the numbers my father used to use for his passwords."

You remember thinking this; so why do you keep pressing 2-1-2-0*?

Because it *is* the correct code. There must be something wrong with the lock.

It is the lock, not you.

2-1-2-0*

Can a mind be conscious and unconscious at the same time? A mind can be conscious of a mistake being made while it unconsciously instructs the body to perform the mistake. Consciously, you are sure this is not the correct code because it is not the same numbers your father used to use for his passwords. Unconsciously, your fingers push the keys:

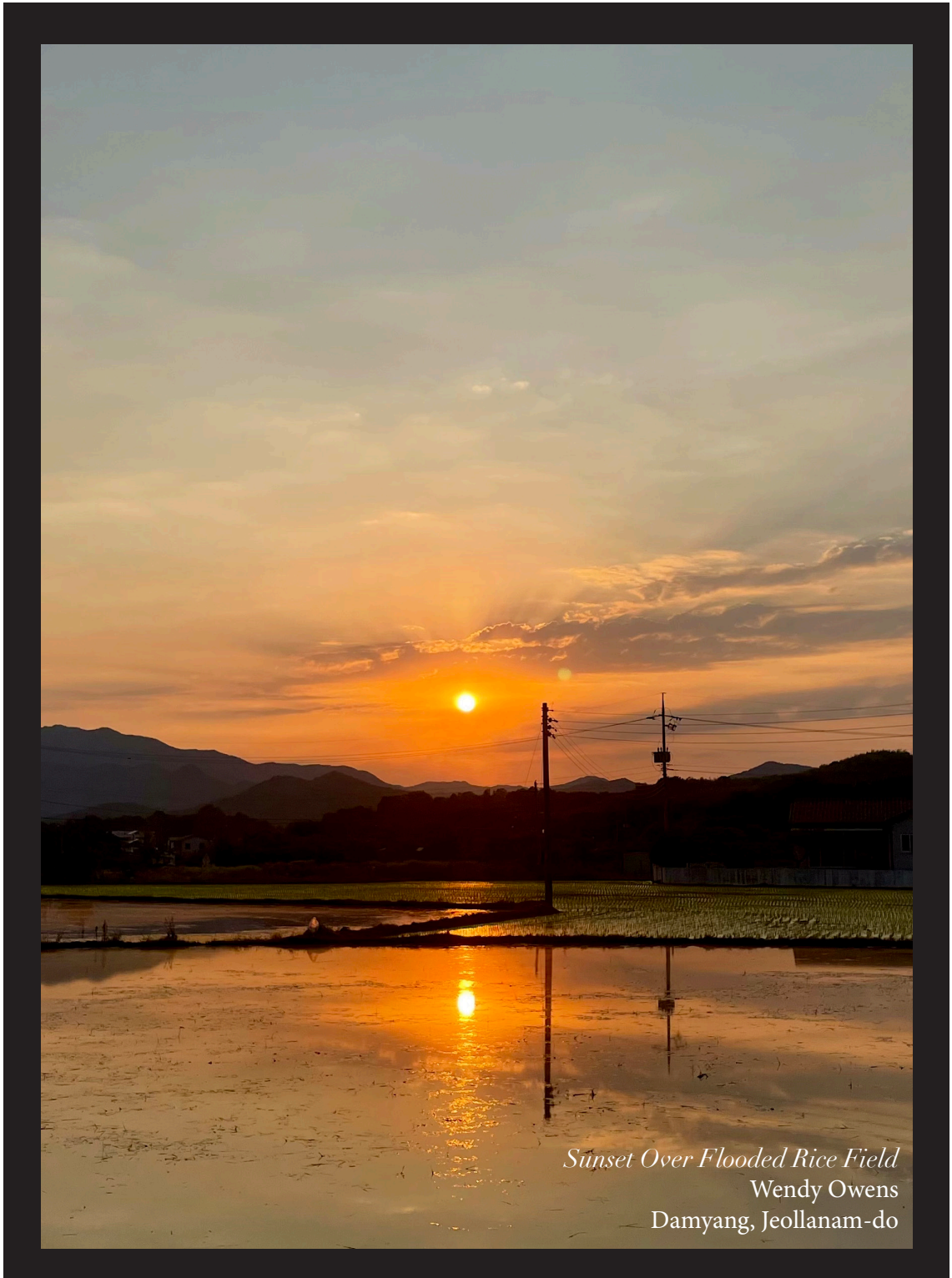
2-1-2-0*

There is an intruder trying to enter this space.

Defeated, you walk up to your landlord's door on the top floor. She becomes worried, asks if you are okay.

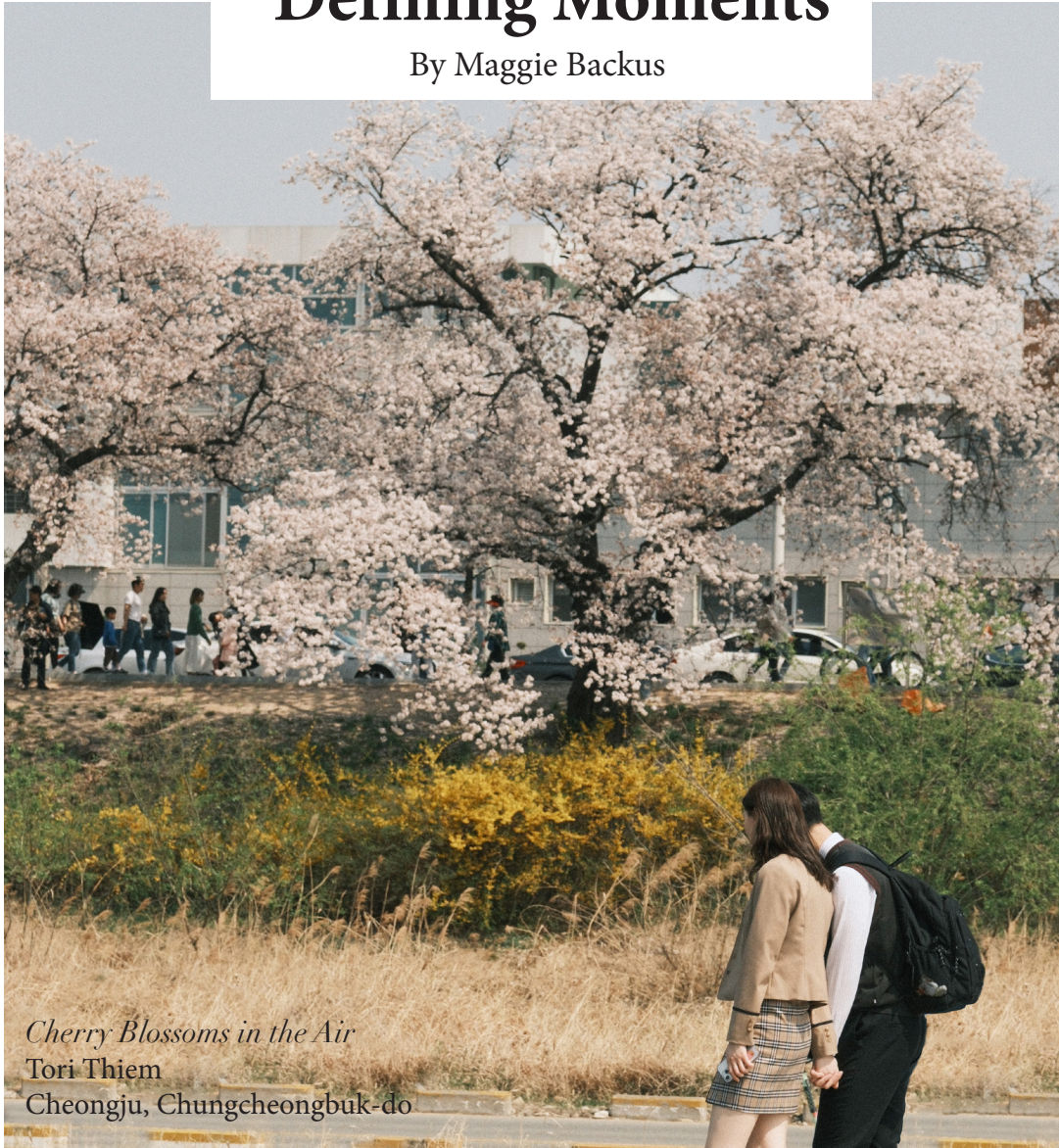
You pay ₩200,000 for a man to drill into your metal door and replace the keypad lock.

Chapter 4: Adaptation



Defining Moments

By Maggie Backus



Cherry Blossoms in the Air
Tori Thiem
Cheongju, Chungcheongbuk-do

When learning new languages has been a source of wonder since childhood, you know full well that some words simply lack one-to-one translations. Through my two years in South Korea, I have come to learn that the Korean word 친구, pronounced “chingu,” is one such example. Despite translating to “friend,” 친구 specifically refers to a friend of the same age. Moreover, age is so irrevocably infused within the Korean language and culture that it determines the precise vocabulary used in any given discourse, with more respectful language expected when speaking to elders, authorities, and strangers. It is more than the mere addition of a “Please” or “Would you mind...?” To speak is to enact a social stratification, ranking the addressee above, alongside, or beneath oneself.

When asking a new acquaintance’s name, for instance, one cannot help but choose whether to inquire about an 이름 or 성함, where the difference lies in informal or formal usage of the Korean term for “name.” As I filter my day-to-day interactions through these parameters, I reflect on the growth of my cross-generational friendship with two native Korean women this year; questioning what it means to participate in and describe our social relationship when the very noun for “friend” is unavailable to us.

On one balmy summer evening after language exchange, I followed Yura's short but rapid strides down into the subway station. She flails her left arm and glares until her smartwatch relents and reveals the time. Yura moves as if every upcoming endeavor is infinitely more exciting than the last, and this attitude propels us downward and secures us a spot on the train just before departure. We drop into the seats.

“유라님의 딸은 미라님의 딸이랑 친구예요? *Is your (Yura's) daughter friends with Mira's daughter?*” I asked Yura. Yura, Mira, Grace (my Korean-American friend), and I meet twice every week. We share our lives between sips of coffee and new vocabulary in each other's mother tongues, hurriedly scribbled into notepads.

Our paths first intertwined at the local Saturday language exchange. Seeking connection in a new place, Grace (a 친구, by Korean linguistics) and I lent each other the courage to enter the cafe in March. The space's design — white paint covering every surface, dimensions accentuated by thick black lines tracing each edge — gave the impression of possibility, a real-life coloring book. The once starkly blank scene soon faded and the attendees' personal hues and charms colored in the room. Mira and Yura, two mothers to young children, drew us in with their honest curiosity about our stateside lives and patient demeanors. Their habit of asking questions in lieu of making assumptions ignited a humbling reexamination of ageist stereotypes. Months later, I have forgotten what the four of us talked about that first day, but I remember the smiles, laughing 'til hands smacked tables and chairs reeled back, and exchanging contacts. At the end of the night, I recall Mira's hand on my shoulder, the toothy grin of a friend coupled with that universal maternal farewell, “Go home safely.” I bowed and wished her the same.

Back in the subway car, I catch Yura's reply. “아니. 미라 딸은 젊어. *No, Mira's daughter is young.*” I

pulled my head off her shoulder and met her eyes. She holds the last syllable, her tone fluctuating with animated denial to soften the rebuttal.

Had I heard her right? “근데... 친하다고 하지 않았어요? *But, didn't you say they're close?*”

“아 네, 네. 친해. *Oh yes, yes. They're close,*” she said. In English, she continued, “They are friends.”

Yura nodded and I leaned back. So, they were friends, but not 친구. A 친구 is a friend of one's own age. I had learned this nuance before, but had mused that globalization and English's presence in Korea would have rendered 친구 an acceptable translation for “friends” in the way that I knew them, transcending generations. While in this case the Korean “friend” label did not apply, the two could still be close, as indicated by the verb 친하다, (pronounced “chinhada”), signifying “to have an intimate relationship.” I marveled at the cultural significance of age, able to override hours of joyful company and declare that, despite only two years' difference, a pair of primary school girls could not be called “friends” in their native language.

Glancing over at this person with whom I share languages, culture, delicious meals, and quality time, my anglophonic mind singles out “friend” as the truest label for our relationship. I transferred to my bus and continued my evening journey home solo, preoccupied by the thought. If we were not 친구, what were we and my friends, who happened to be a decade or so my seniors?

At recent language exchange meetings, I have taken to introducing Mira and Yura to newcomers the same way they introduce Grace and me: “우린 베스트 프렌즈예요,” or “베프”¹ for short, reifying the distinction between “friend” and “친구.” Language exchange was intended to afford all parties ample time to play teacher and student, the prospect of forming relationships threading it together. But our thread, tightly winding us

¹ “우린 베스트 프렌즈예요” translates to “We are best friends.” This phrase is the English “best friends,” pronounced using Korean phonology. It can be abbreviated to the first syllable of each English word, pronounced as “beh-peu” or “베프” in Korean.

together after six months, now dictates how our meetings unfold. Museum visits, drives around town, and spontaneous phone calls weave together in our recent past. We are so eager to grow closer that we speak whatever words come first; awe at the wisdom of my best friends fuels evenings of drowsy persistence to self-study Korean. I long to discern the nuance of their speeches about parenting, after-school academies, wanderlust, self-care, and societal change.

Out the bus window, a view of brick and mortar structures shifts into lush green fields of ripening pears, and I think back to Yura's switch from noun to verb when describing the relationship shared by her daughter and Mira's. The 친 (chin) in both words shares the same hanja², which denotes closeness, intimacy, and familiarity. The hanja of 구 (gu) in 친구, intriguingly, implies a long time and oldness.

Perhaps these definitions were more apt than I had realized. For we are a generation apart and our friendship is young, but it is very much something that we actively nurture, continually strengthened by the ways we give and receive care. We may not be 친구, but we are certainly 친하다.

Each request for clarification that seeks cross-cultural understanding, every act of kindness that transcends words, are additional temporal knots in our thread, securing these precious moments in our memories.

Weeks later, twisting clouds wring out their final humid showers before summer gives way to fall. I sit in my studio eating a late dinner, taking a moment to empty my mind after a day of constant thinking and

The Beach is Calling
Kierstin Conaway
Busan, Gyeongsangnam-do



rethinking at school. A vibration flows through the table to my arms, which instinctively reach for my phone. A call has come from Mira.

“여보세요? *Hello?*” I cheerily answer, always a little too high pitched on the phone.

“어, 매기. *Yeah, Maggie.*” A gravelly reverb. She is probably driving her kids.

“미라님! 잘 지냈어요, 오늘? *Mira! Are you doing well today?*” The first impromptu call sparked concern, initially. We now do this at least once a week. “괜찮으세요? *Are you okay?*”

Mira’s voice is a deep one punctuated by sharp breaths, a seasoned giggle. “넹 괜찮아용. 매기 목소리를 듣고 싶었어, 그냥. 보고 싶어. *Yes, I’m okay! I just wanted to hear your voice. I miss you.*” I can hear her smile as we volley about her work in software, Yura’s barista certifications, Grace’s marathons, and my student anecdotes in multilingual codes.

Korean culture maintains the union of age and language, and thus I peer through the concentric lenses of both in my mind’s eye whenever I reflect on our memories. To nurture this intergenerational and intercultural bond has been to celebrate my elders for expanding my empathy, showing love in the stead of my faraway family, and challenging the oft-bleak narrative of a middle-aged mother. Both excel at caring for their circles while developing new skills and boldly building a margin for unapologetic fun. Our acts and exchanges have served as the palpable definition, the proof, of the existence of a relationship whose label is absent from the dictionary.

I am comforted by the knowledge that our relationship will outlast my eventual departure. I sensed it when Mira guided me towards lively market stands, positioning herself on the narrow sidewalk’s edge, closer to the cars as we walked

downtown. I believed it when Yura brought me fresh pumpkin bread from her baking course and watched wide-eyed for my reaction. I knew it when a subway encounter had me rattled, and they both met me at the next station. No questions. They just held my hands and brought me up and out into daylight.

“미라님, 전화해 주셔서 정말 감사합니다. *Thank you so much for calling,*” I told her.

With the end of each call, I am overwhelmed in two parts. The anticipatory sadness for the coming goodbye fights for expression, futilely endeavoring to ease that ultimate farewell. Then the gratitude wraps around it, soothes it; for what a privilege it has been to be loved and seen by a friend, especially a friend who strives to truly know you through differences in culture, words, and age.

In English, I added, “It was nice talking to you!”

“아니야, 매기. *No, Maggie,*” she interjected, then switched to English. “It is nothing.”

But it means something to me. So the next time, I dialed first.



Chinatown, Tansica Sunkamaneevongse
Busan, Gyeongsangnam-do

² "Hanja" refers to the Chinese characters used to write Korean before the invention of the modern Hangul writing system in the 15th century. Korean syllables that have hanja forms are similar to Latin roots in English. They bring meaning from their Chinese origin into the words they comprise.

Vignettes from the Metro

By William Landers



Line 2
Tori Thiem
Seoul

“Life is like the metro. You’re sitting in the car while people get on and off. You don’t know how long you will have with them, but you can be kind in the time you have together.”
— A mentor and friend

My friends in Seoul often ask me what I will miss most about Korea when I go home. I have always provided a quick, easy response because the full answer would weigh too heavily on a light conversation. As departure speeds toward me, though, I feel an urgency to share some reflections on my journey here. There are so many precious stories I could tell about the people and places I will miss that I could never choose only one. However, I can share a few stops along my journey.

Bongmyeong Station, Seoul Metro Line 1, Dongnam-gu, Cheonan

Bongmyeong Station is nestled in a quiet corner of a mid-sized, mountain-ringed city on the north-central side of Chungcheongnam-do. The Line 1 Metro trains pass through it, carrying passengers leisurely toward Osan, Suwon, and eventually, Seoul. Time exhales slowly and deeply between new arrivals here, on the southern edge of my first placement city.

This place reminds me of the many small journeys I embarked on with my friends. It recalls the slap of three pairs of rubber soles on the hot summer asphalt, the musky air rising from the gardens in the rainy season, and the aroma of the BHC chicken that my group carried for an improvised Thanksgiving. When I ride here in my memory, I see crumbs from the ham and cheese sandwich that I devoured with my neighbor, another ETA, after a hurried departure from Fulbright orientation. I feel the warmth of the July sun as I roasted s'mores with my summer camp students. And I feel the weight of conversations with a dear friend, grappling with our experiences returning to Korea as adoptees. Bongmyeong Station is a quiet, cozy place, and it echoes with the soft whispers of new friends who welcomed me for the first time.

Haeundae Station, Busan Metro Line 2, Haeundae-gu, Busan

Haeundae Station lies several blocks inland from the beach. It is planted so far away that you can only see the blue waves on a sunny day if you squint. The station's exits deposit travelers onto the surface with no cover. On stormy days, the stairs and passengers all shine with a coating of rainwater as they enter the underground portion. The walls and ceilings, like the train cars here, wrap around people and are no larger than necessary. A far cry from the Seoul Metro's cavernous stations and wide trains.

When I think of Haeundae Station, I remember the fat, soaking rain in typhoon season. There is something oppressive about feeling a raindrop fall so fast and hard that it immediately soaks through a jacket sleeve. There is something maddening about the whistle of water blown sideways in a gale. Even on sunny days, though, I feel a weight that clings to me. I feel the raindrops falling on me when the eyes of a waiter search through a group of my friends and then lock onto mine. They have assigned me the role of translator without uttering a syllable in my direction. I hear the gales whip past my ears when the taxi driver asks if I am Korean, even though I have stayed silent the entire journey. They want to confirm what they think they know about me. But they do not know me. They do not know that I was born here but taken and raised elsewhere.

They do not know that I grew up speaking no Korean. They do not know that I have answered these questions dozens of times and have never had my answers accepted as satisfactory. They look at me but do not see me. They hear me but do not listen to me. The raindrops soak into my clothes, and the wind whistles in my ears.

Living in Cheonan or Seoul, I can fold the messy tapestry of my childhood into a box and shut the lid. I can avoid erroneous translator duties by walking into a restaurant at the very rear of my group. I can dodge piercing questions from taxi drivers with vague allusions to immigration. I can slow the typhoon to a light drizzle if I try hard enough. In Busan, however, I feel the full weight of my history as an adoptee. I was born here. I was taken from here. I cannot hide from it here, pressed into a small train car and shivering under my wet clothes.

Anguk Station, Seoul Metro Line 3, Jongno-gu, Seoul

Anguk Station is long, straight and narrow to maximize efficient foot traffic to both ends. Its brown brick walls and black wrought-iron railings bound a race track for commuters who jostle for pole position in the mornings. The railways squeal with the arrival of new passengers, the stone floors clap against hard rubber footsteps, and the turnstiles groan under unceasing rotations. Anguk Station hums with the manic frequencies of rush hour and the urgent motion of bodies.





Yeouido River Park
William Landers
Seoul

I was blind the first time I walked out of this place. I literally could not see because the frigid air painted an impenetrable fog on my glasses. With each breath, I saw less of the world. I felt like a bat in my black winter coat, wrapping my wings around my body, using echolocation to judge the distance to the nearest footfalls. I would have laughed, except that I was also blinded by sorrow. Each step forward brought me closer to a new school and further from my first one. I understood that I was walking toward a desirable placement, one that offered support and opportunities to grow. One that many others had sought. But I was also walking into an unknown space, in the cold, far from the city I loved as a second home.

As I trudged through the biting cold, I wondered if my former principal was standing outside the school, waiting to greet the students like he always did. I wondered if my previous co-teacher was briefing the new ETA on the textbooks. I wondered if my students remembered the s'mores I had made with them last summer. I wondered and worried, and I listened for the footfalls ahead.

Riding through this place now, after another year, I can see. I can see the wide platform where my students smiled and waved at me after a busy exam season. I can see the broad columns that I leaned against while talking about dinner plans with other teachers from my school. I can see the tall staircases that I raced up at the start of each morning, and I can see the sunlight that hit my face halfway through the ascent. Slowly, after each ride at rush hour, discussion with a teacher, and greeting from a student, I warmed up to my new placement. I can see now that kindness flows through this place. As I ride away, I carry the farewells and notes and class photos from my time here. The next time I walk through a cold winter to an unfamiliar destination, I will hold these memories for warmth.





Incheon International Airport Terminal 1, Airport Railroad, Jung-gu, Incheon

Terminal 1 is one of a few stops in a big loop, ferrying travelers between Seoul and Incheon International Airport. The best time to enter is in the evening, when orange sun rays bounce down from the glass roof and give warmth to the gray platforms. I am riding toward it now in my thoughts, leaving Seoul and its tunnels behind a haze of memories and *meonji*¹.

When I think about Terminal 1, I think of saying “see you later” instead of “goodbye.” I think of getting my nose swabbed on a freezing December morning and hugging a loved one before shuffling through the stark white security line. I think of waving to companions departing for home and wondering when I would see them again. I think of boarding an airliner for a short visit to a friend in the southern hemisphere. The day will come soon when I walk off the metro in the belly of Terminal 1. It will be my turn to fly home, a one-way itinerary.

I think of journeys in loops and circles, of wanderings away and back again. I think of the friends and mentors I have ridden beside on this journey, the ones who have left, the ones I will leave behind. I remember the land and its miles of tracks, looping through the cities, linking the people together. As I think of boarding the airliner at the end of this journey, I know I’ll say “see you later,” a phrase I could not know when I was first carried from Korea a quarter-century ago. This time, though, I know my way back. The metro continues onward. People get on and off. It will still be here when I return, and I will ride it again someday.

¹ 먼지 or dust.

할머니

By Grace Moon Meharg

¹할머니 (romanized as *Halmoni*) or "Grandmother."

할머니¹ no longer belongs just to me.
Out of every man, woman, and child
the word slips from open mouths
casually, carelessly.

Their teeth barely catching its edge.

She was Halmoni and she was mine,
growing into a god.
Framed by a halo of stories
sown by the lips of my mother.

Grandmother
born of her daughter, delivered
to the girl who
shares her name.

I climb my roots across the ocean.

Reaching within and without,
glimpsing her in roses,
curved backs in the market.
The mountains gaze at us both.

There's so much
I remember I've forgotten.
As stories start to fade
the gaps gain flesh and earth.

Our bodies meet in Jeonju.

My soles where my mother began.
The air wrinkles
together. Three generations.
One pair of shoes.

the goldfish and a great lake

By Kat Ray

goldfish must not be kept in bowls; folks often do not know that. they need a tank of at least twenty gallons, regularly tested for ammonia and other things. they must eat more than just fish flakes to thrive; you should give them worms and bugs and stuff. yet even the best care cannot stop a *sentient* goldfish from yearning. they are much like me.

i knew a goldfish in a well-filtered tank. he had orange and black flecked scales and big, round eyes. he could see the lake through the near window (in the few hours when the child was not facing him, blocking his view). he would sigh, watching.

the other fish did not have the brains for yearning, but had brains enough for wisdom (and gossip).

“if you leave,” they said to him and each other, “you may grow. for a goldfish may only grow as big as his pond.”

so the goldfish, after hearing this and mulling it over, escaped.

he shot from the tank water like a dolphin and flopped along the flooring, flailing without sight and without aim for what seemed like years to him across wood, across pavement, across rocks, across dirt and mud and silt until — *gulp* — he was swallowed up by the deep pit of a dark, massive lake.

he breathed at last, heart racing, eyes spinning and then focusing on the cold green murkiness above and below him. he tried to swim to the bottom, not to count the pebbles as he used to do; just instead to know that they were there. but he could not reach the ground without losing his head.

he was at first scared and enchanted; the endless deep, the spacious silence. and then scared and amused; the new fishes, the new diet. and then scared and alone; no falling flakes, no watchful eyes. and then scared.

weeks passed of unfocused swimming beneath the current at the top, heart thumping against his ribs.

he did not and could not get bigger, as he had not eaten nor barely breathed one deep breath.

his scales turned gray, and his blood was low like a dull pain. his heart now groaned as a chant vibrating still in the open water. his eyes rolled back as if they could find and catch his brain running away to his tank at home.





home, how strange a word; he mused as it once meant a small glass prison, too big for his scales and fins to grow, too exposed for him to feel comfortable within them. yet now, it was all he yearned for; the rhythmic tapping of a child's finger to the glass, the gruel that floated down and rotted in the pebbles, the blue and pink substrate that he had counted and named. the mold that grew on his fins from stunted sameness. the other fish, always there, *frustratingly* always there, the melody of their conversations, often shared, often with a smile and the wave of a tail.

he yearned for home, now.

now, *alone*, his own pet goldfish in need of tedious care. drifting, eyes finding purchase on the neverending black emptiness below. who could've guessed that to live alone meant to survive alone; to get bigger meant to eat, and to eat meant to hunt, and to hunt meant to swim, and to swim meant to wander through water of one hundred fathoms deep. who knows what lies below?

and so he went belly up; drifted on his back, eyes blinking and straying up toward the top of the lake for a moment before crusting shut completely. he cursed himself for thinking he was good enough to grow. he mustn't be kept in a bowl, nor must he be let in the great deep.

he did not know what to do, but he had no strength to swim anymore. the waves carried his ragdoll body up to the surface of the lake.

it was warm here, as if there was a tank heater. *why?* he pried open his weary eyes.

and he saw the moon.

the tank had never let him; the people closed the window shades at night, so he saw neither it nor the sunrise. he had imagined what it would look like; perhaps similar to the ambient light left on atop the tank. but it was nothing of the sort.

he mustered up all the strength left within his little body to swim even further toward the surface to see it better. he didn't care about growing anymore. he just wanted to survive enough seconds to see the moon. he didn't care how big he looked, nor at this point how zombied he looked, either.

his scales brightened in the starlight, anyway. and, to his surprise, he found bits of insects just at the surface. not as nutritious nor readily there as fish pellets, but there, and food. he gobbled them, and at once the tiny engine of his body fueled enough to clear his cloudy eyes. the moon glowed with even more cosmic vivid light.

the surface's space gave him a bit less control as the cold deep, yet there was warmth and food and beauty and perhaps sometimes, being dragged by the currents was good. he let the current take him.

it led him, at last, to the shallow. he could see the pebbles. he could hear the distant muffled speech of children playing in the water. unfamiliar in patterns, yet too known as any child's voice could be.

he could be alone now, he would tell himself. if he might just have the moon for company.

but the moon became brighter as he had another fish to point it out to; first it was a passing guppy, amused at the strange goldfish's enchantment, then enthralled himself with what he hadn't seen in the steady moon before. then it was a shrimp, then a snail. different from his fish friends before, and the moon knew he missed them. the new fish's presence and conversations with each other at times made him more lonely than when he was in the deep, at times made him feel at home again in their steadiness. he pondered why he felt these ways.

he might just survive gently here, in the new shallow, this home he'd known and not known. he might just grow slowly here.



i do not think every goldfish is meant for the great lake. some are not even meant for the shallow. some should see the moon from their ambient lighting, some should see the moon at the lake's surface. others should see the moon in the glowing deep-sea fish below.

i am just absolutely certain they must not be kept in bowls.



Art by Kat Ray

Chapter 5: Peace



The Next Generation
Tori Thiem
Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do

Student Competition

With every wave of cultural adaptation during the grant year, each Fulbrighter in South Korea hopes to arrive closer towards a newfound, inner peace. Thus, for this year's art and writing competitions, *Infusion* magazine asked students of ETAs to meditate on the following: what brings you peace? The rising generation of peacemakers at the middle and high school level verbalized their lyrical visions for peace in our secondary writing competition. For our even younger advocates for peace, we tasked them with conveying their feelings through visual expression in our elementary art competition. Despite living in a country where English is a secondary language, our young artists and writers were able to eloquently express moments in the bustle of their busy school lives that fill their minds and bodies with tranquility.

In the elementary art competition, *My Friend* by Juwon Cheong was awarded first place for its vibrant nature imagery which blooms in every corner of the canvas, trumpeting the exhilarating peace playmates feel when spending time with one another. In second place, *Moon* by Sodam Han beholds the inner peace that kindles during a neighborhood moon watch, using cool colors and gray shadowing. Finally, *It's My Family* by Seyeon Min received third place for its fresh take on the peaceful family portrait, playing with lines and shapes via multileveled silhouettes and primary-colored text.

Middle school students contemplated what peace means in blank verse. In "The Edge of Farewell," first-place poet Solbi Lee defined peace as the ephemeral warmth that is transmitted in a parting embrace. "Only My Own Universe" by second-place student Nahyun Ku paints a bedtime utopia that peace has the power to transport us to. Subsequently, in "Music That Hugs Me," third-place writer Hyeonkang Jeon conveys the shape-shifting and healing abilities of peaceful tunes, which help us overcome daily obstacles. Our honorable mention poem, "Peace," by Seohyeon Park meditates on the peace that resounds in nature's symphony.

First-place high schooler Taehee Park beautifully considers peace as the comfort of a mother's evolving yet forever steadfast arms in "My Pillow." In "Cats," our second-place winner Seohyeon Maeng playfully introduces peace as the reliable relationships that we cherish with our furry loved ones. Lastly, in third place, Hyunseung Lee considers the sunset, or "Nature's Canvas," a metaphor for peace in the simple yet heartwarming way it can represent love through a sweet embrace of day and night.

Peace does not have one singular definition, and we celebrate the beauty of that through our young dreamers. As we share these expressions of peace, we urge you to then consider for yourself: what brings *you* peace?

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Literary Managing Editor
1st Year ETA, Jincheon,
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Kaitlyn Read
Lifestyle Managing Editor
1st Year ETA, Innovation City,
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Elementary School

1st Place



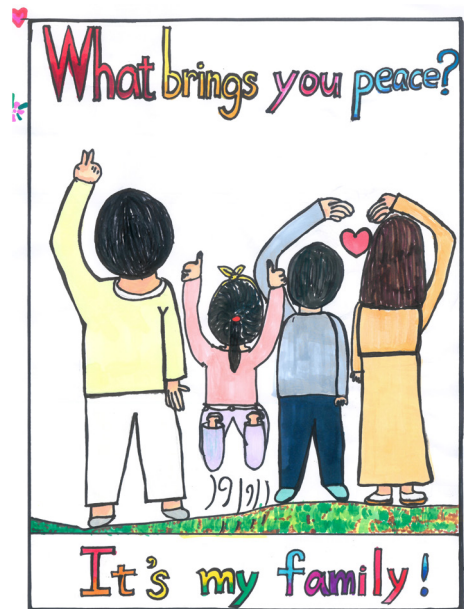
My Friend, Juwon Cheong (정주원), Wonho Elementary School

2nd Place



Moon, Sodam Han (한소담), Yuchon Elementary School

3rd Place



It's My Family, Seyeon Min (민세연), Okgyedongbu Elementary School

Middle School



1st Place

The Edge of Farewell

By Solbi Lee (이솔비)
Hwacheon Middle School

Before I go on my way
You lay your hand on my back

This is it – the end.
Through the warmth of your hand
You allow me to hold onto this moment
to cling to everything we had, everything we were.

As your fingertips brush across my back
You take me in for the last time
And when not even your fingertips remain, I ask
Carry my heart as you go on your way

2nd Place

Only My Own Universe

By Nahyun Ku (구나현)
Hyunil Middle School

Before I go to sleep
Imagine lying in bed

Embroidered with dark night sky
twinkling starlight

Round moon smiles

Lay my head on a soft pillow
Fold my body in a fluffy blanket

Imagine that

The purple scent lingers in my nose
A mysterious and quiet world

along the North Star
I draw pictures

Bluebirds are singing over there
dolphins are dancing over there

Imagine that

Only my own world
Only my own universe
Only my own peace





3rd Place

Music That Hugs Me

By Hyeonkang Jeon (전현강)
Seonju Middle School

It always stays with me
When i felt tired and helpless
It always says "you are doing well"
Even when someone hurts my heart
silently, it always hugs me

shapeless, but sometimes it hugs me like family
Be fearless, it gives me big advice like my father

Thank you for always making me laugh and cry, music

Honorable Mention

Peace

By Seohyeon Park (박서현)
Sannam Middle School

In nature, I find my peace.
In nature, all the worries begin to cease.
Colorful flowers and the gentle breeze.
It relaxes my soul, and put my mind at ease.
In music, I find my peace.
In music, my worries drift away.
In melodies and rhythms, I gladly sway.

So nature's hug and songs that play,
It brings me peace to me throughout the day.
Nature and music makes my day.

High School

My Pillow

By Taehee Park (박태희)
Daedong Taxation High School

1st Place

Lying on the beach with you.
Waves softly cover us as we fall asleep.
The sand slowly sucks me in,
but I don't feel scared.
When you give me food, I eat it.
Back then, I was loved for even the smallest movement.
Mom's arms are comfortable and familiar to me.
This is the pillow that puts me to sleep.

Cats

By Seohyeon Maeng (맹서현)
Daedong Taxation High School

2nd Place

Your drowsy eyes in the morning are like beads.
Your fur sticks out in the sun.
Each one is my happiness.

I stare at you to convey my heart.
But I know it will not be received by you today.

It doesn't matter if there are many differences between you and me.
Even if it's one-sided, I communicate with you.
Everything is okay when I'm with you.

Nature's Canvas

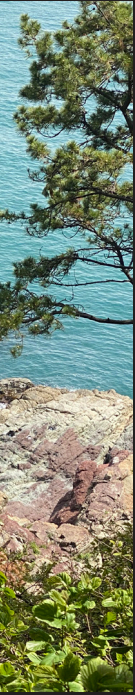
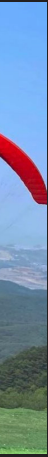
By Hyunseung Lee (이현승)
Gochangbuk High School

3rd Place

Sunset's golden kiss,
Paints the sky with hues of bliss,
Day and night's embrace.

Snapshots of Belonging





*With Love,
The Fulbrighters of South Korea*

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Bridge, Tansica Sunkamaneevongse, Sancheong, Gyeongsangnam-do

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