



CORY LEMKE ■ RIDING THE THIRD WAVE
KAAFC ■ CHOI SOONYOUNG
JOSÈ MARIA MALCOTTI

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A MESSAGE FROM THE BFS TEAM: SOTDAE (숫대)

It would not be considered unreasonable to say that 2020 brought immeasurable strain upon the global population and economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to plague every nation in the world.

We could spend days, even months, analyzing and debating the actions and responses of each nation throughout this pandemic and the long-reaching effects resultant of the policies put into place in response to COVID-19; instead, I'd like to share with you my perspective on how the current pandemic has affected the birth family search process, and how G.O.A.'L. has taken it as an opportunity to move forward.

In the early days of the pandemic, life seemed to go by just the same as it had the previous January and February. I was bracing myself for an extremely busy April as over 8 adoptees had made plans to visit Korea at that time and were seeking our assistance in actively searching for their birth parents.

Consequently, the stricter social distancing regulations in Korea, followed by an explosion of cases in Europe and America, were signs that many adoptees may not have the opportunity to travel from overseas this year. To make matters worse, G.O.A.'L.'s annual **First Trip Home (FTH)** program had to be cancelled, which is one of our most recognized programs within the Korean adoptee community.

The impact of the pandemic on the services offered by the Birth Family Search team was especially dramatic, having fewer inquiries for assistance and cancellation of plans to visit. In general, all of our services were quite slow for a while. During this time, each department

took this opportunity to consult with each other about how we saw our current services and to propose ideas of how to move forward.

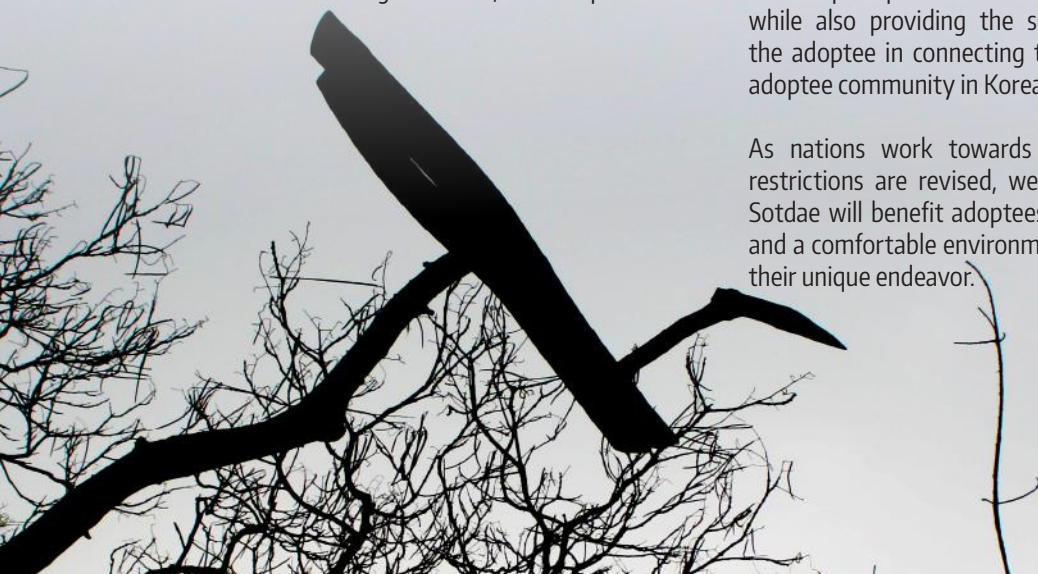
For those who are familiar with family search (and assisting others in their search efforts) you'd know that there are quite a few other organizations and individuals who assist adoptees at various stages of their search journey. G.O.A.'L. is not alone in this service, so we had to ask ourselves: What makes G.O.A.'L. unique in providing this service? What are our strengths? Our weaknesses? What are our limitations?

As a prior participant of G.O.A.'L.'s FTH 2016 program and its active search component, I felt that active search was a unique strength of FTH. Having also volunteered in 2017 & 2019's FTH, I was able to observe opportunities for improvement in various areas. Thus, we began to work on launching a new service to address some of these challenges. The result is **Sotdae (숫대)**.

For many adoptees, the opportunity to visit Korea often seems impossible due to many factors such as investment of time and emotional energy needed to search for their birth parents, but especially financial ones. For some, there may be only one chance to undertake such an endeavor. With this in mind, G.O.A.'L. plans to launch a more personalized "full service" program. Sotdae will invite an adoptee back and allow more time for active participation in the search process, which includes the possibility of staying in areas of interest related to his or her origins for a few days, professional interpreting services, and a dynamic search itinerary.

Ideally, this will provide the much needed time to follow up on potential leads as the journey continues while also providing the support needed to assist the adoptee in connecting to themselves, the active adoptee community in Korea, and Korea itself.

As nations work towards stabilization and travel restrictions are revised, we are excited to see how Sotdae will benefit adoptees by providing more time and a comfortable environment that is best suited for their unique endeavor.



Cory and his biological uncle, the first person he met in his reunion.

CORY LEMKE (HA WOON-DO)

**“THERE ARE ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE RESOLVED.
BUT I THINK THE PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO SOLVE
THOSE ARE US.”**

In this series, we meet adoptees from around the world who have returned to live in Korea. We want to discover how adoption has shaped their lives and what their experience in Korea has been like.

Cory Lemke moved back to Korea in 2013, shortly after graduating from Arizona State University. Since then, he's met his birth family, lived and worked in his birth town of Jeonju, and started his own English instruction business based in the Yeoksam neighborhood on the bustling east side of Seoul.

Lemke, who studied political science, is also the Vice Chairperson of Democrats Abroad Republic of Korea and Co-Chair of the Asian American Pacific Islander Caucus. “Organizing, education – they’re my passion,” he says. “I believe in bringing the community together.”

Now living in Seoul, Lemke, 29, shared some stories about life in Korea, meeting his birth family, and if he ever thinks he'll run for public office.

*Please introduce yourself.
Can you start from the beginning?*

I was adopted to Northern Iowa. I have an older sister, older brother, and younger sister. My older brother and younger sister are also adopted from Korea. We grew up maybe 20 minutes from the Minnesota-Iowa border in a town of about 500 people.

When I was in middle school, we moved to Tucson, Arizona. Much more diverse. I went to high school, then ASU (Arizona State University), then went to the University of Arizona for my master's in international relations. After I graduated, I decided to move to Korea.

As an adoptee, how did you feel about returning and now living in Korea? Has your perspective changed since being here?

Having been here for almost eight years now, it's fluctuated over time. I think being here has really helped change that perspective. I think when I first got here, I was a little bit more aggressive about fitting into Korean society. I think the most striking thing for me, having seen people

come and go and do their searches and be here, is that everyone's story is unique. I think a lot of the [adoptive] community is trying to find an answer, like, this is what happened. I think it's important from a certain point of view to understand what happened in some cases. But there's so much diversity within the community in terms of story and I don't think you can say one size fits all regarding our stories and our relationship to adoption. As an American, I think we try to project our American experience on the Korean experience. That can be problematic. What comes to mind in my personal story is that I'm thankful for my life and where I've ended up. But I recognize that that's probably not a universal sentiment.

With the perspective of hindsight, how do you view your younger self now? The one who came to Korea in 2013.

My personality is the same. But it's, I think, the outlook towards adoption. I'm not as angry at the system. I think there are problems with the system. But I do think, at least in my own personal story, everyone was trying their hardest. So it's very difficult for me to be angry at my biological family, it's very difficult for me to be mad at my adoptive family because everybody was just doing their best.

But as the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. So yes, it's still problematic, the institution of transnational adoption. There are issues that need to be resolved. But I think the people who are going to solve those are us, and people who care enough to create that change.

Going back to your story, what were those early years like?

I got hired on an E-2 visa to teach at a hagwon (after-school private academy). I remember moving around a lot because they had to find a spot for me.

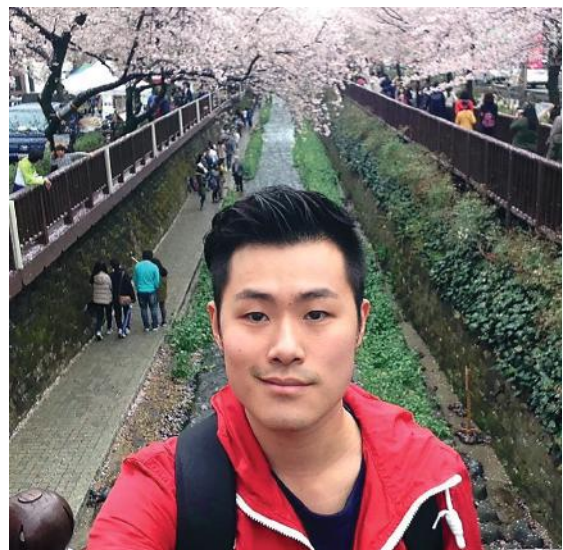
Then about a year later I moved to Jeonju. I quit my job with about a month left on my contract. In the States, I had taken a first-year Korean language course and my Korean professor in the States had a friend at church who had another friend who was teaching at Woosuk University in Jeonju and she was looking for a researcher, and so she hired me. I moved down to Jeonju because my Korean family lives there. It was a very toxic work environment. I think it's like that in a lot of Korean workplaces. [After an unfair incident due to cultural differences], I basically had to clean the office for 4 months. It was really hard at the time, but it really taught me a lot about the realities of what it's like to live in Korea, I think. But I did have a very good support group. I would come up every once in a while, on

weekends, and it was adoptees... It very much was having that community here [that helped].

And then moving back to Seoul [after a year], it really helped prepare me for... [Now] talking to my corporate clients and what they go through, their psychology, and even when they cancel and things like that; I really understood that things are out of their control.

When you came back to Seoul, what was your plan?

I spent [about] a month job hunting and then I got a job teaching at an adult hagwon and I did that for about a year and that was also not good, but by then I knew the system. I found out later that [the school] charged less money [for lessons with me because I'm Asian], so I just decided that I was going to do it by myself and that I didn't really need the middleman anymore. I just started to teach by myself and attract some of the same students and have been doing that for about three years.



Was it difficult to start your own business?

They make it very easy. I got a teacher's license to teach children. I got the Ministry of Education Approval thing to tutor students. Then I realized that I should get a tax ID. I did have a lot of help from my Korean contacts. I think [people without Korean-speaking support] rely on the Seoul Global Center a lot, [but] it's very easy to start a business here.

What kind of teaching do you do?

I teach professional business English, and I'm very fortunate because I kind of stumbled into medical devices and pharmaceutical companies. [I do a lot of work with] Johnson & Johnson and Boston Scientific. I also occasionally do some editing work with political science journals.



Cory and his adopted siblings. Left: his older and younger sisters; right: his older brother with his family.

Can you explain a little bit about how this year has been different (for your business)?

I did have plans to kind of scale up a little bit this year [which was not] feasible. But there's opportunity as well. You know, with COVID-19, I've noticed a lot of Korean people have come back from the States and want to continue their English lessons and they want to focus on academic English. And you know, there's a lot of word-of-mouth here, so it still very much is one of those cultures.

What was your experience like reuniting with your Korean family?

It was about two months after I arrived in Korea that I did the birth search. I was switching to the F-4 visa and so I went to HOLT, my adoption agency, to get the [necessary documents] and they asked if I would like to do a search. About two days later, they contacted me. They were waiting, my family, so HOLT sent them the telegraph and then two days later I was on the phone with my uncle. It was wild.

I met them officially in August. I made contact in April, but it was months later that I actually went down for the reunion. They took us to the HOLT intake center down in Jeonju. They took us to the intake center and there were babies there and we played with the babies. It was a lot. I was like, "this is a lot for me to play with the babies while meeting my birth family while being in Jeonju for the first time." I did that for about an hour. Then I went upstairs and met my uncle and my aunt. The translator was about an hour late. It was hard, sitting there. We shared pictures for the first 10 minutes. Then the translator came and they told me everything that I knew from HOLT.

Which was?

My birth mother is mentally ill. She's in the hospital. My mom is one of nine children, a large family. She was living with my grandfather at the time of my birth and she was not institutionalized yet. She would leave the house for long periods of time and then come back. One time she left and got pregnant and came back. And then by that point, she was about eight months pregnant, they said. With me. With mental health, people are like, "Koreans are not good with mental health," but that really has not been my experience here. I think it's really because of my mother, like in her situation. I've actually had the most mental-health positive experiences in my life in my Korean circles.

How about with your Korean friends?

Well, it's definitely not without challenges. I mean, some of it is [that I'm] nonthreatening. We're coming from different perspectives and we're not competing, [and that] empowers them to be open about what they truly think.

I will say there is a caveat to this. It's very clear that I'm friends with individual males. I'm never friends with a group. I think that's by design because I think the values within Korean male group friends is very different from what I would be accustomed to or what I would, quite frankly, tolerate.



Cory and his biological cousin at the hanok village in Jeonju.

You mentioned earlier that you keep in touch with your birth family.

How has that relationship developed over time?

Usually every Chuseok or Seollal holiday, I visit the hospital. It depends on the circumstance. Usually, my uncle or aunt takes me with one of their kids. I have four cousins, and they kind of re-adopted me as their fifth child.

With my uncle and aunt and when the whole family is together, [we always speak] in Korean. I did that first year of Korean language class at ASU and then I did my stint in Jeonju and it was sink or swim. I spoke barely any Korean

and in two years, you pick up something every day, and that's kind of how I learned. But that was a challenge, too, because they do speak in dialect, so it was really hard at first. But when it's one-to-one, me and the cousins, it's English. I have a good relationship with the younger two cousins. They try really hard. That's all I can ask. I try hard. They try hard. We all try hard. And it's good. I feel very lucky. It's interesting. We don't have the same memories and schema and experience, but I do notice there are some personality similarities. I get a ton from my family in the States, but there are some things I notice that I get from my birth family.



Cory with his biological older brother and his family.

What did you notice that you had in common with your family here?

It's hard to pinpoint. I'm very extroverted and my family in the States are all very introverted; it's silent at my house, except for me, my bubbly self, popping around the house or whatever. Even my adopted brother and sister are very introverted, too, but my family in Korea is very extroverted.

Now you know where it comes from.

Yeah, it's weird. They're very extroverted, very warm people. Very sensitive. My family in the States, too – some are also sensitive, but... I don't know, it's not the same. These aspects, they feel biological. It sounds really stupid but I was walking down to the train station one time, and I was watching my [cousin] walk down the stairs, and I was just like, "that's how I would walk down the stairs."

He had the same walk, you know, the same weird body. (laughs) Those are the two big ones I notice. Music as well, like my mom really likes music, she sings in the hospital. None of my family in the States is really musical, so that's another thing.

I feel kind of voyeuristic sometimes visiting them, because they want to show me where they're from and it's cool. But it also feels very touristy and I feel almost like they need to impress me a little bit. Like, "we're not poor."

I think that's a big sense of shame for them because I'm the adopted one and I think that they feel like they have to show that "our family is not like that" and I want to be like, "it's fine, I'm not ashamed."

We go to museums and we do activities. It's a little active for my style. I'd rather just have a meal and talk about something – politics actually – we're getting there; we had that discussion actually. (laughs)

You studied political science for your undergraduate degree and international relations for your graduate degree. You also mentioned you're currently doing a graduate program in linguistics.

Do you ever see yourself running for office or seeking an administrative position in education?

I don't know... Maybe at this stage, no. I don't know if I'm ready to be in the public eye like that. But changing these institutional problems, especially regarding education, language education, and policy – it's exciting work. There's a lot to be done.

Regarding our language policy in (American) schools, I think that's a big issue. I think we need a better structure, like academic English programs for these [immigrant] kids aside from learning English in content classes and mainstreaming them appropriately; I think there are big issues in Arizona and California specifically. I think our states are at the forefront of that since we are on the border. But I think across the country, the United States, we could be doing more to help our fellow citizens learn the language.

I think we're seeing that in Korea more and more, too, especially with (multicultural) children and helping everyone mainstream into society and participate as productive citizens. It's sad that we have these ideologies that prevent people from being fully productive in society. (Diversity) enriches our society.

It's important work. Especially with diversity – getting that perspective out there and making sure that these stories get told and making sure that we're heard.

The Q&A has been condensed and edited.

■ Interview by Roger Van Scyoc ■ Responses by Cory Lemke

RIDING — THE THIRD WAVE

HOW AN INCREASE IN SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES HAS AFFECTED THE LIVES OF ADOPTEES LIVING IN SEOUL

*Read full articles at iam.goal.or.kr

Mathieu Moles French, chef & restaurateur

In the fall of this year, I opened a restaurant with the concept being a private kitchen. After many years running a Michelin-starred restaurant in Dubai, I returned to Korea and decided to open a restaurant offering a French menu made with seasonal produce and a wide range of wine. Because it is a reservation-only restaurant, we provide an ambiance of privacy and intimacy that is appreciated by our clientele.

Before the social distancing level was increased, the operating hours were 6 PM to 1 AM from Tuesday to Sunday. After the social distancing level went up to 2.5, all restaurants were required to close at 9 PM, which means customers physically have to leave before that time or we can get fined by the government. Therefore, we had to start opening an hour earlier so we didn't have to rush our customers and still maintain the convivial atmosphere and great dining experience.

Our concept of the restaurant is based on a dinner experience with wine after the meal. The idea was to have a set menu for groups no larger than eight. In December, we created a partnership with a beer brand. Because we have to close at 9 PM, we introduced a lunch service in addition to our two dinner services while eliminating our last dinner service. Preparations were the same as before, but we had to come in much earlier to prepare for lunch. We are preparing to offer a takeout menu to meet clientele requests as Christmas and New Years are usually a great time for restaurants. We had some large group reservations, but they all got cancelled. This year, we aren't planning to offer a holiday menu. Depending on the situation at the beginning of January, we might postpone and offer our Christmas menu to some of our regular customers to keep the festive end-of-the-year spirit.

Outside of work, to be honest, I didn't really have to change much in my daily routine. I'm following the new 2.5 restrictions and going back home earlier, which gives me more time to spend with my family, and that's not a bad thing at all.



Kate Mayne / Pyun Ha Ra
Korean-American, freelance marketing consultant

2020 has simultaneously felt 20 years long but also 20 seconds short. It seems like I was just hearing about what would soon be referred to as one of the most dangerous global viruses in history. I remember sitting in cafes and meeting friends, enjoying “time off” since schools and businesses were closed due to the growing number of infected cases in Korea. It wasn’t long after that when I realized the virus was quite dangerous and wearing masks and monitoring where I went and who I met would be a daily requirement. At first, it was inconvenient and a bit annoying, but wrapping up the year, I’m so unbelievably grateful at how serious the Korean government took the whole situation and enforced social distancing and other health safety measures early on. I was bewildered when I heard other countries were fully against the idea of trying to protect their communities just for their own comfort and convenience.

For me, personally, the virus was something I just had to get used to. I kept thinking it would be something that would disappear pretty quickly, and that it was just another annoying occurrence of the year, but it has continued and doesn’t seem to have a clear ending. My year started off with quite a celebration. I had finally gotten my dual-citizenship, after miles and miles of paperwork, so I was really looking forward to a great year. Unfortunately, Covid-19 was not the only negative part of my life this year, but it remains to be the longest enduring part. Luckily, I was not affected by losing any financial security due to the virus; in fact, I had several offers throughout the year, but that’s for another story.

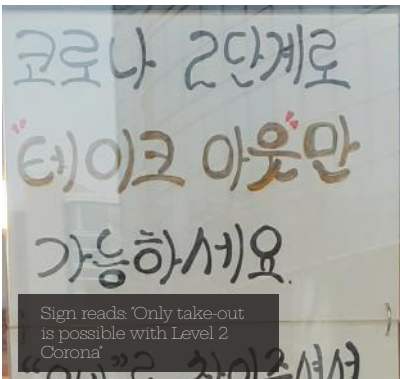


Kristin R. Pak / Lee Young-sook
American, university lecturer

On a mid-December Thursday afternoon, I’m listening for the pressure cooker valve to drop on the dwaeji gukbap (rice & pork bone broth soup) I’m making. I have time to cook lots of homemade meals from scratch nowadays since the level of caution has been raised to 2.5 (the second-highest level) in the Seoul metropolitan area. This has closed my part-time job for three weeks, and my “real job” at a university has kept its classes online all through 2020. With all this time at home, I decided it was a good time to get a dog. In keeping with the culinary theme, I named her Hoo-Choo (black pepper) when I got her at the end of November. The pork had been purchased for her, but she showed little interest in it, so I have been left to eat it; the meal will be complemented with the free kimchi that I picked up from G.O.A.L. last week.

Another reason for all the home cooking is that there are fewer chances to meet friends for dinner. With a 9 o’clock curfew, all restaurants have to kick out their dine-in customers although they can still deliver and prepare takeout food. The 9 o’clock curfew is intended to curtail the after-work team-building dinner and drinking sessions, but restaurants are still busy during the sacred lunch hour. This expulsion has resulted in a second rush hour as customers all leave at the same time and take public transportation home, which makes social distancing impossible.

Hoo-Choo and I are using this time off to explore our neighborhood-mask on, of course!-and get to know each other while I cook, or we sit on the sofa and wait for our deliveries.



Kee Olsen / Han Woon Kee **Danish, engineer at Samsung**

Honestly, I rarely wore a mask before the pandemic. Even on the most polluted days, I wouldn't. Not because it restricted my freedom or it was awkward to wear, no, simply because I never check the pollution level and am utterly unaware of the dangers hovering around my bodily openings every second I am outside. Unaware because I never had to consider this kind of threat in Denmark where I grew up.

Wearing a mask is not a big thing though, and it doesn't affect my daily life. Everybody talks about it, but mostly because a part of the world outside of Korea seems to agree that masks violate our freedom, it makes us slaves to the government, it steals our oxygen and then kills us... kills us more than COVID they seem to believe.

Life goes on in Korea, and many things are not so different from before; some things are, of course.

We wonder whether the world will survive this - I mean, survive wearing a mask (because I'm pretty sure that humanity will survive the virus, but I'm not so sure about surviving the mask issue when I read the news from the US and Europe) - and we're trying to enjoy life as a family here in Korea at the same time.



My family loves getting out of the busy city and exploring beautiful nature, mountains, and rivers located just outside Seoul or even further away. All the experiences where you don't have to re-breathe the air of 300 people standing in the same 20-square-meter room, fortunately for us! So this year, we took up camping. We've been talking about it for years, but now was the perfect chance to do it. It does take some preparation to go camping, so our weekend trips were usually simple trips to parks or similar locations. When we do go camping, it is absolutely great. There

is no pandemic on the beaches we sometimes camp by, nor is there a pandemic in the forest where we like to pitch our humble not-so-water-proof tent; it is a pure, pre-pandemic vacation feeling, and the amount of beautiful camping spots in Korea is countless!

Most of our life takes place in Seoul, so these little trips are mental oases that we need to re-charge after Seoul's lightning-fast life has drained us. I love Seoul, but it's a monster that lives off your soul. It will turn you into a suit-wearing zombie sooner than later if you don't refuel your heart and mind now and then.



But most of our life is centered around work, kindergarten, and what to eat for dinner. Naturally, the kindergartens are trying to cater to these loving parents by ensuring top safety. Lily's kindergarten is no exception. This means no adult, except for the staff, is allowed entry; we hand over our children at the entrance, and before that, we fill out a form in which we are supposed to inform them about our whereabouts since we left kindergarten the day before. A teacher opens the door, just enough to let Lily in. Maybe this is done to make sure I don't sneak in with her... I don't know if that happens a lot?!

The teacher checks her temperature on the forehead with a handheld thermometer. Lily gets into the entrance area, takes off her shoes, and walks to the heat sensing flir-like (thermal camera) setup, which looks like a robot that has been scaled down to match a 4-year-old's height. It has a big tablet-like display on the front and the camera that captures your face as you approach. There is a circle on the display, and you have to align your face with the circle so that it can accurately do another temperature check. Once done, it will loudly inform you, in a robotic voice, that your temperature has been checked. Then you can pass.

I continue going to my office where I meet a similar setup. Like before, when entering Lily's kindergarten, I have to fill out a form, informing the Corona-team at my workplace about my whereabouts since the day before. If I don't, the gate will loudly and very non-discreetly reject my access, and five security guards will make sure that I understand.

After work comes our biggest struggle; what to eat for dinner. Like any other family, whether you live in Korea,

Sweden, or Brazil, deciding what to eat for dinner is the most difficult part of life. Fortunately, Korea might have the most well-developed delivery service in the universe, and the pandemic has made delivery an even more attractive option compared to going out for dinner or even to the supermarket. We still have to agree on what to eat for dinner though, so some things remain the same despite the pandemic.

Vincent Sung Verstraeten

Belgian, freelance photographer & writer, chef

In less than a year, since the virus peaked in March 2020, I became one of the millions of 'victims' who lost their job. Back in mid-March 2020, I was living happily in Thailand for the past 10 years (from 2010 to 2020) while being close to my son, Zen (8 years old), who lives in Koh Samui. This all changed very quickly. As soon as Thailand started to impose very restrictive 'emergency decrees', with several months of complete lockdowns and curfews, thousands after thousands started losing their jobs as the most affected was the Travel and Tourism sector.

After becoming jobless and using up all our savings for four months, it was time to find alternatives for our family's survival.

At the end of July 2020, I decided to come back to Korea and seek alternative ways to work as it seemed that South Korea had managed to contain the pandemic effectively. There were almost no or few drastic lockdowns, restrictions, or curfews. Businesses were running effectively with the "new normal" regulations. Infection and death cases were (and still are) very low compared to other countries.

As my main activity involved lots of traveling to deliver time-critical parcels, sometimes medical supplies or even COVID-19 tests, I was deeply affected by the mandatory home-quarantine of 14 days each time I flew back to Korea after delivering urgent commercial or medical goods, mostly to the USA and Mexico. The first quarantine back in August was pure hell! Being orphaned twice, once when I was abandoned in Busan at around 2 years old, and the second time when my adoptive Belgian-French mother died with my stepfather in a car accident back in 1998, it felt like I was literally in jail. The studio room that I had rented

on Airbnb barely had enough space for a bed, a small bathroom, and a small terrace with the boiler and A/C system. I was confined between 4 walls for 2 weeks. I did not have my own place back then, and it took me 2 months to find a proper apartment in Seoul to rent.

Day and night started to turn upside down, I had numerous suicidal thoughts and felt very lonely. I could not even call my parents since they had passed away, and my adoptive father renounced my adopted sister and me several years ago. After 30, in the prime of adulthood, I could finally admit that my adoptive family story was tragic. Of course, I am still very grateful to have been adopted to Belgium and grew up in a relatively healthy and happy family.

It takes lots of courage and a positive mindset to overcome each time you are locked in quarantine at home. It tends to push you into becoming solitary and lonely. Maybe we have a lesson to learn on being independent and how to survive "hiding in a cave." After leaving my last quarantine without a job, I decided to follow my passion to cook delicious homemade cuisine under the name Mama Seoul, making take-out and delivery meals and changing up the menu to introduce Seoulites to new cuisine.

I have to thank G.O.A.'L. for providing support to adoptees living in Korea and their "emergency living kit" was a nice touch to cheer us up during these difficult times.

Stay strong and be positive! We adoptees are resilient since we have had to overcome many challenges in our childhood, especially to find our own identity in a foreign environment.



KOREAN ASSOCIATION OF ADOPTIVE FAMILY COUNSELING AND EDUCATION

AFFILIATE ORGANIZATION: KOREAN COUNSELING CENTER FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILY

KAAFC was founded with the purpose of leading healthy adoption practices and healthy adoptive families with the approval of the Ministry of Health and Welfare. It is a non-profit organization of adoptive families, counseling and education specialists, social workers, and donors. It also has an affiliate organization, Korean Counseling Center for Adoptive Family, which is responsible for professional counseling before adoption as well as assistance post-adoption.

Since the end of 1999, a movement for public adoption began in opposition to the long-lasting secret adoption culture in Korea. Many adoptive families in Korea experience extreme prejudice and discrimination because of a cultural atmosphere that did not accept diversity along with a focus on blood relationship in the family. Due to the exposure of the real lives of adoptive families that were hidden behind the curtains, the necessity of counseling and education specially dedicated to adoption is being highlighted.

KAAFC pioneered providing services regarding treatment for children's development and adaptation for families that have adopted older children, as opposed to younger children. It also helps with decisions regarding adopting special needs children by ensuring sufficient understanding and preparation in the adoption process, and actively supports the families and parents through counseling and education so that a truly healing and welcoming home environment can be sustained.

In Korea, the lack of understanding and prejudiced discourse against adoptive families have disrupted adoption practices or distorted the nature of adoption. It is imperative that adopted children are brought up in

a safe and healthy home environment, that adoptive families are recognized as legitimate members of the society, and most importantly, that children are not neglected in the foster care system until they turn 18.

Our organization aims to contribute to adoption within the country as well as the healthy growth and development of adoptive families through specialized professional counseling and education on adoption.

Counseling

KAAFC provides counseling services for people having difficulty making decisions regarding adoption, prospective parents going through the adoption process, adoptees, adoptive parents, and biological parents. For adults, we provide psychoanalysis and marriage counseling as well as family therapy. For children, we provide psychotherapy to help their development, and group therapy for exploring and understanding adoptee identity. Professional psychologists specializing in adoption psychology help solve problems through analyzing the subconscious dynamics of attributing every problem to adoption when individual or family issues arise, or reversely, actively denying the issues arising from adoption.

Education

Our organization provides education to foster a correct understanding of adoption and to practice adoption that is focused on the child. In Korea, there are huge issues with the low fertility rate, the separation of family units, and an avoidance of adoption as a society. The instructors for adoption education focus on respecting lives and family values, and elucidate the rights of children to grow up in a home knowing their right to information.

For the general public, it also provides education about a better understanding of adoption, against prejudice and discrimination, and promotion of adoption. For the adoptive parents, it helps foster insights into adoption by focusing on techniques for nurturing children, collecting data on adoption, adoptee identity, and techniques to handle prejudice against adoption.

Some of the programs the organization provides include:

1. Counseling visitation
2. Improving adoptee family adaptation
3. Promoting the development of children and adolescents
4. Parents' education on adoptee website
5. Group therapy for improving adoptee identity
6. Support for intra/international adoption for adults
7. Case handling for adoptive families at risk

Research

KA AFC carries out and publishes research on the relationship between the individual, family, group psychology, and adoption. By coupling empirical data on adoption with academic research in related fields such as counseling psychology and social work, we are able to provide new knowledge about adoption. This research becomes the foundation of counseling and education and tangibly improves the post-adoption services for adoptive families. Research forums on adoption along with counseling for adoptive families and their cases are held regularly, and this research is published in adoption literature and data collection.



Developing Adoption Specialists

Our organization helps develop instructors specializing in adoption education who can carry out social education and education for the adoptive parents, as well as adoption psychology specialists and counselors who can help foster good mental health and development and growth for adoptive families. They are professional specialists who work as service providers with a depth of adoption knowledge and insights into adoption practices. People who have gone through the training program set up by the corporation are certified as adoption specialists. The training program includes but is not limited to Adoption Academy, workshops on counseling visitation and adoption psychology, seminars on adoption, practical training in counseling and education, and research on counseling cases.



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“I HAVE A SECRET... I’M ADOPTED.”

Oftentimes, overseas adoptees grow up with similar narratives, and questions throughout their adolescence: “Why was I adopted?”, “What if I was adopted to a different family?”, “What if I had not been adopted at all?”



Choi Soonyoung (최순영) is a domestic adoptee from Pyeongtaek, South Korea who helps us explore a different question that might not have crossed many overseas adoptees' minds: “What if I had been adopted to a family in Korea?”

Choi Soonyoung (최순영) was born in December 1999 and was adopted at 5 months old. Her story starts in a way that many other adoptees can resonate with. She was found abandoned in a police station garage, wrapped in a blanket in the middle of December. It was so cold that her face was turning purple. The police officers who found her took her to the hospital. At the turn of the millenium, there were so many babies in the hospital that the staff was unable to take care of her. One of the officers jumped in and began giving her some milk. Since she was freezing and starving, she drank it really well. The officer looked down at her while she ate and later told Soonyoung, “I fell in love with you at first sight and wanted to adopt you.” That was the first time they met, and that officer eventually became her father.

Sometime after she was adopted, Soonyoung’s parents wanted her to have a younger sister. Even though they were planning to adopt a girl, they adopted a baby boy who was around 7 months old. Around 2 to 3 years later, they adopted another boy, and then another, and finally, a sister came when she was 8 years old.

On the way to meet her second brother, Soonyoung recalls her parents being very nervous in the car. Her mother’s hands were shaking while she drove, and Soonyoung was in the backseat with her father. He took out a big sketchbook and began to explain how she was born to another mother who couldn’t take care of her, so she came to their home, and they became a family. At one point, she recalls thinking that adoption was “I go someplace and meet a baby, and he comes to our home and doesn’t go back. He just calls my parents his parents.” She didn’t feel adoption was a strange thing; in fact, she thought all people became families through adoption.



When Soonyoung was 8 years old, her friend’s mother was expecting, and this was her first time seeing a pregnant woman. She found it really strange and awkward. Even

though she knew she was adopted, she kept asking her mother, “Am I from your belly?” She really wanted to hear that she was also from her mother’s belly, but her mother said, “I had you from my heart.” She was so confused. “Can a baby grow in your chest?! How can a baby come from a heart?” she laughs. “It was quite awkward. I think I came to learn about my adoption from that time. I mean, I thought I was a little different, and there was a difference between being born and being adopted.”



Soonyoung with her 4 adopted siblings

For many families in Korea, it was not common for them to be open about adoption. Soonyoung goes on to clarify, “There aren’t many [domestic] adoptees in Korea, and before 2000, Korean people adopted in secret.” However, her parents didn’t want to be secretive as they were happy to meet her [because of] adoption, so they were open and told others at their church. After meeting her family, 8 other families also adopted children. She also participated in a lot of meetings for adoptive families. There they learned how loving and good adoption was for them, so she wanted to share this with others. She says, “Adoption was really good when I was young.” She was proud of it and wanted to let everyone know.

Therefore, it came as a shock to her when other people didn’t perceive it in the same manner. Soonyoung told the lady who cut her hair that she was adopted, but the lady was surprised and gave her an uncertain reaction. She also remembers attending a hagwon, where it was common for friends to share secrets. She would say, “I have a really big secret... I’m adopted,” and her friends were really surprised. At first, they didn’t know what adoption was; they just thought it was having a “new mother.” Some of her friends were worried about her and would ask things like, “Are you doing too many chores?” This was one thing Soonyoung didn’t think about: how all the stepmothers in fairy tales, like Cinderella or Snow White, are mean. But some kids would say, “New mother? That’s not real.” After hearing this, she felt sad and didn’t want to tell her secret anymore.

Soonyoung talks about how even some of her grandparents didn’t think adoption was good, and they didn’t understand why her parents adopted so many kids. “Although you adopt them and raise them with love, they will betray you when they become adults,” they would say, even with her sitting right next to them. She would assure them by saying, “I won’t.” However, because of these negative reactions, she stopped talking about being adopted at the age of 12.



There were two turning points in Soonyoung’s life that helped shape her current outlook towards adoption. The first was during a domestic adoptee camp. She went to a center where birth mothers were about to relinquish their children for adoption. She felt uncomfortable being there, especially because the adoptees had to write letters to their own birth mothers. She had nothing to say at first because she didn’t have any good emotions about her birth mother. She blamed her birth parents for all the negative emotions she had begun to feel about adoption and thought, “It’s all because of them that I get hurt like this. [My mom] gave birth to me, but she couldn’t take responsibility [for me].” She began to realize that she might be angry about her adoption. During this camp, she met 5 mothers who cried a lot while looking at her and told her, “I hope my child will grow up well. I hope my child also meets good parents.” This made her think, “Maybe my mom was thinking the same thing,” which made the feelings of anger and sadness that she had go away.



The second turning point came when she was 12 years old. She met a friend who had stayed at the same facility she was in (prior to the finalization of the adoption process). While Soonyoung was adopted at 5 months of age, her friend stayed in the facility until she was 7 years old. “I was

■ DOMESTIC ADOPTEE

adopted and my life is good, but there are many whose lives aren't. I thought many kids don't get adopted or go overseas, so I have to think again about what adoption is to me. Is it good? Is it bad? How can I define myself?" This self-reflection continued well into her adolescence where her biggest issue was wondering, "Am I worth it to have a family?" She began to reflect about when she was young and how she "wanted to prove her worth to other adults... I obeyed my parents [and] I was a really good girl!" She thought, "I have to let my parents feel like it was a good decision to adopt me," but this was a lot of pressure for her. As she grew up, Soonyoung realized, "I don't have to prove to [my parents] that I am worth being a member of my family."



When asked about the fantasy that some overseas adoptees have of staying in Korea, whether adopted or not, she discusses how "it's not really good just staying in the orphanage." She says, "When the children in the orphanage become 20 years old (Korean age), they have to leave with just a little money. I heard it was 5,000,000 won (roughly \$4,542.00), and they have to find a home. The problem is that people who [leave] the orphanage put their money together and live together again [with each other]. But, in that place, a new baby is born." So this situation can continue the cycle of another child being put up for adoption or into the foster care system.



Soonyoung acknowledges that even though Korean culture still doesn't really understand adoption, most domestic adoptees usually have a good relationship with their family, but not all adoptees are able to have that sort of relationship. There are extreme cases where some adoptees even run away from home. While many adoptees accept the fact that they are adopted, others, including herself, think about adoption a lot throughout their life.

Soonyoung feels one big challenge is how Korean news, dramas, and movies portray adoptees in a negative way. Usually characterized as criminals or psychos, the media shows that adoptees will easily betray and abandon their adoptive family. In dramas and movies, if adoptees know their birth mother, they will leave their adoptive family to be with their birth mother, which is something even her own grandparents worried about. Now she talks publicly about her adoption and creates YouTube videos with her brother. She has even given a talk on Sebasitalk (similar to TEDx Talks) that has received 40,000+ views and works with other TV programs to change and challenge these perceptions in Korean society. There are adoptees, like Soonyoung, who are trying to improve society's negative perspective of adoption on social, national, and personal levels through various campaigns, such as National Adoption Day, and other media provisions.



Although there is this stigma of betrayal for domestic adoptees, Soonyoung notes how it's natural to be curious about one's biological information, and that adoptees (domestic or overseas) should not feel guilty about having this feeling. She encourages all adoptees to search if they want to, but she acknowledges that sometimes one cannot get the information he or she desires. However, the process of trying can be positive and help him or her grow.

Soonyoung says that she doesn't have a pressing desire to find her biological parents (right now), but that one day "If I can, I want to try." These days, she does think about her birth mother and doesn't want her to be sad. "Like when it's December, when my birthday is coming. If she feels sad about [me], I don't want her to be sad because I'm living a really good life with my family." She says she would like to tell her biological mother this if she has the chance. She also wants to learn about her birth or more about her biological information.

Even though she hopes her birth mother does not worry about her, she can't help but feel her own sadness in December when her birthday is near. While she was able to meet her adoptive parents on that day, the reality is that she was also abandoned on the same day. "I was on the street, and I was freezing, but I did not cry. I could have cried, but nobody could have helped me. For 11 months, I feel really good, but when December comes...I think about how I would have felt at the time [of abandonment] and I feel a little sad."



Soonyoung on her Sebas Talk, 'If There is Love, There is Nothing to Worry About'

At the young age of 21, she is reflective on such memories; "I want to keep finding myself because those memories keep affecting me. I don't know for certain if the memories are affecting me during this [specific] time, so I want to search about what it means to me and how I feel about it."



From happily sharing her "big secret" with others to feeling anger towards her adoption and everything in between, Soonyoung believes that having an adoptee

community to support her and her family has been really important in understanding her own adoption. The community is good not only for adoptees to grow up in, but for their adoptive parents as well. She recalls a time when she was about 3. "I said, "I don't like you," to my mom... And her mom went to the community and was crying and said, "My daughter doesn't like me anymore!" The parents reassured her mother that it would be okay.

However, Soonyoung's biggest support seems to come from her family and their own willingness to be open about adoption. This can be one of the "biggest problems in domestic adoption" amongst families: secret vs open. "Some families told [their kids] they were [adopted] when they were 15-20 years old." Because her family was open from the start, it really helped her. "When we grew up, we had problems, but we overcame them and worked together as a family."

Her mission is to assist adoptees as they explore their unconscious feelings and help them navigate similar issues that she has experienced. "Adoption is my life right now, and I don't want to hide it." For this purpose, she is majoring in youth education and counseling.

■ Dave Ripp

JOSÈ MARIA MALCOTTI

Josè Malcotti is an Italian adoptee from Rome. He is a leader in the Italian adoptee community and has returned to Korea 22 times. A passion for sports allows him to connect with adoptees from all around the world.

Tell us a bit about your background.

My name is Malcotti Josè Maria, and my Korean name is Park Yong-Duk. I was born in Seoul in 1972 and adopted to Italy in 1977. I grew up in a Catholic Italian family with two sisters and two brothers, all adopted. Three were adopted domestically in Italy, and two of us were adopted from Korea.

What are your interests?

My hobbies are tennis, soccer, and traveling. Through these sports, I am able to share my experience as an adoptee with Koreans living in Rome.

What are you doing professionally?

I'm a tennis instructor. I started to play when I was 17 years old.

How has being adopted affected your professional life?

I think it provides a lot of benefits. Because I am Korean-Italian, I can comfortably teach tennis to both Italians and Koreans.

At what age were you adopted? What was your childhood like?

I was adopted when I was 5 years old. It was very hard at that time because I was one of two Asian children in my area. When I was 11 years old, my adoptive parents got divorced. However, our neighbors still respected us, as did everyone at our church and school.



Do you have any memories of Korea before you were adopted?

Yes, I remember my Korean family: my father, my mother, and my older sister, but unfortunately, I don't remember their faces. I remember my Korean house with an old, black-and-white television. I also remember the orphanage and the hospital I went to.

How connected to Korea were you as a child?

I never had a connection to Korea growing up. I never met Koreans, and I didn't know much about the Korean adoptee community before 2004 when I made my first trip back to Korea to study Korean at Kyunghee University.

When did you start getting involved with the adoptee community? How has it benefited you?

It was 2009 when I participated in a trip to Korea sponsored by NIIED (National Institute for International Education in Korea). I arrived with around one hundred other Korean adoptees from fifteen different countries.

Have you been back to Korea since your first visit?

Since 2004, I have been back to Korea 22 times. I enjoy going back to meet friends.

What are your ambitions and dreams for the future?

My dream is to work in both Korea and Italy and share my time between both countries. I think I'm lucky to have been adopted to such a beautiful country, and also come from such a beautiful country.

■ Responses by Josè Malcotti



COVER ARTIST **CATHERINE DELLA LUCIA**

I am an artist and educator living in Boston, Massachusetts from Detroit, Michigan. In addition to my sculptural and ceramics based practice, I am a Lecturer in Fine Arts at Brandeis University and Framingham State University.

As far back as my consciousness goes, there are three truths at the very core of my identity that have fundamentally shaped the way I exist in the world:

I am a woman. I am a Korean American Adoptee.
I am an artist.

Our identities are constructed of things we choose and things we don't. The blurry space that exists in-between is the place where I begin creating art from. My work often deals with physical or metaphorical balance, particularly the point between two states of existence where an object, act, or memory is simultaneously present as both. Through traditional and digital sculptural techniques, I explore the relationship between impractical, sentimental objects

and their co-existence in intimate spaces (mental and physical) with the human body. What are the cultural, societal, and personal influences that dictate our own hierarchies of taste, function, and nostalgia?

In a time when space is a commodity, I am considering what it means to take up space as a minority female sculptor, while making objects that also require space to exist. The relationship between my identity as an adoptee woman and the work that I create is always present. It manifests through the opposing qualities I hope to imbed in the objects I create – solid and fluid, inanimate and sexual, precious and ordinary, modular and permanent – something that is so familiar to the adoptee experience...to be neither wholly one nor the other, but somewhere in-between.

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