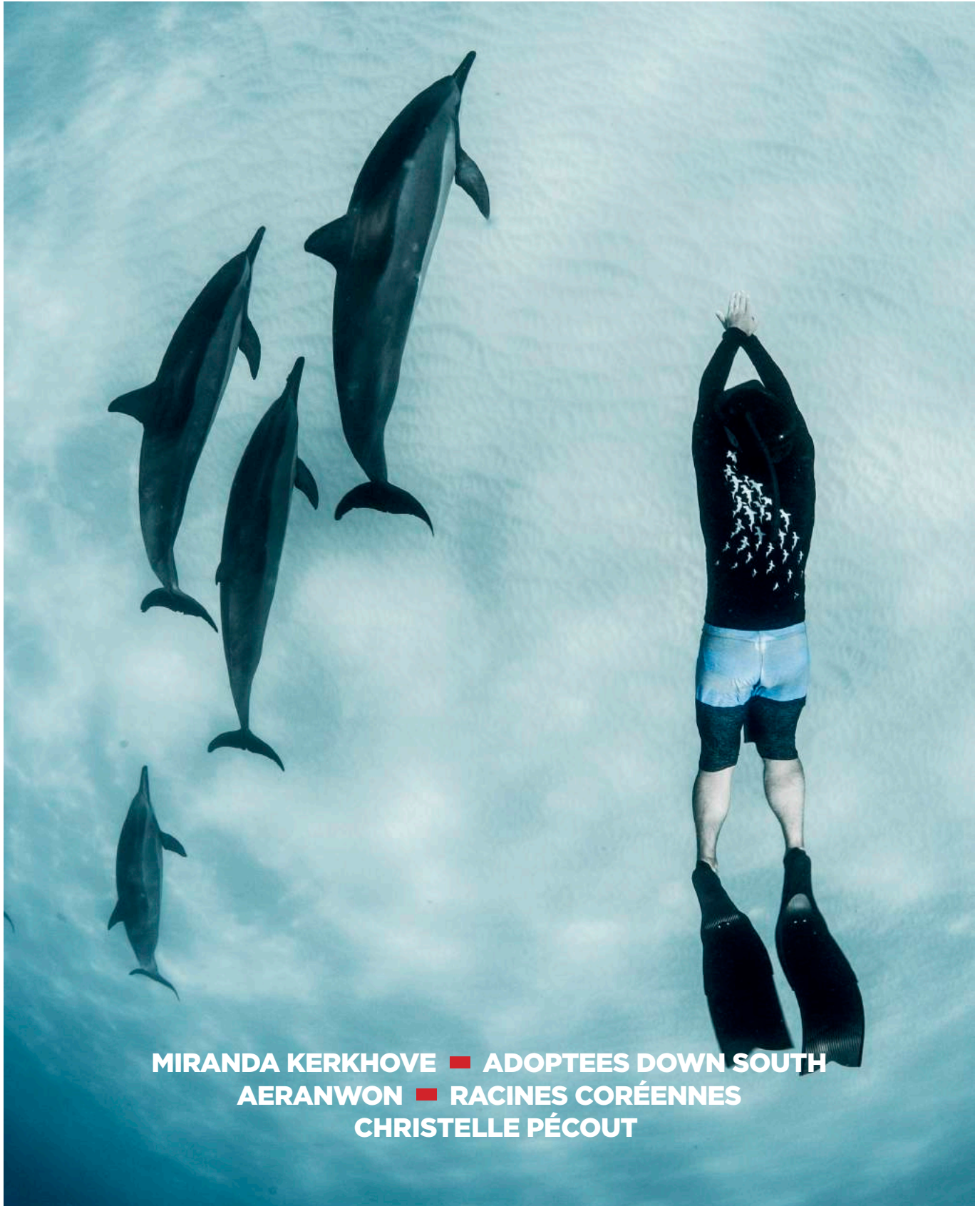


iamgoal.or.kr  
**iam**

January 2021

© Published in Korea by GOAL

**INTERNATIONAL  
ADOPTEE  
MAGAZINE**



**MIRANDA KERKHOVE ■ ADOPTEEES DOWN SOUTH  
AERANWON ■ RACINES CORÉENNES  
CHRISTELLE PÉCOUT**

# ■ TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITION #3  
January 2021

- 3 **G.O.A.'L. UPDATE**  
OUR 2020: A YEAR OF COVID-19 AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESTRUCTURING
- 4 **FEATURED INTERVIEW**  
MIRANDA KERKHOVE  
"People think each story is different and unique, but there were a lot of similarities."
- 8 **LIFE & CULTURE**  
ADOPTees DOWN SOUTH  
A 3-hour train ride to the southern coast:  
See how adoptees are living outside of Seoul
- 11 **ORGANIZATIONS IN KOREA**  
AERANWON  
Aeran Single Parent Family Network
- 16 **INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION**  
RACINES CORÉENNES  
Paris, France
- 18 **MEET AN ADOPTEE**  
CHRISTELLE PÉCOUT  
An adoptee from Paris, France
- 19 **COVER ARTIST**  
LIA BARRETT

**iam** INTERNATIONAL  
ADOPTEE  
MAGAZINE

- Chief Editor  
**Tom McCarthy**
- Content Editor  
**Kara Rickmers**
- Translator  
**YoonJin Baek** (KR)  
**Yoonsuk Chang** (KR)  
**Jessica YeSeul Kim** (KR)  
**Young Ju Kim** (KR)  
**Joanna Nam** (KR)  
**Hyunji Yoo** (KR)
- Laure Rajavtar Badufle** (FR)  
**Nicolas Beaufour** (FR)  
**Leslie Maes** (FR)  
**Christelle Pécout** (FR)  
**Amandie Poupin** (FR)
- Layout & Design  
**Didier Yoo**  
**Kara Rickmers**
- Photo Credits  
**G.O.A.'L.**  
**Lia Barrett**  
**Miranda Kerkhove**  
**Jessye Jin Joo Hale**  
**Matt Lavier**  
**Christelle Pécout**

## ■ CONTACT US

Address  
**#806, 81 Sambong-ro Jongno-gu,**  
**Seoul 03150** (Doosan We've Pavilion)

Email  
**media@goal.or.kr**

Website  
**www.iam.goal.or.kr**  
**www.goal.or.kr**

Phone  
**+82-2-325-6585 (Korean)**  
**+82-2-325-6522 (English)**

The publication of this magazine is funded by the NCRC and G.O.A.'L. G.O.A.'L. distributed this magazine to adoptee organizations around the world free of charge, but invited them to charge a fair price to fundraise for their organization and cover domestic shipping expenses.



# OUR 2020

## A YEAR OF COVID-19 AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESTRUCTURING

2020 was a strange year for G.O.A.'L. as we worked to adapt our existing programs to fit with the state of a global pandemic. The government restrictions set an indefinite halt to all social events and public gatherings that this organization had been so reliant on in the past. Not only did it restrict us from hosting events that promote and raise funds for adoptee causes, but the biggest impact was in the usual steady stream of adoptees that travel back to their home country. The number of adoptees coming to Korea for cultural experiences, language learning, or birth family searches was reduced severely. We estimate around 50 adoptees from around the world visited or came to stay in Korea in 2020. In comparison, there were over a thousand adoptees coming yearly (depending on events such as ICAA's Seoul Gathering).

Having witnessed the effect that the pandemic had on our community in Korea, G.O.A.'L.'s focus naturally shifted more towards social welfare-related support. Our data revealed that nearly 50% of the adoptees in Korea (who participated in our survey) were not a part of the Korean National Health Insurance Service (NHIS) nor had a full-time job covering their national health insurance.

In 2018, Korea made having NHIS a mandatory obligation for most foreigners. The current expense for NHIS in 2021 is 131,790 KRW (\$118) per month – employed or not! Why is this significant? This premium accumulates indefinitely. If gone unpaid, the government can even seize your bank account, and in the worst-case scenario, you will not be able to renew your visa when that time comes.

So, to assist in relieving some of this financial burden, G.O.A.'L. supplied COVID-19 support boxes (containing daily necessities and goods) to over 170 adoptees residing in Korea. We also supported 100 adoptees with a relief fund of 100,000 KRW. We want to continue this type of support in 2021.



Moving forward, G.O.A.'L. plans to become more involved with the government welfare programs that are run by the National Center for the Rights of the Child (NCRC). Our focus will be more on deported adoptees and adoptees living in Korea who are in difficult situations. There has always been a desire among the community that adoptees should oversee assisting these groups of adoptees living in Korea. We believe adoptees are the only ones who can truly know what it is like to be back in Korea and the struggles that can come up. We want to create a sustainable program that helps such adoptees reintegrate into Korean society and provide welfare where needed. Our new involvement with this type of program will put G.O.A.'L. in a position it has not been in before, so stay tuned for more updates!





# MIRANDA KERKHOVE

**“PEOPLE THINK EACH STORY IS DIFFERENT AND UNIQUE,  
BUT THERE WERE A LOT OF SIMILARITIES.”**

**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.**

Miranda's new life began at 8 months old when she journeyed halfway around the world to the Netherlands, where she grew up with her Dutch parents and younger brother. She didn't grow up with many other Asians; in fact, the other only Asians she grew up with were her brother and cousin, who were also adopted from Korea. Although they grew up together, they never spoke about being adopted or about Korea. She actually never even really thought about Korea until she was in her thirties.

Her interest began when a friend asked her to translate a Korean cookbook from English to Dutch. “I started looking on the internet for how to spell Korean words, and what kinds of ingredients were in the dishes, which I found interesting.” This initial interest inspired a return to her birth land in 2007. While on the tour, managed by a fellow Dutch adoptee with a Korea-based travel agency, she discovered an affinity for the sights and the food. This was also the first time she hung out with other adoptees. Of the group of around 20 people she traveled

with, 10 were adoptees. “I didn't realize how much I had in common with my fellow adoptees, so it was fun to discover our similarities.” Her curiosity brought her back to Korea again in the summer of 2011 when she received a scholarship to study Korean for one semester at Sogang University.

She enjoyed this extended period in Korea so much that she decided to move here in 2012. However, it was a huge shock when she came to actually live here. “It was way less fun than during the language course. It was hard to make people understand you.” Although she had already completed level 2 in her Korean language studies at Sogang, she decided to apply for the NIIED graduate school scholarship, intending to generate stable income with a degree. She applied for the PhD program, opting to work toward a doctorate in English Language and Education, choosing Sogang because she felt that the required Korean language courses at Sogang had the best method.

After applying to the doctoral program at Sogang she assumed that she would be enrolled at the language program there as well, so she was surprised to discover that the government had enacted a new policy requiring

NIIED students to enroll in a program at a different university from their language program. To her dismay, she found herself assigned to a program in Jeonju. “I had planned on taking Korean language classes at Sogang, so I already had a place in Seoul; I ended up paying two rents.” When she was finally accepted into her program at Sogang, she once again discovered her enthusiasm for studying, particularly when it came to discussing literature. Despite the fact that she had completed her Korean language program, most of her classes were in English, requiring her to use her hard-earned Korean skills in only two mandatory classes.

It took Miranda six years to finish her PhD, which she finally received in 2018. After she graduated, she intended to spend a well-deserved “gap year” planning her future. Instead, she found herself working, and continued to work as a teacher for InKAS’ low-income English program, a part-time role that she began while in her PhD program. To further make use of her degree, she also teaches at English camps in the summers and winters, a time when many Korean parents decide to send their children to intensive programs between school terms. While she finds it fun to work with children and apply her academic efforts, she actually spends most of her workweek putting her native Dutch to use.

Since high school, Miranda has found herself enamored with English books and television. Years later and thousands of kilometers away, she now finds herself making a living from her hobby. Working as a freelancing subtitle writer, she translates for Dutch television and movies. This job has granted her flexibility and freedom to get the most out of her time in Korea. It also suits her perfectly. “I like to work with language, but I’m not really very original; I’m not writing things myself. It’s nice to work with language. You can think of different ways to say things.”

With a resume bolstered mainly by freelancing roles, repatriating to Korea was quite simple for Miranda, and in some ways greatly beneficial. Her subtitling work requires only a stable internet connection, so she is able to work from anywhere. She also discovered that for Dutch citizens who live out of the Netherlands for more than eight months, the government requires them to pay taxes to their host nation. Upon registering herself and her translation services as a company, she was pleased with the financial implications.

“Taxes here are a lot cheaper than in the Netherlands, so it was not a bad thing to do.” Of course, nothing in life is truly complication-free. After registering herself as a one-

person company, she found that Korean law required her to be paid into a Korean bank account. To cut costs, Miranda opted to send invoices to her clients quarterly. She also discovered that there were certain domestic legal requirements for registering herself as a business.

“Many Koreans don’t claim all their income on their taxes, so a lot of landlords and house owners do not claim all their rent from tenants.” Consequently, Miranda has to make sure she lives in a place that claims all of her rent; otherwise, the tax office will discover that the landlord is generating income from her rent and issue a tax bill. This unusual situation means that the least complicated housing option is typically an officetel, a type of studio apartment or loft that is also commonly used as a small, registered office. However, because of the dual-use nature of these facilities, they tend to be more expensive than a typical one-room apartment. “It’s tricky to talk to a Korean about my situation because they are not used to exceptions.” When she explains the situation, the landlords just assume it is a straightforward residential lease, so she has to be very explicit and fluent in knowing the relevant terminology in Korean to ensure that her situation is allowed. “In my house in Kyungridan, they first told me it was okay, but then once I lived there, they said no, so these types of things are quite challenging.” She has never moved this much in her life, living in nine different apartments in her nine years in Korea.



Before COVID-19, Miranda lived a pretty normal life. As a freelancer, she tries to keep normal working hours and work only during the week, occasionally finds herself working on the weekends to meet deadlines. “The Netherlands is 7-8 hours behind depending on daylight savings time, so when I’m expecting work, I might be working until 1 or 2 AM, or just waiting for work to come until that time.” She would meet friends after work and attend a lot of social events with adoptees. “Most of the time when you hang out with foreigners, it’s just the same actually... You just eat, and then you drink and then you

## ■ FEATURED INTERVIEW

drink more and maybe you go to noraebang (karaoke room) and then maybe you eat some more and go home.”

Becoming a doctoral graduate didn't demarcate the end of her curiosity. Miranda has continued to expand her knowledge and skillset, taking ballet classes, yoga classes, Italian, more Korean, and a tea ceremony class. “I started learning how to play the guitar last year. I'm not sure if I can say I can play it, but I'm trying. I started classes. It's fun. I'm not sure if my neighbors like it, so I try to keep it to daytime hours. My apartment walls are okay, but upstairs. I guess the ceiling is not that thick.”



Miranda performing the traditional Korean tea ceremony.

While the ballet and yoga classes were taught in English by foreigners, she decided to take the tea ceremony class as a way to learn tradition-specific Korean. “It seemed like a good idea at the time to learn more Korean by taking a class in Korea instead of taking language classes... The practical part was a lot of fun, but then after one year, we started doing theory and I had no idea what they were talking about.” She learned how to do the ceremony for loose leaf tea and powdered green tea, learning the traditional Korean ceremony. “It was a lot of fun because even though I didn't understand half of what they were saying, I just watched them and copied what the teacher did and I was fine.” However, the third semester resembled a Korean university class more than a cultural experience, spending four to five hours listening to a lecture given by a different teacher each week, all of whom appeared to be disinterested in answering questions or furthering their students' knowledge. Amid the PowerPoints packed with unfamiliar hanja (Chinese script) and technical terminology, Miranda found herself falling asleep for half of the lessons, so she decided not to continue. “I learned a lot of technical words that I will probably never need to use again in my life.”

Like most adoptees who have made their way back to Korea, the curiosity of finding their birth parents cannot be avoided. “I have looked for my birth parents, but I have not found them... I've done the DNA test and I've been on

the KBS TV show, but I'm not really adamantly looking or searching for them, so that doesn't help.” However, she has learned that she actually has two Korean names. The first time she went to her orphanage in Busan, they told her they had no files on her adoption. She decided to contact her adoption agency, KSS, who in turn contacted the National Center for the Rights of Children [KM1] (NCRC, the organization that, in 2019, absorbed Korean Adoption Services, or KAS), to see if they received her files, the standard course of action for orphanages no longer facilitating adoptions. “I thought maybe if they find some papers that are not in a file or couldn't be placed that it could possibly be me.” At the time, she believed her Korean name was Hwang Hye-Jung (황혜정).

To her utter shock, she received an apology email from the NCRC; according to their records, “Hwang Hye-Jung” had actually been picked up from the orphanage by her grandfather. The NCRC proceeded to cross-reference that girl's birthday with other girls in the orphanage at the time, and they found one: Kim Ji-Young (김지영). “I'm not sure if that's the right deductive method to say that is me. If I'm not the official girl I was supposed to be, I could be from anywhere in Korea, who knows?” Miranda doesn't believe that all this confusion was purely coincidental, and thinks there may be something deliberate in their actions. She thinks it would be helpful for adoptees to gather as much information as possible to present a uniform narrative. “People think each story is different and unique, but there were a lot of similarities and methods that were used [at that time for adoption].”

Miranda continues to share her thoughts on adoption and her concerns regarding records. However, she believes that “I'm never really an extremist in any way, so I'm not really an activist.” She thinks a lot more can be done to prevent adoption, or to prevent situations where children are born who are not wanted. While it may seem like the obvious solution, it would also have to include culturally-controversial issues like abortion and sex education in school.

“There are many children who are being born out of wedlock... [but] why would that be a problem?” She does believe Korean society is slowly changing, but she doesn't know if it's changing in the right way. “People just don't get married or have kids anymore instead of thinking about it in a different way.” She doesn't think it is feasible to stop adoption because there will always be children without parents, but she believes that adoption should focus more on the children instead of the parents. She also takes issue with the stigma around adoption in Korean society. She shares the story of a Korean acquaintance who adopted



a Korean child. However, due to the cultural perception of adoption among Koreans, the child still doesn't know they are adopted.

"It's going up and down whether I like Korea or not. I'm still trying to adjust to their last-minute changes or their last-minute plans, and not keeping you in the loop about things unless you ask for it. I think Dutch people, and me in particular, are the complete opposite," she reflects on a cultural issue addressed by previous interviewee Cory Ha. For adoptees who want to come live in Korea, she advises that they prepare themselves for what life has to offer here, which, in some cases, is not a lot. "A lot of people just end up here without any means of getting by or any plan; then they struggle." For her, having social gatherings without any particular reason is nice, but these events have become non-existent due to COVID-19. "Sometimes it's good to have an organization that can provide you with some kind of family or friend feelings when you live abroad... I think it could help with the whole community." Like many other adoptees (including Guillaume Duret, IAM's first interviewee), she thinks it is difficult to get close to Koreans and make close friendships.

Miranda had a close Korean friend when she first arrived who helped her a lot. However, when Miranda's Korean got better, they got into an argument about her friend's sister who had a baby boy. Her friend said that boys were always more active than girls. Miranda responded by stating that it's also the way parents treat their children and what they allow them to do instead of adhering to gender stereotypes. Sadly, they never met again after that. "I bond with people who can tell me about good things and bad things and they can confide in me and I can confide in them." She is also, even after all this time, uncomfortable with the hierarchy system that Korean society insists on keeping in place. When pressed for an example, she recalls how the oldest member of a group is expected to pay for meals, coffees, or drinks. This has led her to believe that there is a lack of depth in the friendships that are made here.

Miranda has never made any regular plans to go back to the Netherlands; typically returning for a funeral or some type of family event. "It sounds really bad. It turns out I'm at an age where family members pass away, so I've been back every two or three years." She says that these trips back home are stressful because it feels like she's just rushing to meet everyone and doesn't have any time to enjoy being back; no time to go to the places she likes or eat the food she misses from back home. If she could have a normal week-long trip following her own itinerary, she would like to visit more frequently. Part of the reason she

doesn't go back often is because it is expensive. "Being a freelancer, every day you don't work, you don't earn any money." Miranda's Dutch mother came to visit her in Korea once, but that experience was laden with its own difficulties. "It was kind of a clash of cultures. She really didn't like any of the food. She wasn't interested in any of the culture. She didn't buy anything at all Korean, so I'm not sure if I really liked her [being] here." Fortunately, the occasion for the trip was not merely a visit, but to see Miranda get married, so there were plenty of people who could keep her mother preoccupied while Miranda was busy preparing for the wedding. Although she has been married, and divorced, she doesn't really believe in marriage. "I think if you are living together, it is the same thing. Since living here, [I have found this] is quite a Dutch idea or concept because a lot of Koreans do not see it that way. A lot of my [non-Korean] friends are not married and have kids and that is perfectly normal."



Miranda never planned on staying in Korea for this long. She has done some temple stays and has traveled all around the country. She has even been to the Diamond Mountain Resort in North Korea before they closed it. She has seen all the major cities, visited her orphanage, and travelled to the DMZ. She feels like once you have seen all the famous sites, a lot of cities in Korea will start to look the same. "I do like mountains a lot, but I would recommend going to a mountain that is not that popular because otherwise you are walking up in line between all the other Koreans." She also really loves Jeju Island in the summer or spring because the whole island smells like oranges. "I still remember getting off the plane and smelling that scent of oranges. Every few months there's this flare of thinking, maybe I should do something... and then it passes. With COVID-19, I just stay home all the time, so I've been thinking that maybe I should go back to the Netherlands, but who knows."

■ Jill Sanders

# ADOPTEEES DOWN SOUTH

A 3-HOUR TRAIN RIDE TO THE SOUTHERN COAST:  
SEE HOW ADOPTEES ARE LIVING OUTSIDE OF SEOUL



[\\*Read full articles at iam.goal.or.kr](http://iam.goal.or.kr)

## Jessye Jin Joo Hale American, Research Scientist

You may have heard of Busan, well known for its vibrant beaches, skyscrapers, and big city life. Busan is Korea's 2nd largest city, following Seoul. If you're like me, you may not have heard of Yangsan, which is still thought of as a remote farming village by many, sitting just 18 kilometers north of Busan.

Yangsan has gone through an incredible transformation in the past decade or so. Yangsan is now home to plenty of apartments, malls, other infrastructure, and new cafes, restaurants, and 술집 (drinking houses) pop up seemingly overnight.

How did I find myself here, of all places?

After participating in a language program in Busan at Pusan National University, I got connected with someone from a biotech startup, which specializes in cancer therapeutics. The main lab and research offices were located at Pusan National University Yangsan Campus Hospital. When I got the job offer, I was surprised to hear "Yangsan", as I had visited once before during the language program. My roommate had family there, and I remember visiting a lovely park with a garden of LED roses. Fast forward a couple months, and I was living smack in the middle of my office, that park, and my roommate's parents' apartment. It seemed like fate!

While it's easy to miss home or think about the exciting life of Busanites, I do appreciate this town and the place I've found in it. Walking to work, on my right is a gorgeous mountain, Obongsan, where I've hiked and soul searched, and met some interesting characters. I can even see my favorite spot along the ridge, where a single tree stands out against the sky. To my left, is a slightly less flattering sea of apartment buildings. And just out of sight are a series of rivers and streams that boast fantastic bike paths that can take you to Busan, or even Seoul! Yangsan is a wonderful place to be outdoors.



Yangsan is lovely, and more lively than its preceding reputation as a rural farming village, but since it is built around young families and apartment living, I am glad that it's attached to the subway line. If I want to go shopping,



see some new sights, or meet friends at the beach, I can hop on at a station near me, pay less than \$2 and arrive in roughly an hour. One of my favorite areas in all of Busan is Amnam park, where fishermen and tour boats can be seen on any pleasant day. There are even dinosaurs! In addition to the views and photo ops, there is a peaceful rock climbing crag where the rocky cliffs meet the sea, introduced to me by my rock-climbing dad, Dong-Il.



Apart from my “climbing dad,” birth parents, and Kiwi soul sister, I’ve found even more family here in the Busan KADs group. I was introduced by another Korean American adoptee named Meghan before the COVID-19 pandemic. We’re a small group, but adding members slowly. We don’t meet nearly often enough, nor regularly for that matter, but I have found good friends and supporters in this group. We’re mostly American, and some have lived here a few years, like me, while others have been in Korea for over a decade or two.

We are currently 12 people total, with a few honorary members who’ve since moved away. Being a small group, I’ve really gotten to know the folks here, and I feel like I know a very intimate side of their lives and vice versa. We share a unique understanding of the challenges of adoptees living in Korea, and it was even at the apartment of one of these KADs that my mom first met my birthdad.

My friend, who I met on a Facebook Asian Adoptee group, lives in Incheon and came down to visit. We met a photographer from Gimhae, who was just added to the Busan KADs group, and we talked about everything under the sun, including the shootings in Atlanta. Under normal circumstances, especially in Korea, I don’t know if I could jump into a conversation like that with someone I was just meeting, but the shared struggle of the Korean-American adoptees at this time completely dissipated those social barriers. It’s a unique privilege of being an adoptee.

It wasn’t until this last year through G.O.A.’L.’s Jeju trip that I realized how many adoptees are living in Seoul, and by then, I had already built quite a circle of friends here. While

the temptation to go up to Seoul and work with GOA’L and the large adoptee community will persist, for now, my time and place in the world is here.

I had a lot of surprises coming to Korea, some good and some not so good. I never expected to meet so many adoptees from around the world, nor did I ever dream of meeting so many adult adoptees going through such similar experiences and making similar decisions. Being adopted has presented its challenges, but the reward has been great. I am part of a unique community that is connected through shared understanding, experience, and a predisposition to listen to each other. I’ve never felt more heard, or should I say, read?

### **Matt Lavier** **American, PADI Scuba Diving Instructor**

When I was adopted to a family from Portland, Oregon, USA, I would have never thought that my story would bring me back to Korea. I was always told that my birthday was April 18th. Fast forward 35 plus years and I finally decided that I’m going to move to Korea to conduct a Birth Family Search. The only things that I thought I knew for certain, were my birthday, my Korean name (that was given to me by the police that found me on the police station steps), and that I was from Busan. All of that changed when I landed in Seoul, South Korea on February 5th, 2016. During that month in Seoul, I spent quite a bit of time gathering information about who I was and if there was any hope of successfully conducting a Birth Family Search. Working with G.O.A.’L., we managed to put together a flyer of who and how I was doing, and how I turned out, in general. Life was brutal in that adopted family, both physically and mentally, thus the greater desire to conduct this search. When I visited Holt International in Seoul, I found out that I only had half of my records and Holt Korea had the other half.

After visiting Holt Korea in Seoul, I decided to move to Busan. As soon as I arrived in Busan, I was greeted by a university student (which G.O.A.’L. had coordinated) to show me around and take me to the police station where I was abandoned, the hospital that conducted my final medical check, and the orphanage that I stayed at while in Korea as a child. When we visited the orphanage, my eyes were opened, and I was flooded with a mountain of questions. I was told by the current president of the orphanage that my name was not given to me by the police, but rather the orphanage itself. They think that my Korean name was actually my given name. As for my birthday, that was wrong as well. I was actually

found by the Korean police on April 17th, and taken to the orphanage on April 18th, thus this was the date that my records were created by the orphanage, and not my birthday. The hospital records and notes at the orphanage state that my birthday was estimated at February 5th, and thus I had an epiphany of, "Wow, I arrived and came back to Korea on my Korean birthday".



I have adjusted well in Busan. I am currently an English teacher at two different public elementary schools. I really enjoy teaching. Though the pay may seem low (especially coming from the U.S.A.), it's actually very affordable to live comfortably in Busan and save some money on the side. Food is inexpensive and restaurants are cheap, so going out to eat isn't a problem.

I love the beach and the water, and living in Busan, I'm almost always at the beach in one fashion or another. I am also a PADI Scuba Diving Instructor and work with 씨월드다이브센터 (Seaworld Dive Center, "Busan Scuba" on Facebook). They're located at 14 Naengjeong-ro 6 (yuk) beon-gil, Jurye-dong, Sasang-gu, Busan. We are currently the only Dive Center in South Korea that offers courses and classes in English.

The diving in Busan can be great, but due to a lot of Korean divers not following the rules of the area where we do

most of our Open Water training dives, there's really not too much sea life in those waters. It's quite sad, because you will see people spearfishing where it's supposed to be a protected area for aquatic life. It makes my day when the police show up and ticket those individuals, and I wish the police would be more present, but I'm guessing they just do not have the resources to commit to the area.

The best scuba diving in Korea is outside of Busan though. If you are a scuba diver and want to advance your skills and certification, then we will take you to Pohang, Ulsan, Yeongdeok, and or Yangyang where there are huge cubes that fish swim through and about. Many different shipwrecks to explore and a giant crab statue underwater that you can swim in and around are some of my favorites. The waters are warm during the months of May through November, but from December to April, you better have a dry suit.

When I'm not scuba diving or teaching, I try to visit with fellow Korean adoptees. There are currently between 10-15 of us down here living and working in Busan. Some have lived here for 20 years and are still loving life in Busan. The mix of Korean adoptees in Busan range from people in the U.S. military, professional photographers, engineers, and educators in public and private schools. Our ties to each other are bound by our vast experiences and desire for connection. Where we came from and our histories, whether positive or negative, do not define us, but instead has carved the path to where we're going. I would like to leave you with this quote. I truly do love what I am doing and hope that each and every one of you that have read this find your happiness.

"Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful".

~Albert Schweitzer







애라원

나 래 대 안 학 교

# AERANWON

## THE IMPACT OF AERANWON'S SERVICES FOR SINGLE MOTHERS IS REVEALED IN AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR, YOUNG-SIL KANG, AND RESIDENT, HAEUN.

Aerawon is a pioneering organization that has dedicated their work to support single mothers and help them raise their children. Their mission to protect life, motherhood, and the family did not see much backing during a time when Korean society thought it would be better for mothers to send their children overseas for adoption. However, their efforts have paved the way for over 60 facilities and networks like theirs to open nationwide.

Aerawon was founded in 1960 under the name "House of Grace" by missionary Eleanor Vanlierop. She first established a facility to help provide rehabilitation and protection for young women in Korea who were unable to care for themselves. The country was still recovering from the Korean War and circumstances often left young women in critical situations. Teenage runaways, domestic abuse, and early pregnancies contributed to an increase in single mothers. So in 1973, Eleanor decided to commit her work to helping single mothers. "She witnessed the depressing and sad life of the single mothers who had to send their babies to foreign countries," says Young-Sil. House of Grace was later renamed Aerawon in 1977 after Eleanor's Korean name, Aera, which means "planting love."

Today, Aerawon describes themselves as a "one-stop service for single parents" and is the core of Aera Single Parent Family Network. It is a network of 7 different branches that help mothers at all stages of their pregnancy as well as after birth. But it took them time to develop

and receive support from the government to become what they are now. At first, mothers were only allowed to stay at their facility for 6 months. But Young-Sil points out, "they are pregnant for 10 months...when babies are born, [mothers] had to almost immediately leave, so it was basically impossible for them to raise their children back then." Young-Sil first worked at Korea Welfare Services, and in 1990 when she moved to the Single Mother's Counseling department, she found that many of the mothers wanted to raise their children, but lacked the support to do so. She was much more interested in helping these mothers keep their children, but working at the adoption agency made it difficult for her to do so.

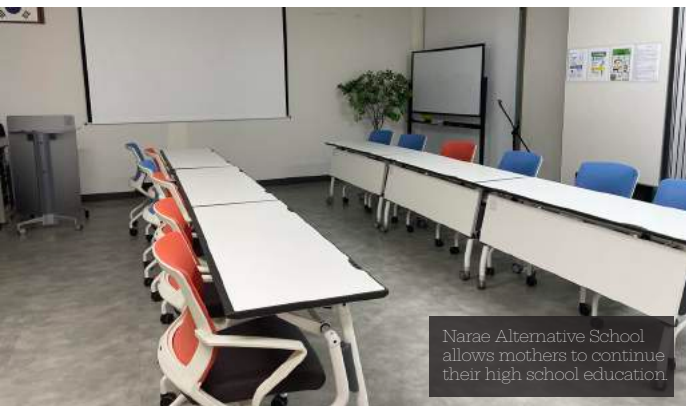
So Young-Sil decided to leave Korea Welfare Services and she found work at Aerawon, where they shared the same idea of supporting single mothers and helping them to raise their children. At the time, Korean society still had a very negative view about single mothers. "How can single mothers raise kids alone? It is miserable, and kids should be sent to better homes and mothers should just forget them," was how people thought," remembers Young-Sil. She also says how there was a lot of social prejudice against children raised without a father, which led many mothers to believe it was better for their child to be raised overseas and not in Korea.

When Young-Sil joined the staff at Aerawon, they worked to raise money to support their vision of helping mothers keep their children. They saved money for basic

## ■ DOMESTIC ORGANIZATION

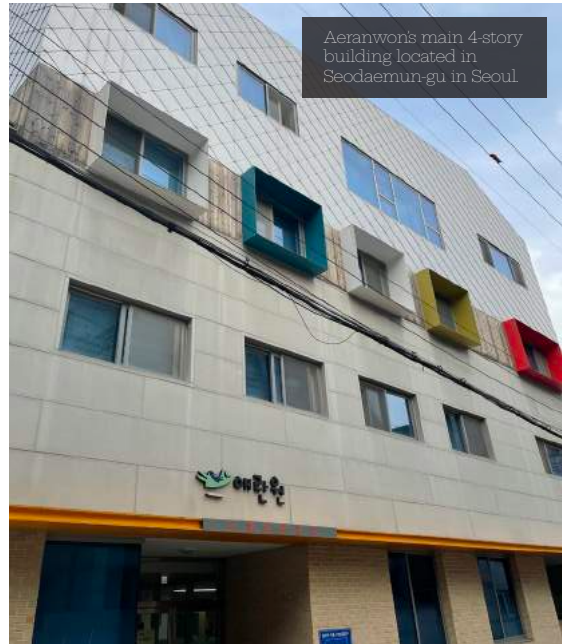
necessities like formula powder and diapers, but later on received funding from the Community Chest of Korea. With this funding, they were able to pay for monthly rent at a small facility where they could have women stay for 1-2 years and receive vocational training. In 2000, they moved into their new facility and quickly found themselves at full capacity with young women who were seeking help to care for their children.

Because Aeranwon provided childcare support, mothers were able to complete vocational training, find jobs, and raise their children. Aeranwon not only helped these mothers keep their children, but they also helped them become self-sufficient while gaining confidence and perseverance. They wanted to create a system, “a system in which the country supports the mothers,” states Young-Sil. So 2 years after Aeranwon opened their first facility, they held a seminar where mothers they had assisted came to speak. “Some moms even came from Jeju Island, their babies piggybacked on their backs.” At the seminar the mothers were overcome by emotion, crying while they expressed the gratitude they had for what Aeranwon was able to do for them. “They talked about how their babies were about to die, and how desperate they were...their kids could have been sent to different homes, but [because of Aeranwon] they could responsibly raise their children.”



Listening alongside others in the audience were Seoul lawmakers and government officials. They heard the stories of the mothers and how, because of Aeranwon, they were able to keep their child and live successful lives after giving birth. It was after this seminar that single mothers' well-being and the well-being of their children were taken more seriously by the government. Funding from the government was given to provide the building which is now their headquarters, Aeranwon.

This 4-story building is located in Seodaemun-gu, near Yonsei University, and houses mothers during their pregnancy until 6 months after they give birth. Here,



mothers are given pre and post-natal care, counseling for the baby's future, as well as vocational training for the mother's future. Younger mothers are also able to complete their high school education through Narae Alternative School, an in-facility alternative school for teen mothers. Young-Sil explains, “like a regular school, instructors come in and give lectures, and there is also a diploma for them.”

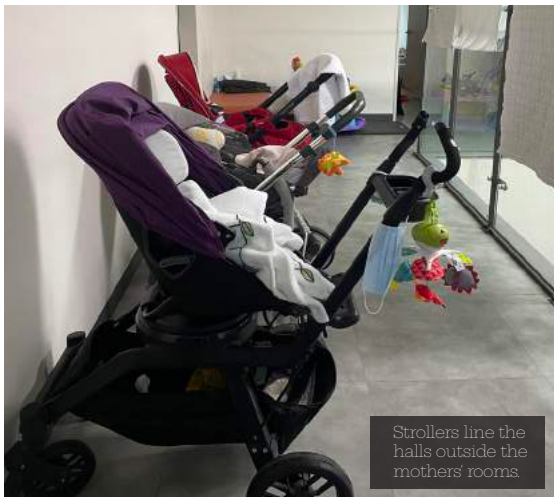
Since 2000, there has been an increase in welfare support to aid single parents in raising their children. So these days, Aeranwon mainly helps women who are in extreme situations. “About 70% of the women who come to us live separately from their parents [because of] divorce or they have passed away, so they've had a very difficult life since childhood,” says Young-Sil. One of Aeranwon's current residents, Haeun [pseudonym], talks about her experience at Aeranwon. Haeun grew up with her grandmother in Daegu, but has lived on her own since middle school. She became pregnant and when a friend, who was also a single mother, invited her to live together in Daejeon, she went. However, she was later kicked out and didn't know where to go. She was still pregnant, so she searched online and found a place for unmarried women, but there wasn't a lot of information. “I called the 1366 hotline for women (Korea Women's Hotline) and they told me about [Aeranwon].”

When she first came to Aeranwon, Haeun just cried. “When I heard the name ‘center for unmarried mothers,’ the nuance of it made me feel like I was in a devastating situation,” she remembers through tears. Mothers at the seminar back in 2002 also talked about their anger



towards Korean society because of the social prejudice that single mothers face. "At first I was conscious of what other people would think...if they would stare at me for coming into this building."

But Haeun quickly found out that Aeranwon was a safe place. She was able to feel a sense of community and belonging with the other mothers who were in a similar situation as her. "I'm one of the older residents here and seeing women who are younger than me staying strong made me feel relieved [when I first got to Aeranwon]. I didn't cry anymore..." She participated in the various programs Aeranwon offers its residents - parenting education, vocational training, and even yoga.



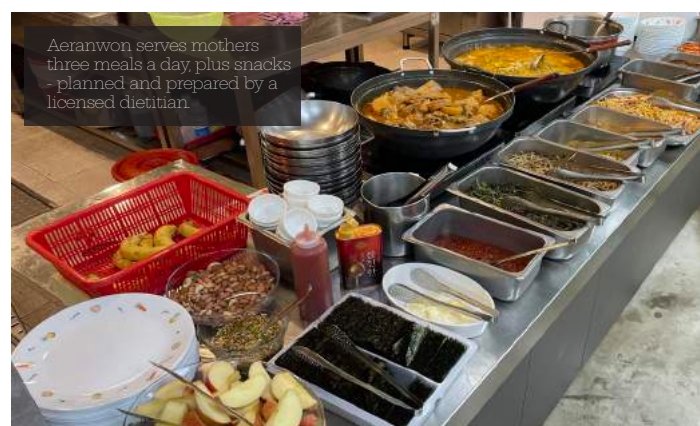
Aeranwon's network goes further to empower these young mothers and makes sure they are prepared for life after living in their facilities. Haeun also gained confidence that she could take care of her child. "I never thought about giving up my child for adoption," she says, but she did feel unsure and scared about how she would be able to raise her child. By being at Aeranwon, she was not only supported by the staff, but the other mothers as well. "If you hear stories [from other mothers] like, 'When you go to the second center after [staying at Aeranwon], they support you with this and this, and help raise your child while you study for your certificate...' and you just feel like you can raise your child on your own."

Haeun recalls this time when she was out with some of the other mothers buying baby clothes. "The attendant was making small talk like 'Oh, you guys are buying gifts for someone?'...and the other mothers were confident in saying, 'No, we're unmarried mothers,' because we had each other." Since she still lives in the center with the other mothers, Haeun says she hasn't had the chance to really feel society's gaze on her as a single mother. "I

don't know how hard it will be, but we talk about it [at Aeranwon]..." Her initial self-consciousness - about what strangers would think of her entering and leaving the building - went away once she saw that other mothers didn't care. But she also realizes that she hasn't been out with her daughter on her own, so she's uncertain about how she will feel then.

Aeranwon offers various programs and educational opportunities that help mothers make the most informed decision when it comes to their child's future. "Our opinion is that we should base the decision mainly on the child," Young-Sil says. Aeranwon counsels mothers and says, "the first priority should be to be raised by their own parents, and second, domestic adoption, and third, overseas adoption...last should be to be raised in the facility." They have mothers meet with other mothers who are currently raising their child, as well as mothers who have sent their children for either overseas or domestic adoption. They even invite overseas adoptees, who are living in Korea, to come to talk with mothers about their experience growing up overseas. If a mother decides on adoption, Aeranwon suggests mothers choose domestic adoption so the child can still have a sense of national identity.

Even though Aeranwon encourages mothers to keep their children, they ultimately leave the decision up to her. They provide resources, testimonies, pros and cons, and other information to assist the mother in making an informed decision about what is best for her child. Whichever decision the mother makes - to keep her child and raise him/her or relinquish the child for adoption - Aeranwon is there to support her decision.



Within Aeranwon's 7-branch network, they have two different types of centers mothers can go to after their stay at Aeranwon: Aeran Mother & Baby's Home and Aeran Seumter.

## ■ DOMESTIC ORGANIZATION

Aeran Mother & Baby's Home is a center that houses young mothers and their babies, while focusing on teaching mothers to be self-reliant and help prepare her to raise her child. Here, mothers receive continued vocational and employment support as well as classes in parenting and life skills. "The atmosphere of the center itself makes mothers realize that they can raise their children because help is available, says Haeun.

Aeran Seumter is a center for mothers who have made the decision to give their child up for adoption. While they also receive vocational and employment support, they also go through grief counseling. "Before the year of 2000, about 80-90% of the cases [single mothers] led to adoption," Young-Sil says. Even if women wanted to raise their children, they did not have jobs or a place to live so adoption seemed like the only option they had. But as facilities like Aeranwon began to receive support from the government, about 80% of the mothers that came to them made the decision to raise their children on their own. However, as the years went on, Aeranwon also saw an increase in mothers with mental health disorders who were not prepared to raise their child, which led to adoption. This led to about 60-70% of the mothers who come to Aeranwon choosing to raise their child.



While Aeranwon currently focuses on the welfare and support of single mothers, they hope to redefine the definition of "single mothers" in Korea. "I think the word "single" should not be misused," explains Young-Sil. Throughout the years, as they have worked with single mothers, they have come to find that there are many "social blind spots" in the system. There are mothers who are married, but live in poverty or some mothers who are divorced, as recent as 3 months after marriage. The government does not give aid in these situations, since they were once married. "I think there is too much focus on whether the mother is married or not," continues Young-Sil. "What the government should actually know is that adoption, child abuse, and the need to go to facilities [like Aeranwon]...start from a crisis pregnancy. And a single mother is not the only one who is in crisis." Young-Sil would like to remove the word "single" from the label of those they help. She hopes that Aeranwon will be able to operate as a facility where any person who is experiencing a crisis pregnancy can come in and receive support. "I think we need to expand our scope to help women in crisis situations so that they can keep their children, and to provide welfare for children."

Young-Sil does not want to just limit Aeranwon's services to women. When asked about opening a facility like

Aeranwon for single fathers, she recognizes the need. "We should start such a system... but there should be male personnel...[to handle issues more related to the fathers' situations]." She also notes that just as the government did not provide welfare for single mothers back in 2000, now they do not help married or foreign mothers. "Most of them [mothers not supported by the government] just give up their children like single mothers did in the past. They are now abandoning their children in the baby box. This is because there has been no support for women in a crisis pregnancy." So moving forward, Aeranwon is working to expand their reach of people who can receive their services.



Haeun's daughter is now 6 months old and they are getting ready to move to Aeran Mother & Baby's Home. "Because we know we have places to go after we leave here [Aeranwon]...and places where we can reach out for help to gain self-sufficiency, we are relieved." Haeun is studying to become a nursing assistant. She is also working towards obtaining a certificate for proficiency in computers and has plans to work at a doctor's office. "I like going to the mountains...I like to spend my time hiking," she says and now that her child is old enough to attend daycare, she has more time to pursue her studies and enjoy some of her hobbies.

During her stay at Aeranwon, Haeun also encountered mothers who have made the decision to relinquish their child for adoption - whether domestic or overseas. She says, "...they give birth to children without giving up and put them up for adoption with broken hearts." She can see this decision was not an easy one to make and that the parents of overseas adoptees from the past "might have felt the same...when I see these mothers I can feel that they're heartbroken." Aeranwon encourages these mothers to write letters to their children, letters that will



be sent with them when they are separated. Following is a letter written from a mother at Aeranwon who made the decision to relinquish her child for adoption.

■ Kara Rickmers

## TO MY DEAREST BABY

Mother Seo-woon Han (pseudonym)

Age 16, Aeranwon

*Hello, my baby Soo-min. The name I gave you at birth is Soo-min Lim. According to Chinese characters, Soo stands for outstanding, Min stands for agile, and Lim stands for forest. Your name is composed of two meanings: excellent talent and wisdom. I conceived you at a considerably young age.*

*When I first saw the ultrasound of you, I was so surprised, just the fact that life existed in my stomach was a new feeling for me. But since the upside-down position in my stomach, you were in posed risk, I made sure to stretch daily and eat plenty of fruit. When I was pregnant with you, I ate carbonara pasta nearly every single day. I'm really curious to know whether you like carbonara pasta too! I kept up with my prenatal education and was always so focused on you. When you were in my stomach, you'd work hard, kicking your feet against my stomach. It seems like we both put in a lot of effort towards each other.*

*On the 36th week and 5th day carrying you, it's as if you were getting ready to meet the world since my water broke the very next day. I went to the hospital immediately and after two hours of labor you were born at 5:40 am on May 22nd, 2020. 2 hours of labor is relatively short but regardless it was quite unbearable and hurt a lot. However, following the unimaginable labor I forgot all about the pain and was enraptured by you as soon as I saw your face and heard your cries. At the time you were born you weighed in at 2.84 kilograms which was on the smaller side. This made me worry whether or not you'd be able to grow up at a healthy rate. Since it was my first time being a mother, I went through trials taking care of you due to my lack of experience and skills, but I was thankful that you ate well and that your bowel movements were healthy. I wasn't sure if it was because you were a newborn or if you took after me, but you slept a lot and it worried me. Looking back on that time, I really worried about you a lot...*

*You were such a good baby that you'd wake up crying for food at dawn and I'd happily feed you your baby formula.*

*Thanks to you, I gained new experiences and learned a lot. Just as you grew right before my eyes, the days rapidly passed by. Perhaps the days passed by so fast because I didn't want to be separated from you. I took a lot of pictures of you as a baby. I'd always use polaroid film so sparingly but using it to take photos of you wasn't the least bit wasteful. Even though you will live with a new family and go by a new name after we are separated, I'll always remember my Soo-min forever and ever. Even if I tried, I could never forget your face since we look too alike. Your eyes, nose, lips, and eyebrows all take after me. You are a carbon copy of me, from your uneven eyelids, your round nose, your defined upper line peak, to the shape of your eyebrows, etc. Your long fingers and toes also come from my genes. If your personality took after me, you'd be an affectionate individual, but it'd probably be best if you didn't take after me personality wise.*

*Soo-min. Our separation is not because I didn't like you. In my heart, I wanted you to live happily in a family without misfortune so that is how I came to this decision. I really want you to live happily doing whatever you want to do in life. If one day you want to seek me out, please do so. Your mom will be waiting for you. We'll be separating on your 11th day of life. Since I'm prone to tears and have been crying every single day, you've been crying with me as if you know I'm sad. Please, please, I sincerely hope that you meet an amazing adoptive family. I truly love you Soo-min, I still love you, and will continue to love you.*

*Soo-min, I truly love you and I am incredibly sorry.*

*May 31st, 2020. The day Soo-min turned 10 days old  
Your loving mother*

[Provided from Aeran Single Parent Family Network Newsletter, December 2020]

**AERANWON**  
Aeran Single Parent Family Network

Website [www.aeranwon.org](http://www.aeranwon.org)  
Address 138 Yeondaedongmun-gil Seodaemun-gu, Seoul, South Korea  
Email [aeranwon@chol.com](mailto:aeranwon@chol.com)





# RACINES CORÉENNES

**PARIS, FRANCE**

### *When and why were you founded?*

Racines Association was founded in 1995 by a band of young French adoptees. The founding members: Yolaine Cellier, Marie Franville, Guillaume Goulin, and Karine Grijol were very interested in Korea and adoption. At the time, Korea was an unknown country in Europe, so Racines coréennes was created to learn more about Korean culture.

### *What was the reason behind making an official organization?*

There are at least 12,000 French adoptees from Korea. We are the second country with the highest number of Korean adoptees in the world. As you can imagine, it made perfect sense to organize ourselves.

### *What is your role in Racines?*

I am a member of the board of the association as the general secretary. Before 2015, I knew of the association but not the members or kinds of people in the organization.

### *What is the history of Racines coréennes?*

In the 2000s, Racines coréennes was a member of an official consulting group for the French government regarding international adoption. As the oldest adoptee generation from abroad, we could attest to the experience of being a French citizen adopted from abroad. We have about 130 active members, but we

are larger (around 200 people) including our family members. Of the roughly 12,000 French adoptees, many of them have been members of the association at one time.

Now is the time for the second generation, our kids, and this is the reason why so many of us are coming back to Racines coréennes. We are proud of what we are, and we want to show our culture and origins to our kids; some who are very young, and some who are teenagers or even older.

Korea is also more popular than ever, and this is another reason why people joined the association. They want to know more about the association and Korean culture. We are currently growing, and this is for the best.

### *What are some events that you plan during the year?*

We plan many events. We have at least two big events a year and our monthly lunch, which is organized in a Parisian Korean restaurant. This is for our members and anyone who would like to meet the association members. It is a wonderful time to share delicious Korean food at a central place in Paris. Children have grown up, and it is very nice to share this time with all of our families. Not every Korean adoptee has children, but the ones who do are very pleased seeing them meet other children of adoptees and becoming friends.

Our delegations in the French regions also organize events on their side. Every year, we organize events with other Korean associations in France. We have links with KOWIN (Korean Women in France), and ARCF, the Korean community in France. We are also close with other associations interested in Korean culture. We work with the travel agency Corée Voyages, based in Seoul, organizing two trips a year to Korea for members and their families. For our adoptee members, this is a good way to go back to Korea for the first time. Travelling with other adoptees can also be less stressful, especially when one wants to learn more about his or her origins.



### **What kind of services do you provide your members?**

We give information about birth family search procedures because some of our members are coming to the association to find out about it. This year, because of the lockdowns, we provided webinars. There was also news about administrative procedures, and we tried to clarify these points.

Meeting each other is the most important. This year, it was very difficult to meet in person, so we planned many occasions to meet online: Korean language lessons,

meeting time with members and adoptees from all over France, and yoga time to relax, for example. This was a success. Many of our members want to meet in person now after meeting online. Because we can talk with people far away, it is a good way to share and talk about our stories.



We also took advantage of the respite granted in the summer to have some picnics outside and to have our monthly lunch.

We also provide activities and events across all of France with our delegations. There are three of them now, and we are currently developing more. This link is very important in different parts of France. Our president tried to personally meet every delegation in different cities (Toulouse, Orléans, and Lyon). There are plans for future delegations in Strasbourg and Bordeaux, so we are still growing.

As I said, the second generation, our kids, is the most important for us. We are proud to be born in Korea, and now Korea has become very famous and popular around the world.

■ Responses by Christelle Pécout



**Racines coréennes**  
French Association of Adoptees from Korea

Website [www.racinescoreennes.org](http://www.racinescoreennes.org)

Address 100 boulevard Masséna, 75013 Paris, France

Email [contact@racinescoreennes.org](mailto:contact@racinescoreennes.org)

### **International Korean Adoptees Association**

Website [www.ikaa.org](http://www.ikaa.org)

Email [info@ikaa.org](mailto:info@ikaa.org)

\*Racines coréennes is an IKA member organization





# CHRISTELLE PÉCOUT

**As a 44-year-old comic book artist from Paris, France, Christelle Pécout is the general secretary of the Racines coréennes association board. During her midlife crisis in 2015 regarding her origins, she went to Korea for the very first time.**

***Tell us about yourself.***

I am interested in a lot of things, all very different. Last night, during our aperitive Zoom time with other adoptees, we talked about many things, such as high frequency trading (hahaha)... Really! I am really interested in submarine films, space exploration, rock festivals, art museums, going for a walk in big cities, and spending some time with friends and family. God, I miss it so much!

***How did being adopted affect your childhood?***

Being different, Asian, but growing up in a white family is not so easy in France. In Marseilles, where I was, there were not so many Asians at the time, but I didn't suffer too much from racism until adolescence. Being a French Asian woman, it is sometimes very painful, but my little sister and my cousins are also adoptees from Korea, so I didn't feel alone. But, I did miss out on the Asian identity.

***How connected to Korea were you as a child?***

I was not connected at all. I was proud to be born in Korea, but I ignored everything about the small country until this time. It developed very recently for me, in 2015. Now this link is very strong, but I built it on my own through independent access to Korean culture. I call this "my asiatude."

***When did you start getting involved with the adoptee community as an adult? How has it benefited you?***

The same year I made my book about K-pop in 2015 was when I started to get involved. You know in France, that was a very difficult year. It began with Charlie Hebdo, and it was a nightmare year for French people, especially for Parisians. But it was my Renaissance year. I engaged myself in so many ways: as a Asian feminist, as an author, and as an adoptee with Racines coréennes.



***What are you doing professionally? How did you get into this field?***

I have been a comic book artist since 2001 and have at least ten books published. I studied fashion design and comic book art at famous French art schools. I have always been good at drawing and writing. This is my favorite part: creating. I also have a part-time job as an art teacher, and I love it. Sharing my experience and art with young people is really amazing.

***How has being adopted affected your professional life?***

Well, I very quickly became a freelance artist, so it was okay, but I can say as an adoptee that I had a really harsh time becoming the woman I am today because I didn't trust myself enough. Lack of confidence...

***Have you been back to Korea? What was your first time back like?***

I returned in 2015, and that was my very first time. I had been to Japan, Hong Kong, and China, but never South Korea. It was probably THE time, and it was a blast. Everywhere I had travelled before prepared me for this country. I adore Korea. I feel very good in this country even if I have different opinions about a lot of subjects, especially as a feminist. But, I have travelled to Seoul twice since 2015. The last time was in 2019, and I can't wait to go back.

■ Responses by Christelle Pécout \*Full interview at [iam.goal.or.kr](http://iam.goal.or.kr)



## COVER ARTIST **LIA BARRETT**

Lia Barrett was born in Jeonju sometime in February 1984 (although her birthday is officially listed as March 9, 1984). She was adopted in June 1985 and was raised in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. After completing university at Parsons School of Design in New York in 2007, Lia has been on a continual pursuit of travel and adventure. From her deep-sea work in a homemade submarine off of Roatán, Honduras, to shooting world record holding freedivers, Lia has embraced the underwater world as her ultimate sanctuary.

Lia is the co-founder and Creative Director of Prawno Apparel, an ocean-minded apparel company that draws designs directly from Lia's photographs. She has been published in numerous newspapers and magazines,

including the front page of the New York Times, BBC, CNN, Time, Outside, O Magazine, ESPN, Playboy, The Times (UK), Men's Journal, and 60 Minutes. She has sat on several underwater photography judging panels and finds great pleasure in encouraging other photographers to grow and develop their craft.

In 2018, Lia returned to Korea where she was reunited with her birth parents after 33 years. Although she hasn't met them, she found out she has 6 half siblings (three to each parent).

■ [www.liabarrettphotography.com/](http://www.liabarrettphotography.com/)



