

Some memories of the 1275 Couple Blessing

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ARRIVAL

We arrived in Korea in the middle of the night, and boarded a bus to take us to the McCol factory in Yongin. We arrived in the quiet of the early hours, and the seminary brothers were shown to a large hall at the top of the stairs in the main building. We were the first ones to arrive, and we spread our sleeping bags randomly around one corner of the room.

When we woke in the morning, a group of Japanese brothers had arrived while we were sleeping. In that vast hall, they had formed a tight island, all their sleeping bags next to each other, unlike us sprawling, spread-out Americans.

At the top of the stairs outside the hall was a soda dispenser, with paper cups, dispensing McCol. It was a soft drink based on barley tea, with a rich, roasted flavor. As the week wore on, it dispensed more and more watery McCol until it produced only fizzy water, which gradually became less and less fizzy. "Das ist der mineral vater!" one Austrian brother pronounced loudly.

Up early the first morning, a few of us decided to take a look around the premises. The air outside was biting cold. Following a churning, rattling noise, we walked over to an adjacent building. Standing in the open doorway, we could see a production line of MacCol bottles hurtling along, some glowing with heat.

That was the only time we saw the machinery moving. The factory was being closed down bit by bit for the matching and blessing. The factory employees, we were told, were not members of our church. I think they had no idea what was about to descend on them. It was as if the Olympics were suddenly to arrive in their workplace, in their village.

We went back to the hall where we slept, and sat around wondering what was to happen next. The hall was slowly filling as brothers from different parts of the globe trickled in.

PRESIDENT KIM'S ADVICE

The speakers crackled and a Korean voice said "UTS man go. UTS man go." Andre Jenkins shrugged, and walked over to a phone by the wall. He picked it up, talked into it for a few minutes.

"President Kim wants to meet with us at 1" he said.

President Kim met with the group from the seminary, which was around 50 of us. He got right down to it. "Father may ask you questions!! Don't be shocked. He may ask older sisters 'Do you still menstruate? How often?'" He demonstrated by peppering one sister with such questions. "How much blood?" "If Father tells you to come, you come quickly! Don't pray every step coming slowly. This age of attendance! And don't sit in the back with head bowed. You should show you're ready to be matched! Head up, stand straight. Father asks for people, you go! Go to the front!"

People later testified that Father asked the exact same questions that David Kim mentioned.

A TASTE OF KOREA

We wandered down to the linoleum-tiled, pillared cafeteria for breakfast. The food generally consisted of rice and kimchee (of course) and surprises such as macaroni and hot dog salad for breakfast. We, being Moonies, wanted to eat Korean food. The Koreans, being hospitable, were trying to give us Western food.

I was hoping for a taste of Korean culture. I got one when a cafeteria lady came up to me while I was in line for rice and said something in Korean, waving her arm. I smiled and shook my head to say I didn't understand. So she put a hand firmly on my butt to push me into another line. Like your mom would do when you were little. Family.

THE FACILITIES

The bathrooms were down a long hallway. The brothers' shower area was enough to accommodate 20 or 30 people at a time, and the hot water felt luxurious. After a few days, it couldn't keep up. You had to go before everyone woke up to get hot water.

The changing room had cardboard boxes set in a row against the wall, each one numbered. I suppose Koreans would have put their clothes in one box, changed after showering and left the box neatly in its place.

This is not what happened when brothers from several different cultures used the showers. Within a day or two, the boxes were either soggy with water, dented and crumpled, or missing as someone took the box with them back to the brothers' dorm. The numbers were disordered or missing.

The accommodations evolved as people kept arriving. Workers laid down a floor cover of multicolored scrap felt in the cafeteria, which now became the sisters' room. The brothers were moved from the hall to two unheated rooms downstairs. One room held sacks of grain stacked high on pallets, the other room was bare concrete floor. Cardboard boxes were available to break down as mattresses.

I chose to stay in the 'Soybean Suite', as I figured being on top of a stack of soybean or barley sacks would keep me from getting stepped on as I slept, a common occurrence in our sleeping-bags-on-the-floor lifestyle. The downside was that if I dropped something, it would fall down between the grain sacks and I would never see it again. I was not up to moving 50 lb grain sacks. I tried.

You could see your breath at times in the Soybean Suite. At one point, boxes of beautiful floral patterned blankets were set out in the dorms, presents from True Parents. The Soybean Suite now looked, in the words of one brother, 'like a field of flowers'. And we were warmer. We had members coming from Africa, the Philippines and Iran.

FINDING PEOPLE

Since this was before the age of cell phones and Internet, if you wanted to find someone of the same gender you could wander around calling their name or asking people you knew if they'd seen them.

If you were looking for someone of the opposite gender, you were limited to standing by the door of their dorm and either: a) finding someone going in who spoke your language (good luck) and asking them to go in and shout the person's name, or b) standing in the doorway and yelling their name until you got a response. This last technique did not win you new friends from other countries, especially if you did it for 5 minutes late at night, as some did.

CULTURES MEET

Culture clashes, small and large, were inevitable. Brazilian brothers and sisters passed the time in the cafeteria by singing Oakland songs (pop songs with revised lyrics) accompanied by guitar, paper cups and whatever they could bang, shake or rattle. The Brazilian members danced as they sang, which shocked members from more 'vertical' countries, where members only sang holy songs, and the only approved movements were marching and swaying.

A German leader went up to a group of brothers playing cards to pass the time that they should "Throw those cards in the garbage! They are of the devil!". They looked at him blankly, waited until he left, and kept on playing. The Japanese leaders had spent the flight over playing poker on the plane.

At one point, when hundreds of brothers and sisters were passing both ways through one door, two members from the same country met in the doorway and stopped to talk. Immediately both lines stopped moving and the crowd on each side swelled. I tapped the sister on the shoulder and said "You shouldn't talk here, people need to get past." She flung her arm up and said "OK, brother!!!" clearly feeling I was being rude and stuffy.

A walk past the factory gates into the village was instructive. Village men walked with their hands held behind their backs, palms out. We didn't know how to greet them. Nodding, waving? Body language was very different. Some bolder children shouted "Hello!" and giggled when we answered.

There were loudspeakers which could be heard everywhere, playing military music or long announcements in Korean.

The stream through the village was several different colors, none of them natural. Neon orange and green are what I remember. One American sister joked "I'm gonna call Greenpeace on South Korea."

GET WITH THE PROGRAM

The assembled leaders quickly came to the conclusion that members waiting around indefinitely for Father to show up and start matching was not a good thing. This was in the times when there was no set schedule: Father showed up when he showed up, things began when he said they did, and ended when they were done. You either showed up ready for anything or you were in a constant agony of wondering and expectations.

So a series of lectures and talks was scheduled, and all members were directed to attend. Around the hall, people were grouped by language, with a translator standing in front of each group. When Betsy Jones gave a talk on the meaning and value of the Blessing, she had to pause regularly for translators in Japanese, French, Portuguese, Korean, Tagalog, etc to relay her words.

Talks on DP by Rev. Sudo (I think), change of blood lineage, etc followed. For me, I felt a little stifled to be sitting there in Korea, where I'd never been before, listening to lectures I had certainly heard before. The atmosphere in Korea is very conducive to prayer and spirituality. At one point I looked at the leaders assembled on the stage, and when I looked at Martin Porter I distinctly saw a centuries-old British officer's coat and hat on him.

WE GET SICK

The jet-lag, time change, cold weather and stress produced an inevitable result: the flu. People all around us were catching chills, and a rattling cough quickly followed. The drafty, overheated or unheated accommodations made it worse. The pharmacies in town sold antibiotics over the counter without a prescription, so a lot of people tried that. I bought some garlic and added it to every meal. Even so, at the Blessing ceremony I had a roll of tissue in my suit coat pocket for my bride to use, as her nose was running the entire time. A lot of us went home sick, something to share with those who couldn't be there.

THE MATCHING AND BLESSING

Before the matching, the leaders kept us singing holy songs while we were waiting, and spent a lot of time and effort arranging us by education. PhDs in the front, masters degrees, seminary students, bachelors', high school, and so on into the back.

I don't know how much attention Father paid to order when he arrived.

Having neat and straight rows was important, apparently. The German leader would point to a row and say "Hey, you fellows! Get organized there!" They would look at him blankly. Apparently a group of German brothers would know exactly what to do.

The matching began well into the night. Father had been matching second generation and True Children, and he had the flu as well. When he arrived, the first words he spoke made me flinch. His throat was clearly beyond raw, but he kept going all night.

Newly or previously matched couples were free to talk, eat, or wander around while the matching went on. For some, the process took days. For others, it was over quickly and you had time to talk and get to know each other.

This was not a guaranteed process. One brother decided to tell his new fiance his life story, and it was only after he'd poured out his heart for an hour or two that he realized she hadn't understood a thing he'd said.

There was one hour between the end of the holy wine ceremony and the Blessing ceremony. I have never seen so many well-dressed sisters run so fast. In heels.

Imagine: you have one hour to a) find your wedding dress along with the 1,200 other sisters trying to do the exact same thing, in a room not designed for hanging clothes (some sisters used the conveyor belt) b)

fix your hair and makeup (along with 1,200 of your sisters), c) use the bathroom (same crowd), d) get back to your designated meeting place to find your fiance among the 1,200 identically dressed brothers and e) line up for the Blessing ceremony with a prayerful, dignified and grateful attitude.

They did let us line up inside. The original plan was for us to line up outside, in sub-zero weather. Shivering, flu-ridden, we were grateful. Better the blast of dry heat inside than the freezing winds outside.

The suit I wore was one of only two that Sears had exactly in my size, and it even had my name on it. The style was called "The Harley", and it was made of thick wool. I was worried it would be too hot. It turned out to be just right.