

Up North: Chapter Thirteen - Moon Over Alaska

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Sun Myung Moon first visited Kodiak in August 1983. He came directly from the tuna fishing grounds off Massachusetts. He came to fish. Apparently he fell in love with the pristine land and waters and continued to come every summer for more than twenty years.

In 1979, International Oceanic Enterprises, a company owned by Unification Church International, was formed in order to buy and convert an oil field supply vessel into a factory trawler. When the deal fell through, the funds for the project were used to buy waterfront property in Kodiak and to build a seafood processing plant under the name International Seafoods of Alaska (ISA). When construction began in 1980, and it became known that the infamous 'Moonies' were moving into the small fishing community, there was an uproar. Most folks in Alaska, just like the rest of the country, knew about Rev. Moon and the 'Moonies' through the media. Surely most of the stories I've read or seen in the mainstream media began with 'Rev. Moon the millionaire industrialist, self-proclaimed messiah, convicted tax cheat and controversial cult leader that brainwashed young Americans' and went downhill from there. Although the opposition was fierce at first ISA stuck it out and once the plant was completed and operational the guys like Johnson Choi, Tony Aparo, Dave Rogers, Joachim Becker and Neil Shuckerow operated in an ethical manner, paid good money for fish and slowly won over most of the community.

The notorious millionaire industrialist and cult leader was not the man I knew and was able to observe first hand. Instead, I found him to be a genuine visionary who led a life of devotion to God and was a tireless worker to realize his dream of a world of peace and prosperity for all. His ocean related activities, dating back to the early sixties, seemed to stem directly from his somewhat mystical connection to the natural world from his rural upbringing and the deep poverty of his native Korea in the fifties and sixties. He went to sea to experience and commune with the Almighty. He caught fish to feed people.

In 1983, I was fishing for the giant Bluefin tuna with Ocean Challenge out of Gloucester Massachusetts. I was crewing for Dr. Tyler Hendricks on a twenty-eight-foot fiberglass boat. Dr. Hendricks was an old comrade and had just graduated as the first Unification Theological Seminary grad to go on and get his Ph.D. Of course, Rev. Moon appointed him to be the head of Ocean Church, the sponsor of the Ocean Challenge program. We had a great summer hanging out and we caught nine tuna.

Once, Rev. Moon came out to the grounds to see Dr. Hendricks. Rev. Moon's boat came alongside and I caught the lines and held the two boats together. The Rev. Moon started talking about various knots and what they are best used for. Then he talked about Ocean Church and his vision for the ocean. He explained clearly why ocean training was important. He told us that living on the ocean is more difficult than life on shore. If you train to do the difficult things at sea, those same things will become much easier on the land. When the difficult things become easy, you can lead other people. His words that day reinforced my desire to go to sea.



A couple of weeks later they asked me if I wanted to work in Alaska on the boats. I didn't hesitate. I was informed that they needed two guys and if I wanted to go, I had to be interviewed by Rev. Moon. That day I was taken by boat out to the North West corner fishing grounds to meet Rev. Moon. The interview took place via the VHF radio. Daikon Onuki translated. Rev. Moon said that if I went to Alaska I would have to carry a million dollars in one pocket and a pistol in another. I told him I was trained with firearms in the Marine Corps and I could do that. He said go right away. Me and another guy were on a flight out of Logan that night.

When we arrived in Kodiak, Rev. and Mrs. Moon and their son Heung Jin were already there and staying at the Bancroft house, a two-story single family home on Bancroft Road, that we were using as a bunkhouse. Since we had just arrived, we were invited to have dinner with them. The table sat about eight people and the menu was king crab. I put my head down and focused on eating.

Finally, Rev. Moon asked in English "Mack do you like king crab?" In Alaska, he always called me Mack for some reason.

I replied, "Yes it's my first time."

He said, "Good, eat a lot."

Later Mrs. Moon asked Mr. Choi, in Korean, who are these two guys with the bushy beards. Mr. Choi told her we were Ocean Church guys and we grew beards to hide our baby faces.

That night we all sat with the Moons in the living room and the Rev. demonstrated and taught us how to make an elaborate rig for catching halibut. He was skilled at building tackle, his fingers nimble and hands strong. The next day we all boarded float planes to Shuyak Island for halibut fishing.

When followers of Rev. Sun Myung Moon arrived in Kodiak in 1980, they were not necessarily the pioneer or outdoor types. Most of them were probably more comfortable fundraising, giving a lecture, a sermon or working in an office. For the most part, when they moved to Kodiak to build and operate a seafood processing plant, they took to the local ways like fish to water. Fishing and hunting became de rigueur for the 'Moonies.' Running a small boat, catching and cleaning a fish and shooting then butchering a deer became their new skills.

Of course, Rev. Moon's vision was much bigger than just a business. For him, the ocean, mountains and wilderness of Alaska were the ideal training grounds for church members and world leaders. Over the years, he brought church members and leaders from Korea, Japan and around the world to experience the lifestyle and to be personally trained by him. For several years, he brought Korean university professors, put them in raingear and boots and trained them on the rivers and seas around Kodiak Island. He also brought forty-three Japanese women, all married to American husbands, to work and live the lifestyle. They sacrificed their family life for six years and brought a measure of stability and success to the operation. Later, Rev. Moon sent them out to pioneer seafood businesses around the world.

Summer after summer, Rev. Moon lead the worldwide movement from North Garden, a training center that was built in Kodiak. In the process, everyone witnessed firsthand the daily life of Rev. Moon. He was

at the dock every morning at oh-dark-thirty, except in the most inclement, dangerous weather. From first light to the last light each day he labored on the ocean. The marine climate around Kodiak and the sea conditions are more often than not rough, wet and cold. Rev. Moon always went out, not in a cabin cruiser, but an open boat as close as possible to the sea. There was never a chance for even ten minutes shelter from the harsh environment. He ate rice balls, Hershey bars and Bit-O-Honey for lunch without a pause in the fishing. He urinated in a bucket like everyone else. His boat almost always came back after dark. Of course, they held dinner for him. Over the evening meal, a few were able to share some more intimate conversation with the Moons. Usually, the day's events were reported and discussed. Leaders took this time to report and seek Moon's advice and direction for their activities.

After dinner, Rev. Moon began speaking. For two, three or even four hours he poured out his heart and led the worldwide movement. It was always after midnight when he retired to his rooms for a few hours sleep. Before long he was up again and ready to go back to sea. Mr. Choi, took to sleeping on the floor in front of the Moon's door because several times he was up and out the front door before anyone else in the house was awake. We watched him live this way day after day, year after year and tried to keep up.

Another time, Rev. Moon decided to travel to and fish at many locations around Alaska. At that time, I was running the company's salmon operation at Egegik in the wilds of western Alaska. We had built a guesthouse and we also bought a late model SUV and had it flown out to drive VIPs around. When we got the word from Kodiak that they were coming, we had a Korean lady and a plane full of Korean food flown out. We then stood by.

When the call came that they were wheels up out of Kodiak, we had less than an hour to wait. The problem was the weather. We were socked in. The thick fog was right down on the deck. Our airstrip was, in fact, the beach. I was in the SUV on the beach with a handheld VHF radio when I established contact with the pilot. He couldn't see the ground. I turned on the headlights and drove up and down the strip. I could hear the plane's engines as it flew lower and lower. I tried to talk him down for more than twenty minutes. It was a moment of truth for me. Could we welcome these VIPs or would the weather steal our chance. As I look back on it now, I realize how foolish I was. Luckily the pilot had no messianic visions and decided to turn back.

Several days later they tried again and this time, the weather cooperated. I toured them around the plant and we had lunch together at the guesthouse. Rev. Moon told me that I was a lucky man because I was able to live in this paradise of ocean, rivers and tundra. He said he envied me. Of course, the main point of the trip was to fish. This was late August and what was left of the salmon run was up in the river and wouldn't take a hook. I knew this but failed to clearly report the situation. I had learned early on not to give a pessimistic report. Anyway, there was a small chance that we could snag something.

I drove them down the beach and up along the Egegik River to a spot where I had stashed a skiff. Along the way, we had to cross the land of one of the local legends, a hard-drinking fishing captain who had opened a hunting lodge on the river. We stopped briefly and I introduced them. To get down to the riverbank, we had to drive down a trail that was rough and washed out. The alder bushes scrapped both sides of the truck and no matter how carefully I tried to drive; everyone was bumped and tossed around.

The skiff was an 18-foot flat-bottomed aluminum boat with a 40 horse Johnson kicker. It was a typical western Alaska workboat. I had tried to clean it up as befitting the guests. We loaded up the guests and the gear and set out. In the boat were Mr. Choi's son, me and Rev. and Mrs. Moon. Needless to say, it was not a stellar day of fishing. By the time we started up river the tide had already turned and the sand bars became a problem. Although the flat-bottomed boat was pretty good in shallow waters, we kept running aground on barely submerged sand bars. I tried to keep to the channels but before long I was in the water pushing the boat off the bars.

Mrs. Moon was in fairly good humor and at one point called out "Oh Mack, swimming in Alaska"?

The fishing was non-existent. We moved the boat and the Moons cast again and again.

Over and over, Mrs. Moon gently urged her husband "Let's go." Her husband grimly ignored her.

To add to the good time, the mosquitoes swarmed us. Finally, Mrs. Moon made a joke using a play on two similar Korean words, moegi meaning mosquito and mool gogi meaning fish.

"We can't catch fish. Only we catch mosquitoes."

Finally, the Boss said let's go back.

Back the guesthouse we had tea and snacks and waited for the plane to come and pick them up. Rev. Moon told us that I had a special kind of character because I was a former Marine. Then he ordered me to get a bulldozer and fix that trail down to the river.

Of course, I said, “yes sir.”



Mosquitos in Alaska

But what could I really do? The land was owned by the state of Alaska and was adjacent to a salmon stream. I could borrow the equipment and do it in the dead of night. The legal exposure would be huge and the PR fallout would damage our ability to work in the area. Furthermore, during the very next spring flood, the trail would be washed out all over again. How could I explain these complexities to the big boss? But Rev. Moon had ordered it done. I have a great deal of sympathy for the church leaders who were with Moon constantly and were often ordered to do impossible things. It's the Korean way.

My most enduring image of Rev. Moon in Alaska is him sitting cross-legged, back straight on the engine cover of an open boat. No matter what the weather or sea conditions he always sat staring out to sea, unchanging. When I remember him on the ocean, I remember his unchanging posture, completely in control of his mind and body in the midst of the constantly changing marine environment. I greatly admired this persona of self-control because I myself always struggled to control my mind and body.

Although he has passed away, Sun Myung Moon has left an enduring legacy on Kodiak Island. His unique concept of blending church and ocean life and the training of young people on the ocean remain as the core of the Ocean Church and Ocean Challenge programs. Young people from around the world still gather at North Garden each summer to challenge themselves, the ocean and to meet God.