



My mother is Korean, but I didn't grow up speaking the language and never had much exposure to the history or culture—beyond home cooking that is. I've always been curious about my mother's background and that aspect of my identity. It's also one of my life goals to be fluent in Korean. Over the years, I've flirted with learning the language. I'd spend months intensely focused on self-study, life would get in the way, and then the next time I had the urge to learn I'd have to begin at the beginning again. After a month at Ewha, that cycle was finally broken.



I first heard of the International Summer College when my sister attended. She loved her classes, her new friends, the campus, and felt as if she gained a whole new family by the end of it, she said. It was transformative. I too had an unforgettable time. I'll forever be grateful that my sister said, *absolutely yes!* she'd recommend it. We have an aunt, a few uncles, and cousins in Seoul who I'd met but barely had a relationship with. There was always a language barrier between us. While at Ewha I spent my weekends with them and thanks to my Korean class, we began to communicate for the first time. I've come to understand what my sister meant about gaining a new family. It was life changing.

I thought I'd feel out of place as a graduate student in the summer program among mostly undergrads, but I never did. We had plenty in common—especially our eagerness to explore all things Korean. I could go on and on about my experience—about the things I loved, the things I learned, saw, ate, what I found fascinating—and I have. My friends can attest to it. But, it is the classes, and their teachers, and the way they helped me connect with my family, that had the greatest impact.

The first day in Korean class was beyond intimidating. We went over the syllabus and then were told there would be no more English. At that point, the little I knew of Korean disappeared on me. Words that were once easy to pronounce became sticky. It was also clear there would be a lot of speaking aloud, every day, in pairs, in front of everyone, sitting and standing, performing dialogues, getting called on randomly, when I'd only ever practiced alone in my bedroom before. It was, of course, the very things I feared that led to significant progress. I learned faster than ever thanks to teachers who made me laugh *a lot*, generous peers, and the immersive environment inside and outside of the classroom.

I also took Gender Relations in Korea with Eun Mie Lim. Her passion was infectious. She gave me several new lenses through which to examine Korea's history and present. As a creative writing student whose fiction engages with mixed identity/race/culture and emotional inheritance, among other things, her class was more than generative. It inspired countless ideas and helped me begin to understand the context of my mother's life and the way my parents met. The things we learned also helped me better understand gender relations in America by offering a counterpoint in perspective. I only wish I could've studied with Professor Lim longer. There was so much rich material and some of my most memorable experiences at Ewha happened in her class. We went on an eye-opening field trip to the Korea Sexual Violence Relief Center. We also went to the House of Sharing and The Museum of Sexual Slavery by Japanese Military. There we met one of the impossibly strong women who survived the horrors of enslavement during Japanese occupation. We read the stories of so many women who were brave enough to share them. It was an experience I will never forget.

