

APRIL 2025

UNITED ON THE ROK

Celebrating the Military Child

**OSAN YOUTH & TEEN CENTER AND
THE MILITARY YOUTH OF THE YEAR**

LESSONS FROM THE WISDOM OF DANDELIONS



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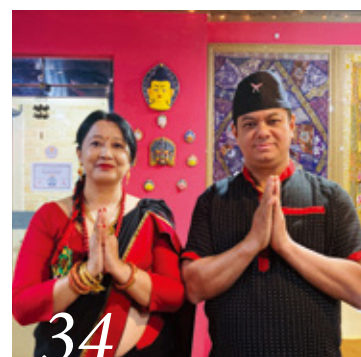


Osan Youth & Teen Center and the Military Youth of the Year

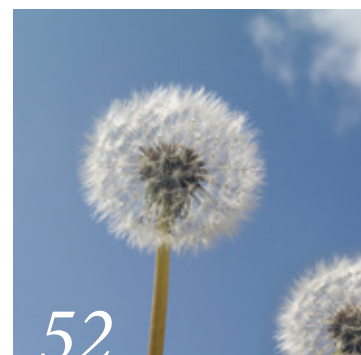
At Osan Air Base, the Youth & Teen Center empowers military youth like Isabella—2025 Military Youth of the Year—through leadership programs like Keystone and a strong focus on service, growth, and community.

Cover: In honor of the Month of the Military Child, children from Humphreys and Osan gathered at Pyeongtaek's Naeri Cultural Park to celebrate their unique journey and bright futures. This joyful moment, captured by photographer Anna Lonborg, showcases the energy and creativity of our military-connected youth.

Children are the dreams of today and the leaders of tomorrow.



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Lessons From the Wisdom of Dandelions

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UNITED ON THE ROK

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United on the RoK Magazine is a magazine with a military community focus that is distributed to United States Forces Korea installations within the Republic of Korea.

This magazine aims to connect readers to the diversity of our communities and showcase what South Korea has to offer from culture and travel to food and family, and more. Contents of *United on the RoK* are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the United States Government, the Department of Defense, or Oriental Press. All content within *United on the RoK Magazine* is written by non-paid, volunteers within the military-connected communities across the RoK. Articles within *United on the RoK* are written independently and non-sponsored, with no monetary compensation or products received in exchange for the author's opinions, reviews, or mentions in the magazine.

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A whimsical New York City scene captured the intersection of the US and Korean cultures in the Songnan Entertainment District (S.E.D.) in Osan, one of many vibrant murals found throughout the area. Photo captured by Sierra Beaton.

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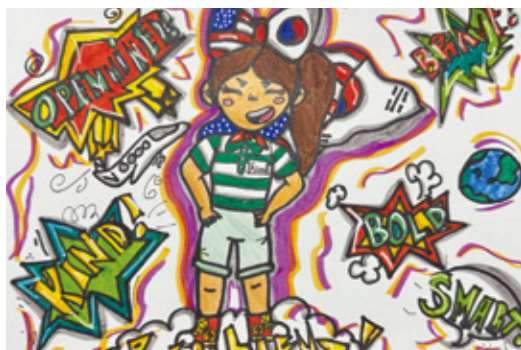
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

April has arrived, and with it comes an opportunity to honor and celebrate the most courageous members of our military community—our Military Children. As a mother to a military child who has navigated multiple deployments, PCS moves, and multiple OCONUS duty stations, I understand the unique challenges and victories that come with being part of an active-duty Army family. Though it isn't always easy, the strength and adaptability our children show in the face of constant change is truly inspiring.

In recognition of the Month of the Military Child, we've put together a series of stories, contests, and highlights to celebrate their sacrifices, growth, and achievements. These young heroes genuinely deserve our attention and admiration, and we are excited to share their stories this month in United on the RoK.

Diamonds in the Rough: Lessons From the Wisdom of Dandelions

As military families, we face many obstacles that require us to adapt and thrive in new circumstances. In this article, our author draws life lessons from the military child, the humble dandelion—a symbol of strength, growth, and the ability to thrive even in harsh environments. Like dandelions, military families and children have a unique ability to make the most of wherever they are planted.

PIEF's Pyeongtaek 101: Your Support for Thriving in Korea

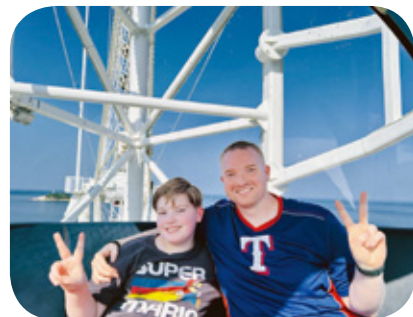
Moving to a new country can be overwhelming, but the Pyeongtaek International Education Foundation (PIEF) is here to help! This article highlights PIEF's resources, from language support to cultural activities, ensuring military families can feel at home and thrive in Korea.

Celebrating the Military Child: Recognizing Their Sacrifices and Achievements

Our military children make incredible sacrifices and accomplish amazing things, often behind the scenes of our own challenges. This piece honors their courage, strength, and the critical role they play in military life. It's a reminder to take a moment to appreciate their contributions and celebrate their achievements.

Using Your Voice Beyond the Ballot Box

Civic engagement extends beyond voting. In this article, we explore how you can continue to make a difference by



actively participating in your community, advocating for change, and using your voice to positively impact those around you—not just during elections but all year round with the NDAA and the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

Month of the Military Child: Photo and Poetry Contests

We are thrilled to announce the Month of the Military Child Photo and Poetry Contest. The military communities throughout Korea were showcased by our military-connected children in the form of still images and the written word. These pictures and poems reflect the unique experiences of these children, and we are celebrating their creativity and the bonds that hold them together, no matter where they are stationed. Check out our winners and be inspired to make some memories with your own family.

Into the Heart of Borneo: A Riverboat Adventure to Meet Orangutans and Other Jungle Wonders

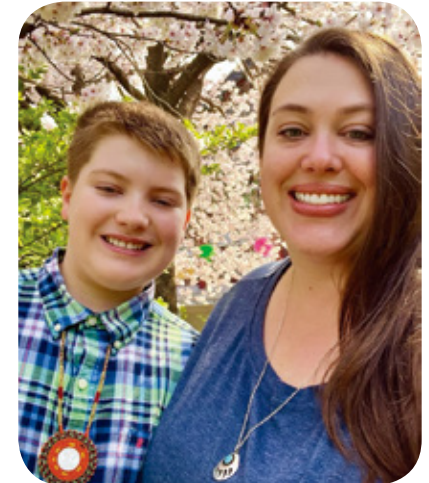
For those dreaming of a breathtaking adventure, join us as we journey through the jungles of Borneo. This feature takes you on a riverboat expedition to meet orangutans and discover one of the world's most biodiverse ecosystems.

Purple Up! with Ube Crinkles: A Sweet Taste of Home and a Pop of Purple for Spring

What better way to celebrate the Month of the Military Child than with a delicious treat? This month, our author shares a family recipe for Ube Crinkles, a Filipino-inspired dessert that's a sweet taste of home and a colorful nod to the purple we wear in support of our military kids. Let's bake together and bring a touch of joy to our spring!

As a mother to a military child, I know our journey is filled with challenges and achievements. It's not always simple, but the connections we create and the support we offer each other make every success worth celebrating. I hope this United on the RoK Mag issue brings you inspiration, encouragement, and a deeper understanding of the unique experiences of being part of a military-connected family. Let's take this month to honor our military children and all military families' dedication and remarkable spirit.

Warm regards,
Jetta Allen
Editor in Chief
United on the RoK Mag



LIVE MUSIC&ARTS

Events & Festivals



APR16-25

Coldplay : Music of the Spheres Delivered By DHL

Goyang Stadium
globalinterpark.com



APR18-27

Universal Ballet Giselle

Seoul Arts Center, Opera Theater
globalinterpark.com



APR20

Voice of phantom with La Poem

Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



APR25-26

EDC Korea

Inspire Arena
globalinterpark.com



APR29

Orchestre National de France

Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



APR30-MAY06

Seoul Spring Festa
WONDER SHOW

Seoul World Cup Stadium
globalinterpark.com



MAY03

HIPHOPPLAYA FESTIVAL 2025

KINTEX Exhibition Center 2
globalinterpark.com



MAY05

Ghibli & Disney OST Concert

Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



MAY17

Hans Zimmer Live

Inspire Arena
globalinterpark.com



MAY23-25

Seoul Jazz Festival
PAT METHENY: DREAM BOX/
MOONDIAL TOUR

GS Arts Center
globalinterpark.com



JUN13

2025 Yuhki Kuramoto
Concert

Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



OCT21

OASIS Live '25

Goyang Stadium
globalinterpark.com



MAR07-DEC31

Changgyeonggung Palace
Illuminates with Moonlight
Lotus Show

- Venue: Area of Chungdangji Pond at Changgyeonggung Palace
- Inquiries: +82-1522-2295
- Operating hours: 19:00-21:00 (Hours subject to change)
- Fees: 1,000 won

Starting March 7, 2025, Changgyeonggung Palace offers Moonlight Lotus Show, an enchanting media art show set against the serene backdrop of Chungdangji Pond. Following its enthusiastic reception as a special program at last year's Royal Culture Festival, it has become a regular night tour program, inviting visitors to witness the magical fusion of digital media art, history, and nature. The event features eight captivating themes, showcasing the palace's scenery through stunning media art facades.



APR08-MAY06

2025 Tae'an World Tulip
Exhibition

- Venue: Korea Flower Park
- Address: 400 Kkotjihae-an-ro, Tae'an-gun, Chungcheongnam-do
- Website: koreaflowerpark.com
- Inquiries: +82-507-1497-5536
- Operating hours: 09:00-18:00
- Fees: Adults 14,000 won / Senior citizens & Groups 12,000 won / Children & Teenagers 11,000 won

Tae'an Tulip Park presents the largest flower festival in Korea and offers excellent photo opportunities. The festival venue is divided into sections, which are decorated in different styles according to the annual theme, allowing visitors to enjoy the sight of colorful tulips among creative and fun backdrops.



APR25-MAY06

Hampyeong Butterfly Festival

- Venue: Hampyeong Expo Park
- Address: 27 Gonjea-ro, Hampyeong-gun, Jeollanam-do
- Website: www.hptff.or.kr
- Inquiries: +82-61-320-2238

The arrival of spring, blooming flowers, and fluttering butterflies signal the start of the Butterfly Festival in Hampyeong. The festival features exhibitions on flowers, butterflies, and insects, along with cultural and art performances highlighting environmental themes. At the Butterfly Ecology Center, visitors can view fascinating butterfly and insect specimens from around the world. Popular eco-activities include kite flying, visiting the dairy farm, and playing traditional folk games. A beloved family activity is catching butterflies in small bottles and releasing them into the flower gardens. The festival also offers a lively food market and special performances on Children's Day.



MAY03-11

Mungyeong Chasabal Festival

- Venue: Mungyeongsaejae Provincial Park
- Website: www.sabal21.com
- Inquiries: +82-53-253-4729
- Fees: Free

Home to many ceramic masters and artisans, Mungyeong holds the Mungyeong Chasabal (Tea Bowl) Festival every year to honor and develop traditional Korean pottery and ancestral craftsmanship. The festival holds an exhibit with more than 200 kinds of high-quality and high-end ceramics and an online auction of luxury tea bowls. There is also a performance, "A Day of a Mungyeong Potter," in which craftsmen tell stories and provide explanations behind their tea bowls to add fun and content to the festival. Visitors can mold their own clay and make tea bowls, and children can partake in various programs.



MAY02-06

Boseong Green Tea Festival

Area of Korean Tea Cultural Park & Boseong tea fields
www.teafestival.kr



MAY16-25

Gokseong International Rose
Festival

Gokseong Seomjingang Train Village
www.gokseong.go.kr



ONGOING -JUN08

JUNJI ITO Horror House

DUEX Busan
globalinterpark.com



JUN14-15

2025 World DJ Festival

Seoul Land
globalinterpark.com

Hey You, Daegu!
Here's the news in Area IV

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Who is eligible? Army families and other military families expecting a child or with children from birth to 36 months of age are eligible to participate in all the services offered - FREE OF CHARGE!	Location: Army Community Service New Parent Support Program Soldier Support Center, "Camp Walker" Bldg 330, 2nd floor, Suite 220	Operation Hours: Monday - Friday 0900 - 1600 ** Some visit hours are flexible** *** Travel to Camp Carroll upon request***
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To contact the AREA IV NPSP office please call
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The training is thanks to a \$1 million donation by the Association of the United States Army, and the training videos provided by Installation Management Command and the Army G-9 Team — along with the USAA.



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Your Support for Thriving in Korea

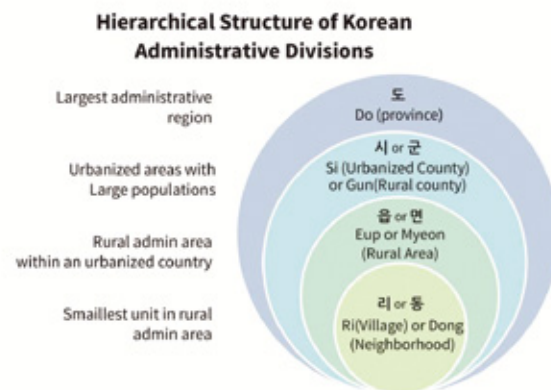
By South of Seoul

Join the 2025 Season of PIEF Classes, Workshops, and Walking Tours starting this spring!

Moving to South Korea may feel exciting, but it can also feel overwhelming. How can you search Naver effectively if you don't speak Korean? Where do you shop for groceries? How do you find a medical specialist? What's the best way to get around? Great news, if you live in or near Pyeongtaek, the Pyeongtaek International Exchange Foundation's (PIEF) Pyeongtaek Living 101 program is here to help! They provide FREE courses, workshops, and walking tours that support integration.

Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), this program is part of South Korea's ongoing efforts to build a more inclusive and equitable society. Recognizing the unique needs of United States Forces Korea and United Nations Command military-affiliated residents and other international newcomers, MOFA funds programs that promote cultural understanding, accessibility, and social equity. By helping foreign residents—especially those who cannot read or speak Korean—navigate daily life, Pyeongtaek Living 101 supports attendees so they can comfortably participate in the local community and feel a sense of belonging.

The Pyeongtaek Living 101 program uses a custom integration curriculum designed specifically for international residents in Pyeongtaek-si. Each topic is based on local research into the real challenges and needs of the community. Developed with insights from surveys, interviews, and direct feedback from those living in Pyeongtaek, this program provides practical, relevant, and easy-to-understand guidance for navigating life in Korea. Each class, workshop, and tour is led by experienced international residents who understand the struggles of adjusting to a new country and are passionate about helping others feel at home.



What Can You Expect in 2025?

NEW curriculum elements such as the Introduction to Pyeongtaek-si: Integration Handbook were written for 2025. Compiled in response to the most asked questions during the 2024 program, the handbooks and new workbooks provide a deeper dive into difficult to conceptualize topics. This includes managing the integration process, local government structure, accessing support services, and more. For example, a detailed explanation of government structure was added so that our community members can better access information and find solutions.

The new curriculum supports a busy season of free adult classes, hands-on workshops, walking tours, and the NEW social outings.

- Classes cover residency essentials, exploring Pyeongtaek (finding neighborhoods, events, and using Naver Maps), home & living tips (grocery shopping, recycling, home maintenance, and education options), and community building (connecting with expat groups and local organizations).
- Workshops include Korean search skills, unique local experiences, life simplification strategies, and goal-setting to avoid FOMO.
- Walking tours guide participants through key neighborhoods, teaching public transit navigation and orientation to neighborhoods.
- Social outings will occur after each course of workshops and classes. Attendees will spend an evening visiting a board game cafe, nori bang, or other activity decided on by the group.

Additionally, in 2025 Pyeongtaek Living 101 will launch a special kids program for kids ages 2-11. The program will teach Korean language and culture through games, activities, and fun. The Pyeongtaek Living 101: KIDZ will happen at the same time as the Adult classes and workshops.

Why Does MOFA Support This Program?

South Korea's partnership with the U.S. military and international residents is long-standing and plays an important role in local communities. However, language barriers, cultural differences, and daily life challenges can make integration difficult.

MOFA funds Pyeongtaek Living 101 because inclusion matters. By providing resources and education, the program ensures that:

- U.S. military-affiliated residents and other internationals have improved access to healthcare, banking, and essential services.
- Korean communities and foreign residents build mutual understanding, reducing cultural misunderstandings and creating a space for cultural integration and inclusion.
- Everyone, regardless of language ability, can thrive and feel welcome in Pyeongtaek.

This program is especially helpful for those who cannot read or write Korean, offering practical support

Multidimensional Model of Immigrant Integration



so that all residents—regardless of nationality—can participate more easily in daily life. Whether you need help reading signs, filling out forms, or understanding local systems, Pyeongtaek Living 101 makes sure no one is left behind.

How to Stay Updated

Don't miss out on upcoming classes and tours in 2025! Follow PIEF on Facebook to see announcements, schedules, and registration details.

Follow Now!

- Pyeongtaek International Exchange Foundation (PIEF) Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/withpief>
- Pyeongtaek Living 101 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PyeongtaekLiving101>

Join the Waiting List!

If you would like to get advance notifications of Pyeongtaek Living 101 events, join our mailing list: <https://forms.gle/U7XGA59wzDJAPEGJ9>

About the Authors



South of Seoul: Founded in 2015, the South of Seoul team consists of volunteers on three continents working together to support English-speaking people traveling or living in South Korea. South of Seoul volunteers work with organizations and individuals across South Korea to improve equitable access to information across South Korea. Much of South of Seoul's information focuses on Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea. Blogs published under the authorship of "South of Seoul" include blogs compiled by multiple volunteers to improve access to standardized information unrelated to individualized personal experiences.

Website: <https://blog.southofseoul.net/>
Facebook: South of Seoul
Instagram: south_of_seoul
Download the South of Seoul App

Celebrating the Military Child:

Recognizing Their Sacrifices and Achievements

By Tyrese Cook

April

marks the Month of the Military Child,

a time to honor the incredible resilience, adaptability, and sacrifices of the children who stand beside our service members. While their experiences may not make headlines, their contributions to military life are undeniable. They are the quiet strength behind the uniform-navigating ever-changing landscapes, forging friendships that span continents, and learning life lessons many adults have yet to grasp.

Growing up with a father who served to now being a military spouse and mother of five, I've witnessed firsthand the unique journey of military children. They grow up knowing that stability is fleeting, that goodbyes come with every set of orders, and that "home" is not defined by a single place but by the people who fill it. Yet, in the face of these challenges, they rise. Their ability to find joy in the unfamiliar and embrace each new chapter with fearlessness is nothing short of extraordinary!



"New adventures in a new country." - Abbott Family

How Families and Communities Can Uplift Military Kids

Raising a military child is both an honor and a responsibility. Families, communities, and leadership all ensure they have the tools, support, and encouragement they need to flourish.

Honor Their Sacrifices—Big and Small

One of the most powerful ways we can uplift our children is by acknowledging their sacrifices. While they may not wear a uniform, they serve in their own way. It's easy to recognize the big moments—saying farewell to a parent before deployment, adjusting to life in a new country, or switching schools mid-year. But it's just as important to honor the small moments. It's the courage of walking into a cafeteria filled with unfamiliar faces, the maturity of stepping up when a parent is away, and the tenderness of blowing kisses to a laptop screen, knowing these virtual hugs will have to do for now. These moments hold extraordinary weight.

As a military family, being featured on CNN last September was a profound honor—one my family didn't take lightly. It was more than just an opportunity to share our story and highlight the incredible work happening at Camp Humphreys or the dedication of the soldiers; it was a chance to shine a light on the sacrifices—both big and small—that military families, including their children, make every day. CNN thoughtfully acknowledged my children, recognizing their bravery, resilience, and the unique challenges they face while standing strong alongside our family.

When platforms as influential as CNN take the time to acknowledge our community, it not only validates our experiences but also shapes how others outside of our military world see, respect, and treat us. It's a reminder that service is also about the families who quietly serve, often without recognition.

Create a Sense of Stability in an Unstable World

Orders change, assignments shift, and what was once home can be packed in boxes overnight. Stability is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children amid the uncertainty. It doesn't always come in the form of a permanent address; instead, we, as parents, can create an environment grounded in traditions, bonds, and support systems that remain steadfast no matter where we are in the world.

For our family, one of the most treasured ways we



"On to new adventures!" - Stark Family



"Valentine's Day card exchange. Community, connections and a whole lot of heart amongst our young scholars." - Humphreys Area Homeschool Co-op



"There are a few perks to being a DMZ Dustoff baby." - Fish Family



"Sibling adventures in Korea! Exploring the beauty, history, and culture of our new home-one temple at a time." - Clark Family

maintain stability is through family traditions. Every year, my husband and I cook a familiar meal that our children look forward to, whether it's Thanksgiving, Christmas, or New Year's. Though we might make minor adjustments depending on our duty station, the core dishes stay the same, providing comfort and continuity. These traditions anchor our kids in a life that can often feel like it's in constant motion.

Ensure Schools and Organizations Are Military-Child Friendly

Our children face the constant upheaval of new schools, friends, and shifting curriculums. Transitioning can be challenging, especially after leaving a great school district.

As a community, we should look at ways to ensure our children feel understood as they move schools. One meaningful approach is increasing awareness among educators about the realities of military life. When teachers and staff recognize the challenges these children face—like learning gaps from frequent moves or the emotional toll of deployments—it allows them to provide more thoughtful support.

Flexibility in academic planning is another area that can ease transitions. PCS moves don't always align with school calendars. However, when schools offer seamless credit transfers, accommodate mid-year transitions, and provide access to military transition counselors, it helps lighten the load on our children. Without these considerations, students often navigate not just a new environment but entirely new academic expectations, which can be overwhelming.

Beyond academics, it sends a powerful message when schools acknowledge the Month of the Military Child with assemblies, classroom discussions, or special events. Feeling welcome is just as important as keeping up with their studies.

At the heart of it all, it isn't just about what happens in the classroom—it's about the collective effort to create an environment where they know they matter. As a community, we have the opportunity to continue these conversations to advocate for changes that truly make a difference in their educational journey.

Foster Open Conversations About Their Experiences

True strength isn't about suppressing emotions—it's about learning to navigate them in a healthy way.

Encouraging our kids to express their feelings through journaling, art, or open family conversations helps them feel heard. Rather than simply reminding them to "be

strong," we should validate their emotions, whether they're experiencing anticipation, uncertainty, or mixed emotions about a new chapter. Creating intentional moments for reflection can make a significant difference. Asking questions like, "What's been the hardest part of this move?", "How do you feel about the friendships you're making?" or "How do you feel as mom/dad prepares to leave for this training?" opens the door for honest conversations. Storytelling is another powerful tool—whether through scrapbooking, making videos, or writing letters to their future selves, documenting their journey allows them to see their growth over time. And when emotions feel too big to navigate alone, connecting them with counselors or therapists can provide valuable reassurance and guidance.

One moment that truly helped my oldest children process our move to South Korea was a family meeting where my husband and I addressed all their concerns and questions head-on. That open conversation eased their anxiety and gave them a clearer picture of what this next chapter would look like. In our home, we prioritize creating space for honest conversations because when our children know they have a voice and a safe place to share their feelings, they are better equipped to embrace the journey ahead.

A Lifetime of Gratitude for Military Kids

Our children may not have chosen this life, but they live it with grace, boldness, and an unbreakable spirit. They are the glue that holds military families together, the bridge between communities, and the future leaders shaped by unique experiences.

As we celebrate the Month of the Military Child this April, let's go beyond words and turn our appreciation into action. It's essential that our traditions, support systems, and platforms actively uplift and embrace our kids in every phase of their journey. Advocate for policies that ease transitions, ensuring they have the resources to thrive. Encourage the creation of programs that foster belonging so that no child ever feels alone in a new place. These children deserve more than recognition; they deserve a community that actively uplifts and embraces them.

Most importantly, our commitment to them shouldn't end when April does. Our children will continue to navigate challenges long after the celebrations fade, and it's up to us to ensure they never feel like they are facing them alone. They are not just a part of our communities—they are the heartbeat of them.



"Military life has given our child so many opportunities to explore the world around him, fostering his love for all things aviation!" - Allen Family



"Christmas time looks a little different for our family. While we cherish time with extended family, our small family unit also enjoys traveling for the holidays. This year, we spent Christmas in Tasmania, visiting a beautiful lavender farm." - Cintron Family



"Kraft family Christmas memories in Korea." - Kraft Family



"Our children's strength and joy shine through every adventure, the heart of our family and the future of our community" - Cook Family

Final Thoughts

To all the military children out there: You are seen. You are valued. And your journey is a testament to the strength of our military community.

You are braver than you realize, stronger than you know, and more extraordinary than words can capture. In a life filled with constant hellos and goodbyes, you have mastered the art of courage. You have learned to stand tall in unfamiliar places, to find laughter in the midst of change, and to hold on to love even when distance separates you from those you cherish most.

I know this journey isn't always easy. There are days when the weight of missing a parent feels heavy when starting over yet again feels overwhelming, and when you long for the comfort of the familiar. But through every challenge, you rise. You grow in ways that many never will—learning resilience, embracing adventure, and discovering that your strength is not defined by where you are but by who you are.

Even when you feel like your sacrifices go unnoticed, please know—you are seen. You are valued. You are loved. Your story is one of perseverance, heart, and an unshakable spirit. You are not just part of a military family; you are the heartbeat of it. You are the quiet strength behind the uniform, the light that makes each house a home, and the reason so many service members serve with unwavering dedication.

So keep shining. Keep believing in yourself. Keep embracing each new chapter with hope and excitement. No matter where this journey takes you, know you are never alone. You are part of something bigger than yourself—a community that understands, supports, and celebrates you.

You are a military child, and that is something of which you should be incredibly proud.

About the Author

Tyrese Cook, also known as Re, is a devoted military spouse and proud mother to five daughters—including two sets of twins—who brings warmth, insight, and a touch of humor to every subject she explores. Tyrese, a non-denominational Christian with a master's degree in social work, is a licensed social worker in Ohio and Kentucky who practices therapy. Drawing on her faith and expertise, she is passionate about mental health and committed to helping others reach their full potential with compassion and understanding. Recently featured with her family on CNN, *United on the RoK*, The OCONUS Project, and The Goode Show. Tyrese's life and work reflect her deep commitment to family, love, and resilience. Outside of her work and family life, she delights in cooking creative meals, diving into captivating books, and experiencing the world's diverse cultures. Follow her journey on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram at @AuthenticallyRe.



Prefer In Forest: A Café That Blends Luxury, Nature, and Community

By Sarah Symbolist

I'll never forget the first time I stepped into Prefer In Forest. After months of watching the café come to life from the ground up, I eagerly awaited any signs of its grand opening, and in the summer of 2022, the moment finally arrived. With my seven-year-old in tow, I walked in and immediately questioned my decision to bring a child into such a meticulously designed space. From the sculptures on the first floor to the polished granite staircase, not to mention the Louis Vuitton trunk set—something my fashion-obsessed self had lusted over for decades—the entire place oozed luxury. I was desperate not to ruin a single thing.

Fast forward two and a half years and while the feeling of luxury remains, what keeps me coming back is the feeling of warmth and welcome that envelops you the moment you step inside. Not only am I a regular here, but so are both of my children.

Tucked at the base of Buraksan, the floor-to-ceiling windows on each floor invite you to immerse yourself in the beauty of nature both inside and out. Paired with contemporary design elements like polished surfaces and minimalist furniture, this fusion creates a serene yet sophisticated atmosphere. In a country where outdoor spaces are a luxury, Prefer offers several areas to soak up the outdoors. Whether it's the covered seating on the first level looking out at the spacious lawn, the balcony seating on the second floor, or the breezy rooftop deck, there's no shortage of outdoor spots to unwind.

Inside the café, seating options are abundant and thoughtfully designed to cater to every mood and gathering. Whether you're looking for a spacious table to accommodate a large group, an intimate spot with scenic mountain views of Buraksan, or the cozy allure of a bean bag seat, there's a perfect nook for



everyone. The café thoughtfully provides baby seats and high chairs, ensuring that little ones can join in the fun comfortably. It's the ideal setting for sipping coffee before or after a mountain hike, catching up with friends over the afternoon, or treating the family to a refreshing bingsu on a warm summer evening.

Prefer's drink menu offers a range of beloved classics from the smooth Americano to refreshing smoothies and delicious ade beverages. My morning favorite is a classic iced vanilla latte, perfectly sweetened with their homemade vanilla syrup. In addition to house-made beverages, there's also a selection of prepackaged fruit juice and milk options for kids.

The true star of the café lies in its ever-evolving pastry selection. Located front and center on the first floor, the display is a constantly changing array of freshly baked goods, with each visit bringing something new and exciting. From delicate pastries to seasonal indulgent treats, the selection is thoughtfully curated to delight both the eyes and the taste buds.

Quick to jump on (and off!) the latest food trends, Prefer delights its customers with the trendy crookie (a croissant cookie combination), unique creamy corn-based delicacies, and a rotating selection of seasonal specialties. From chestnuts and sweet potatoes to fresh strawberries, each dish is crafted to highlight the best of the season. At the same time, they continue to offer timeless classics like salted bread and lemon madeleines. Their handcrafted desserts are a true highlight, featuring fun takes on classic tiramisu and mouth-watering fresh fruit tarts. If you're craving brunch, you'll find delicious croissant sandwiches available during the midday hours. These flaky, buttery sandwiches are the perfect balance of savory and satisfying, making for a delightful and filling brunch option. Whether you're seeking a trendy treat or a beloved staple, Prefer's food selection is constantly evolving to keep your taste buds on their toes.

A trend sweeping through Korea is the fusion of cafés with art galleries, and Prefer embraces this creative concept. Located on the basement level, its revolving art gallery showcases a fresh collection of works every month, allowing guests to experience a blend of culture and coffee. In addition to the revolving art gallery, what truly sets Prefer apart is its ability to bring the community together. They often celebrate musicians by hosting live concerts, creating a vibrant atmosphere that blends great music with an inviting ambiance. These performances offer a unique touch to the café experience,



allowing guests to enjoy both delicious food and live entertainment in a cozy, energetic setting.

This past year, they introduced a produce bin near the entrance, where a local farmer delivers fresh, seasonal picks throughout the week. Every morning I watch a flower farmer arrive and replenish the bouquets available for purchase. During this past autumn and winter, they hosted a flea market on the lawn, allowing local vendors to showcase handmade goods. Now inside you can find a table dedicated to hand-knit creations made by artisans from the area—each piece is a perfect reminder of the café's commitment to supporting local talent and fostering a strong sense of community.

Prefer in Forest is open 365 days a year from 09:00 to 21:00, offering a welcoming escape for coffee lovers and art enthusiasts alike. Be sure to follow them on Instagram to stay updated on their concert dates, art exhibits, and seasonal offerings, ensuring you never miss out on a special event. The café ensures a seamless experience for all guests, offering free and plentiful parking, including a dedicated handicapped spot. It is fully wheelchair accessible, with an elevator inside for added convenience, making it a welcoming space for everyone.

Resources

Prefer Cafe
경기 평택시 지산로140번길 243 프리퍼
<https://naver.me/FbOnQZTw>
Instagram: prefer_in_forest



About the Author
Sarah earned her bachelor's degree from the University of North Texas in Fashion Merchandising. She is married to her high school sweetheart and raising two fearless daughters. When she's not busy managing family life, you can find her browsing thrift stores, biking or hiking to discover new coffee shops, planning her next vacation adventure and writing about it all on her blog at www.sarahsymbolist.com.

Using Your Voice Beyond the Ballot Box:

Understanding Civic Engagement

Written by Jetta Allen and Keri Pennie
Photographed By Vaughn Larson, Amanda Gray, and Joseph Curzi



The Capitol Building is the seat of the United States Congress, the legislative branch of the federal government. It is located on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

Almost all of us have voiced an opinion on social media—be it a post, thread, or meme. Your digital imprint may receive several likes and comments, maybe even stir up lively debate, but it won't reach an audience that holds real sway, which are our congressional officials (representatives and senators). Social media and digital habits have diluted our voice into passive forms of participation. Engaging in our democracy requires action. By expressing your needs and values directly to your elective representatives via e-mail, phone calls, or social media posts, you are doing your part in upholding our democratic framework.

The lack of voter participation actively contributes to the outcome of each election. According to data from the University of Florida Election Lab, in the 2024 general election, approximately 245 Million Americans were voting eligible. 89 MILLION Citizens did not turn out and exercise their constitutional right to vote. That's 36% of the population whose voice remained silent and unaccounted for in our country. Some say voting polls should be open on Sunday for more involvement, modeling the voting process in place across Europe. Imagine how different the outcomes could be if we took the initiative to make our voices heard? How do we move from disengagement to re-engagement? Civic engagement can start at any time.

Voting is the backbone of our republic, shaping our democracy. Your voice can be heard beyond the ballot box. Elected representatives want to hear from their constituents—that's you! As public servants, they

represent our interests, listen to our concerns, and ultimately represent all those who live within the area they represent. Our elected officials aid in the accountability of our government, shape policy, problem solve, and often need our support to maintain relevance as they influence our government processes.

This article is your resource for understanding how to vote abroad, locate and contact your elected representatives, and the ins and outs of military House and Senate committees that directly influence our lives. You will find tips for effective letter writing and even applications for your phone that make it easy for your voice to be heard! You will find a list of non-profit organizations that support various areas of interest in the military community. These non-profits effectively work on changes in our government through a unified voice, and a systematic process of advocacy, and might be the community you are looking for to use your voice beyond the ballot box truly.

Voting Abroad

Voting abroad allows U.S. citizens overseas—military members, federal employees, contractors, and their families—to participate through absentee voting. The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) provides resources and assistance to help these voters register and request absentee ballots using forms like the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). Absentee voting ensures overseas citizens can exercise their right to vote in federal, state, and local elections, regardless of their location, through secure and accessible processes. While the processes are different from state to state, county to county, and city to city, the FVAP offers guidance on voting deadlines, ballot submission, and other key election-related details. You can also find voter tools and services from the Overseas Vote Foundation. Here there are clear explanations of voting abroad, overseas voting reform initiatives, tool kits for service members, answers to frequently asked questions and much more. Each squadron has a Voting Assistance Officer (VAO) and your local military branch's family readiness centers can assist you further with additional questions.

Resources For Voting Abroad

- Federal Voting Assistance Program:
<https://www.fvap.gov/>
- Overseas Vote Foundation:
<https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/about>



▲ Soldiers at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba demonstrating their constitutional right to vote. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Vaughn Larson.

Identifying Your Representatives

Your voice doesn't end at the ballot box. You can contact local, state, and federal representatives—so where do you start? USA.Gov is your one-stop shop, allowing you to identify names and contact information for Local, State, and Federal Officials in one space after sharing your residency or "Home of Record" address. The information populated will include the officials' party affiliation, address, phone number, website, and social media accounts. One pitfall, it doesn't share the officials' contact email, but you can find it with the information given.

Next, GovTrack.us and Democracy.io are other recommended resources. These sites will ask for your residency address and then populate the names of your representatives and offer many other features.

GovTrack.us has a feature I find valuable. On the main landing page, you can find your representatives,



but you can also find legislation that affects you by selecting a subject area to search for and you can sign up for alerts. Areas to search for include (but are not limited to): Armed Forces and National Security, Civil Rights and Liberties, Minority Issues, Education, Energy, Foreign Trade and Financial Sectors, Health, Housing and Community Development, and so many more. Another feature is seeing recent major votes on legislation. This information could be valuable for your letter writing. The “Legislation Coming Up” feature shares what will be voted on in upcoming weeks, again, another important aspect of letter writing.

Democracy.io has a “Write Your Message” function that will have a box for you to write a message and then the site will send the same message to all your representatives. For another option, head to the representatives’ website and use their individual forms and submission process. For finding specific representatives in the House or Senate, there are also other websites available to find those.

Resources For Voting Abroad

- USAGov: <https://www.usa.gov/>

- GovTrack.us: <https://www.govtrack.us/>
- Democracy.io: <https://democracy.io/>
- Find Your House Representatives: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Find Your Senate Representatives: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/index.htm>

Annual Impacts of the Presidential Budget Request and NDAA

If I told you there was a piece of legislation discussed year-round, every year, that was written specifically for the Department of Defense and the military community would you believe me? Each February the President of the United States submits a proposal to Congress, outlining the priorities and expenses of the country for the fiscal year called the Presidential Budget Request (PBR). The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) helps prepare this budget. If you want to know what is being requested, you can with the resources below. This budget provides the actual funds for national defense and allocations to the Department of Defense. But what governs how those funds are spent and how does it im-

pact military-connected communities?

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) authorizes the U.S. Department of Defense's budget. It's been passed annually since 1961 and is discussed by constituents, non-profit agencies, and elected representatives all year long. The NDAA impacts every single person in the military-connected community. Not only does it have items related to budget, but it also contains a wide range of issues including the organization of the military, equipment, education, and even the rights of military parents! As this law is debated and amended annually, your voice is desperately needed to shape its contents! Let me tell you how.

Resources for the PBR, OMB, and NDAA

- White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB): <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/>
- President's Budget Request: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/>
- U.S. Federal Budget Explained (CBO and OMB): <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/56415>
- Government Accountability Office (GAO): <https://www.gao.gov/>
- USAspending.gov: <https://www.usaspending.gov/>

NDAA and the House and Senate Armed Services Committees

The NDAA is reviewed, drafted, and passed by two main committees in Congress: the House Armed Services Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee. These committees are made up of members of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Representatives represent approximately 750,000 citizens of America and are elected for a two-year term. Senators are only two per state and represent the entire state. Senators are elected to six-year terms.

The members of these committees change annually and knowing who is currently serving on these committees and subcommittees is crucial when you are looking for an avenue for advocacy and a specific representative to be invested in the solution or feedback you seek. When you reach out to these representatives, not only can it impact the NDAA draft being developed, but it gives your voice a platform to the representatives that hold the ability to influence changes in other parts of government policy, policy that impacts the military community, and those even outside our military community.



Subcommittees on the Senate Committee for Armed Services change over time including their leadership, members, and focus areas, particularly with each new Congress convening every two years. Currently listed on the website are the following subcommittees:

Subcommittee on Personnel: Focuses on military personnel issues, military education, DoDEA schools, DoD childcare, education considerations for military children, recruitment, benefits, military health care, MWR, and more.

Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support: Deals with military readiness, training, logistics, housing, business management, base alignment and closures, defense energy, and defense infrastructure.

Subcommittee on Airland: Covers issues related to Army, Air Force, National Guard, and Reserve planning operations, equipment, policy, and strategy.

Subcommittee on Cybersecurity: Addresses national security in the cyber domain including oversight for budget accounts, DoD offices, and cyber agencies.

Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities: Handles issues related to science, technology, special operations, intelligence, counterterrorism, security operations, and more.

Subcommittee on Seapower: Focuses on Navy and Marine Corps planning, defense, and operational planning, including shipbuilding and maritime operations.

Subcommittee on Strategic Forces: Oversees U.S. nuclear weapons policy, missile defense, space capabilities, Department of Energy, and defense environmental management programs.

The House Armed Services Committee holds many hearings on various topics. You can find full committee hearing recordings, information on their business meetings, transcripts, and summaries. On their website you can filter this information by the various subcommittees listed above as well, helping you to stay current on specific areas of your interest.



Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro and Commandant of the Marine Corps Eric Smith provide testimony at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the Department of the Navy fiscal year 2025 budget request at the Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., May 16, 2024. Photo captured by Chief Petty Officer Amanda Gray.

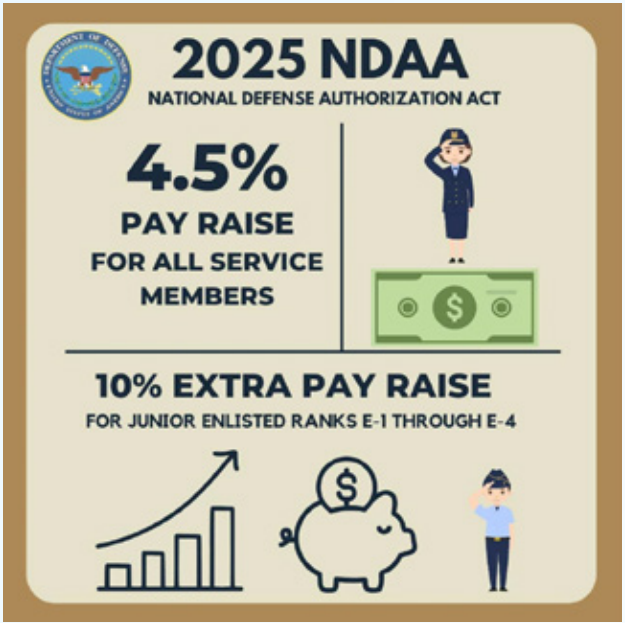
Those serving on these committees can provide oversight and accountability to various aspects that each committee has purview over. As we shared before, the representatives serving on these committees also serve within other places of government. Letters written to them impact so many areas of government, but not every member of the Senate and House works specifically in the armed services committees, so you may want to prioritize who you're sending letters to based on the subject.

Resources for the NDAA and the House and Senate Armed Services Committees

- House Armed Services Committee (HASC): <https://armedservices.house.gov/>
- Committee Members: <https://armedservices.house.gov/about/members.htm>
- Hearing and Subcommittee Items: <https://armedservices.house.gov/calendar/?EventTypeID=214>
- Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC): <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/>
- Subcommittees, Majority, and Minority Members: <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/subcommittees>
- H.R.2670 - National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 (Passed): <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/2670>
- S.4638 - National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 (Introduced, not law yet): <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/4638>
- National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Summary: https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fy25_ndaa_executive_summary.pdf

Using Your Voice: Tools and Strategies for Effective Advocacy

Now that we've explored the importance of using your voice beyond the ballot box, it's time to dive into how you can take action. Look for Part 2 in May's issue where we'll share tools and strategies to make your advocacy even more impactful. From writing effective letters to using apps that connect you directly with lawmakers, we'll guide you through the practical steps to ensure your voice is heard loud and clear. Be sure to check back for the next installment and get ready to amplify your civic engagement!



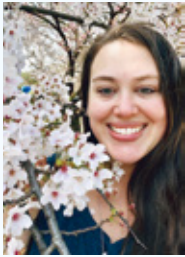
▲ Starting in April 2025, all Department of Defense junior enlisted service members will receive a significant pay boost after the U.S. Senate approved a \$895 billion dollar defense policy on Dec. 18, 2024, as part of the 2025 NDAA. U.S. Air Force graphic illustration of 2025 NDAA by Airman Joseph Curzi.

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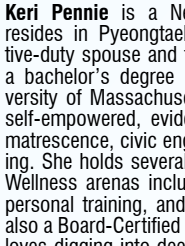
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- United States Senate Committee on Armed Services (n.d.). 118th Congress Subcommittees. Retrieved February 19, 2025, from <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/subcommittees>

*The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.


About the Authors



Jetta Allen is the Editor in Chief of *United on the RoK* Magazine and the 2025 Armed Forces Insurance Military Spouse of the Year for USAG Humphreys. She has been a driving force in South Korea's military community since 2019. What began as authoring a support column for the Exceptional Family Member Program evolved into a multifaceted role combining her talents in writing, photography, and content creation. Beyond her editorial duties, Jetta is passionate about advocating for the civil rights of military families, fostering community connections, and exploring Korean culture with her family.



Keri Pennie is a New Englander who currently resides in Pyeongtaek, South Korea with her active-duty spouse and two small children. She holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of Massachusetts and is enthusiastic about self-empowered, evidence-based healing methods, matrescence, civic engagement, and sustainable living. She holds several credentials in the Health and Wellness arenas including trauma-conscious yoga, personal training, and sacred circle. Keri Pennie is also a Board-Certified Health & Wellness Coach. She loves digging into deep conversations and soil as a community gardener, hosts stroller clubs, is a secular circle space holder, a Key Support Liaison and Resiliency Training Assistant, and creates a garden of community wherever she is planted.



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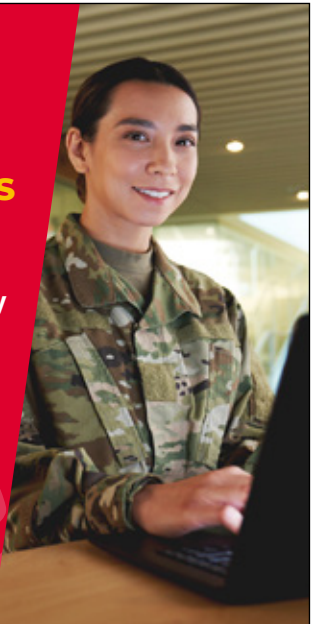



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A Journey from Nepal to Korea

Born and raised in Chitwan, Nepal, Sujan grew up surrounded by breathtaking mountains, rivers, and the warmth of a close-knit community. His passion for cooking and his background in marketing fueled his dream of opening a restaurant where he could share the flavors of his childhood. Korea provided the perfect opportunity with its dynamic and diverse food culture.

"I came to Korea on a tourist visa, but this country gave me the opportunity to build a life here," Sujan shares. "I saw the potential in Pyeongtaek, a place where both Koreans and foreigners come together. It felt like the right place to introduce Indian and Nepali cuisine."

The restaurant's name, "Mountain," pays tribute to Nepal's towering peaks, including Mount Everest, while serving as a simple, memorable name that resonates with customers.

A Menu that Captures the Essence of Tradition

At Mountain Restaurant, every dish tells a story of tradition and home-cooked goodness. The menu is a carefully curated blend of Indian and Nepalese specialties, with flavors that cater to a wide range of palates and spice levels. Mountain Restaurant imports some spices to keep the flavors true to its roots. Fresh herbs and spices like cumin, coriander, turmeric, and garam masala are essential to creating authentic Indian and Nepali flavors.

The Barbecue Momo is one of the standout dishes at Mountain Restaurant. This smoky, spiced delight, a Nepalese dumpling, has quickly become a customer favorite. In addition to the momo dumplings, the Thali Set offers a well-balanced meal with rice, lentils, vegetables, and curry. Those looking to experience the flavors of Nepal will be delighted with these authentic dishes.

If you are new to Indian and Nepalese cuisine, Sujan recommends starting with the giant Naan and pairing it with one of the traditional curries on the menu. Enjoying the giant Naan and curry is a flavorful introduction to the region's bold spices and comforting textures. For those looking for vegan and vegetarian options, the restaurant offers many dishes to experience and enjoy.

A Warm and Welcoming Dining Experience

Here at Mountain Restaurant, the goal is not just to provide delicious food but also to create a home away from home. "We want our guests to feel like they are part of our family," Sujan explains. The restaurant has incorporated décor featuring hand-embroidered fabrics from India and Nepalese cultural elements that immerse diners in a truly authentic atmosphere.

Whether you are enjoying a meal with family, catching up with friends, or introducing someone to the rich flavors of Nepalese and Indian cuisine for the first time, Mountain Restaurant provides a warm and inviting ambiance that makes every visit special.



Scaling New Heights with Indian & Nepalese Flavors in Pyeongtaek

By Mini DeLamarter-Lefebvre and Melissa Edwards-Whittington

Nestled in the heart of Pyeongtaek, within walking distance of AK Plaza, Mountain Restaurant is the place for authentic Indian and Nepalese cuisine. Since opening its doors in 2017, this restaurant has become a beloved gathering place for locals, expats, and tourists. Founded by Sujan Kumar Shrestha, Mountain Restaurant is a heartfelt homage to his homeland of Nepal and a celebration of rich culinary traditions.



Thali Set

children, especially those under 15, love our food and encourage their families to return. I have a deep fondness for children, and seeing them happy brings me immense joy, as I believe they are a true blessing.”

Mountain Restaurant is proud to have been voted by the community as Best Indian Restaurant (2022, 2023, and 2024) and Best Family Restaurant (2023) in the Best of Pyeongtaek annual polls by South of Seoul. Residents can support the people and places that make Pyeongtaek unique by voting in the Best of Pyeongtaek poll every year.

Overcoming Challenges and Looking to the Future

While owning a business presents many challenges, being an immigrant in Korea introduces many additional hurdles. For Sujan, one of the biggest obstacles was the language barrier. While he focused on his passion for food and creating a wonderful dining experience for the customers, this helped him to navigate the hurdles he faced as an immigrant business owner.

While the restaurant has not drastically changed over the years, they have adapted to the customers’ growing needs and stayed true to its mission. Having an experienced chef from Nepal who has worked in five-star hotels in India and Nepal, the business has focused on innovating the menu while maintaining the authenticity of the food.

Sujan’s goal for the future of Mountain Restaurant is to be the destination for authentic Indian and Nepalese cuisine in Korea. The focus for the future is to expand the menu, introduce health-conscious options, and continue to create beautiful dining experiences for the customers.

A Heartfelt Thank You

The road to success has never been travelled alone, and Sujan expresses his deep gratitude to those who



K-Creators at Mountain Restaurant

have supported him. “I owe everything to my family—my parents, Mr. Laxman Shrestha and Mrs. Sushila Shrestha, who have always believed in me; my wife, Mrs. Ishwori Shrestha, who has stood by me through all the ups and downs; my brother-in-law, Mr. Rajesh Shrestha, for his unwavering help in Korea; and of course, my children, Ishu and Ishan, who bring me endless joy and motivation.”

An Invitation to Experience Something New

If you are new to Indian and Nepalese cuisine, Sujan has a simple message: “Our food is healthy, flavorful, and made with love. Don’t hesitate to give it a try—you just might find your new favorite dish!”

Whether you’re craving the smoky richness of Chicken Tandoori, the comforting warmth of a steaming cup of chai, or the bold flavors of a perfectly spiced curry, Mountain Restaurant promises an experience that will transport you to the heart of Nepal and India.

Visit Mountain Restaurant in Pyeongtaek and discover a place where great food, culture, and community come together. One meal at a time, Sujan and his team are bringing the spirit of Nepal to Korea, creating lasting memories for all who walk through their doors.



Ishwori Shrestha and Sujan Kumar Shrestha



Restaurant Interior

(from left) Gujan Kumar Shrestha, Ishwori Shrestha, Sushila Shrestha, Mini DeLamarter-LeFebvre, Melissa Edwards-Whittington, Chuck Whittington, Laxman Shrestha



Getting There: Location, Parking, and Accessibility

Mountain Restaurant offers a cozy and inviting dining experience, but guests should plan ahead when it comes to parking and accessibility. While there is no dedicated parking lot for the restaurant, visitors can find both free and paid parking options in the surrounding area by utilizing parking garages and street parking. Those with mobility concerns should note that the restaurant is located on the second floor of the building and is only accessible by stairs, as there is no elevator available. Unfortunately, this means that Mountain Restaurant is not stroller or wheelchair accessible. However, don't let that stop you from ordering takeout from this fabulous restaurant.

- Hours: 10 am to 10 pm daily
- Address: 46-1 Pyeongtaek-dong Pyeongtaek-si Gyeonggi-do (<https://naver.me/Gq839ln9>)
- Instagram: mountain_restaurant
- Facebook: Mountain Restaurant



About the Authors

Mini De Lamarter-LeFebvre is a dedicated DoDEA teacher at Humphreys Middle School, where she began her adventure in August 2022. She is married to Michael, a retired Army Field Artillery officer, and together they have two wonderful children, Zachary and Michaela. Mini has a passion for travel and the adventures it brings. She loves making connections in the new places she visits and cherishes the friendships she forms along the way. Her enthusiasm for exploring the world is matched by her commitment to volunteering and improving the community she lives in. Mini's efforts to make a positive impact are evident in her dedication to both her students and her community.

Melissa Edwards-Whittington has been in Korea for over 7 years. She and her husband have a YouTube channel, "KimchiRednecks", where they share about life in Korea, places to eat and visit in Korea, and cooking. They also have a YouTube channel, Shining With KimchiRednecks, dedicated to their hobby of making whiskey and brandy at home. They are also parents to three precocious senior Shin Tzu daughters, Minion, Sookie, and Mayhem who are featured often in their social media.

As Social Media Marketing Manager for *United on the RoK* Mag, Melissa brings her passion for the military community to life through compelling digital content. Her expertise spans content creation, social media marketing management, and community engagement through connectedness.

Melissa further extends her community impact through the South of Seoul, a local organization enhancing expatriate life in Korea. Through her on-line media management with South of Seoul, original content, established blog presence, and fostering multiple groups for language exchanges and content creators, she offers unique insights into life in South Korea. She has also volunteered for Pyeongtaek Insight as part of their content creation team. Her work consistently bridges cultural gaps while fostering connections within the international community.

Follow Melissa and her family here:
 YouTube: @kimchirednecks / @shiningwithkimchirednecks
 Instagram: @kimchirednecks
 Facebook: KimchiRednecks
 South of Seoul Blog: www.blog.southofseoul.net



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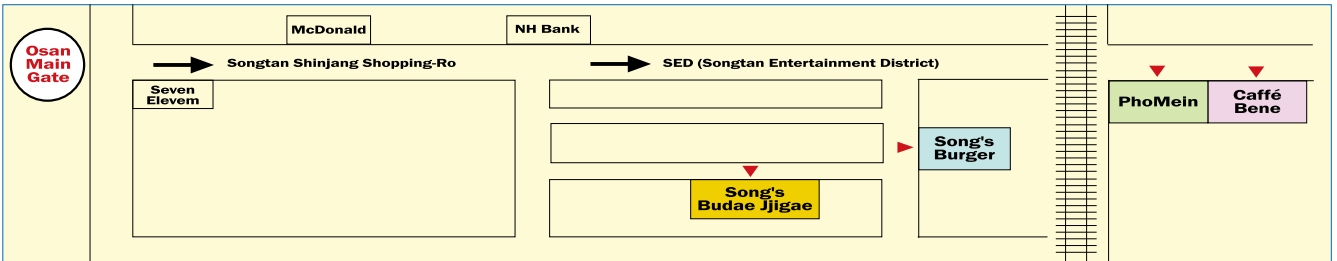
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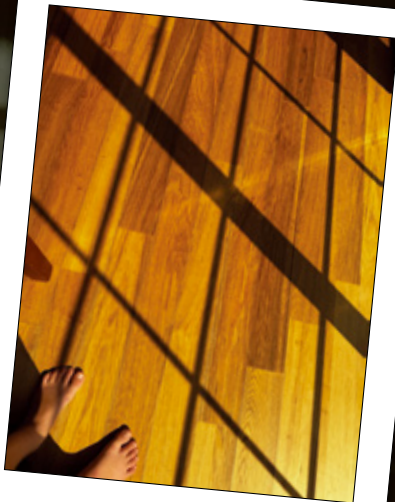
Month of the Military Child Photo Contest



First Place
Strolling in Myeongdong
Captured by Robin P.



Second Place
Viewpoint
Captured by Robin P.



Third Place
Shadows
Captured by Hazel B.



First Place
My Cold Countryside
Captured by Sienna U.



First Place
Military Kid Super Power
Captured by Dhalia H.



Second Place
Feeding the Birds
Captured by Allison F.



Third Place
Frozen in Place
Captured by Chloe L.

10-14 Years Old Category



Second Place Tie
A Different View
Captured by Ashlynn O.



Second Place Tie
Summer Night Magic
Captured by Ashlynn O.

15-18 Years Old Category

Month of the Military Child Poetry Contest

First Place

Olive N.

Flowers

Silent meadow.
One flowers alone waits
Until Spring comes.
Spring is here and
So are the flowers.

7-10 Years Old
Category

First Place

Ta'Miya

Conversation

Step 1) Stop the car you stop your life.
Step 2) Hands on the dashboard its a
perfect cutting board.
Step 3) Step out the car it's the last
time your feet will move.
Step 4) Hands up ask your ancestors to
rain hell down on them.
Finally step 5) you're not alive.

Now you're ready my son but just
before you go you must know this
world will never see you like a baby.

To them, you're a monster but to me,
you are the reason I live and yet this
world doesn't want you to live the life I
gave to you.

Remember this conversation baby boy.

Yes ma'am-They can never stop me
momma even if they try in every
conversation they'll know my name.

15-18 Years Old
Category

First Place

Ava V.

Here and There

Moving here,
And moving there,
It seems as if I'm moving everywhere!
This new house,
And these new friends,
This new school,
And this cycle never ends!
To say I don't mind it, would be a lie,
But when I think about my life,
I think of the good times.
I think of when a friend did this
And when a friend said that,
I think of my house that was on the hill,
And of the school that I grew up with.
I think of this new country,
Oh, and that one too!
And I think of all the times I wasn't blue.
I think of when my family and I,
Are always there for each other,
And how we'll always love one another.
The thing is, I love my military life,
And I'd rather live like this,
Than live an unfulfilled life.

11-14 Years Old
Category

Second Place

Chloe L.

Onward Together

The laughter, the games,
The friends that we meet,
New cultures, new stories,
Life on repeat,
We learn how to adapt,
How to love from afar,
How to shine when it's dark,
And how to reach for the stars.

Third Place

Olivia L.

Peripatetic Heart

Through every door, through every gate,
Where is my home, my place, my state?
Not bound by walls, or overseas,
Not desert's dunes, or forest's leaves?
It's in my heart; a place to grow.
A place to feel, a place to know.
For when my kin are far away,
I feel their love from where I stay.
Where will I go? I don't always know,
But in my heart, my ebb and flow,
Home is where my family will go.

All About Pyeongtaek Agro-Ecological Park

By Missy Moore

Living in South Korea, it's easy to turn your sights to the big adventures and the huge destinations. Most people actually snub their nose at the Pyeongtaek area in the grand scheme of things because, for all intents and purposes, it's farm country. Pyeongtaek has its local gems though, and Pyeongtaek Agro-Ecological Park is one of those.

South Korea goes hard for its outdoor spaces. Think: extra extra. If there is an opportunity to turn a simple park into something spectacular, they absolutely will, and Pyeongtaek Agro-Ecological Park is no exception. It's beautiful every season. We've visited in the winter when everything is brown and gray, and the animals are a highlight with beautiful holiday lights in the background. In the spring and summer, the place is alive with color.

What to Do at the Park

Operated by Pyeongtaek-si, the Pyeongtaek Agro-Ecological Park is a pseudo "theme" park that's perfect for all ages. Locals and visitors, alike, flock to the perfectly manicured walking paths that wind through the park. Pet owners love the enclosed playground area for dogs to run and play. Children love the animal enclosures where you'll see birds, peacocks, bunnies, and more, and the playground? Bar none.

There are actually over 170 species of plants and flowers throughout the botanical garden, and nature lovers (like yours truly) love being able to bask in this beautifully landscaped park literally just off the interstate. Oh, and friends? There's a parking lot. If you know Korea, you'll know that's a big one.

Our Favorite Parts

Spring is absolutely, hands-down, my favorite season at Pyeongtaek Agro-Ecological Park. The tulips are



a sight to see. Being able to take the boys there on a few different homeschool days to draw the tulips was such a treat for all of us. Each season, they host the Pyeongtaek Flower Festival, which needs no further introduction. Mieke's school took a trip there, and we spent hours running around the grounds and enjoying the fresh air.

The playground has a great sandy area, which is always a hit, and we love that it's just about 20 minutes from Camp Humphreys. So, even when everyone is tired, and hot, and messy, you're just minutes from home to clean back up. Basically, it's the ideal outing if you hope to stay local.

Bring some snacks and some water to stay hydrated and make Pyeongtaek Agro-Ecological Park your next day trip. Check out the Botanical Garden, the Museum of Agriculture, and make memories thorough the park!

Tips for Visiting

- **Price:** Free! Kids under 9 are allowed to enter only when accompanied by a parent and/or guardian.
- **Parking:** There is a large parking lot, but it does fill up quickly during the spring and summer months. Arrive early!
- **Amenities:** There is a small grocery/fresh market and cafe onsite. There are clean public restrooms, playgrounds, and easy access to and from the freeway.
- **Accessibility:** Most of the park, barring the stairs leading up floral hill, is accessible to both strollers and wheelchairs.

Resources

Website: <https://www.pyeongtaek.go.kr/agro-ecopark/main.do>

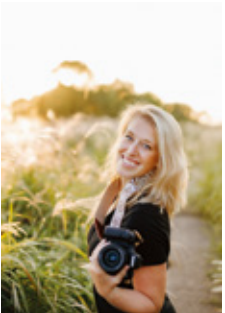
Agricultural Village Theme Park
64-1 Sukseong-ri Oseong-myeon Pyeongtaek-si Gyeonggi-do
<https://naver.me/5lSngj1S>

Pyeongtaeksi Museum of Agriculture
98-2 Sukseong-ri Oseong-myeon Pyeongtaek-si Gyeonggi-do
<https://naver.me/FlfB8Hrw>

Pyeongtaeksi Natural Theme Botanical Garden
1030 Sukseong-ri Oseong-myeon Pyeongtaek-si Gyeonggi-do
<https://naver.me/FPn0Z4hC>

About the Author

Missy is what she fondly refers to now as an "elder milspo." With more duty stations than she'd care to admit under her belt, thousands of Space-A miles logged, and three children in tow, she likes to think she's done - and seen - a good bit at this point. Missy has a degree in Journalism and a passion for blogging and photography, so she absolutely loves combining the two to share her love of and passion for Korea and the Land of the Morning Calm.



Instagram: [lovinglifemooreblog](https://www.instagram.com/lovinglifemooreblog)
Follow her blog at <https://www.lovinglifemoore.com/>



Local Flavors, Global Perspective

A Guerrilla Gourmet Culinary

By Jetta Allen



Chef James T. Canter's culinary story began in the quaint maritime town of Elkton, Maryland, where the Chesapeake Bay's briny breeze mingles with the aroma of steamed crabs and home-style cooking. This small northeastern town, with its weathered docks, locally owned restaurants, and family-run markets, laid the foundation for what would become a remarkable global culinary adventure for Chef James T. Canter of Guerrilla Gourmet. His grandmother, Mamaw Francis Ida Justice, was a chef in the Elkton County Jail, where his grandfather was a deputy sheriff. Chef Canter would work in her kitchen as she made biscuits & gravy from scratch and all kinds of delicious country cooking. He said,

"Some folks would say that on Saturday night, folks would deliberately end up in the slammer just to get her Sunday cooking."

Growing up surrounded by the town's rich seafood traditions and helping in his grandmother's kitchen cooking family recipes, Chef Canter absorbed more than just cooking techniques – he inherited a philosophy where food serves as a bridge to connect people and cultures through unique experiences.

From those humble beginnings, Chef Canter's passion for cuisine has propelled him through numerous culinary ventures. His journey spans from producing engaging culinary television content to commanding the helm of a successful food truck enterprise and restaurant in Texas, eventually leading him to his current chapter as an international culinary consultant, culinary instructor, and caterer in South Korea. Each step of his reflects



the same warmth and authenticity he first encountered in those Elkton kitchens with his grandmother, now translated into a global language of flavors and cuisines. So global that in 2019, Chef Canter served as the UNESCO Culinary Chef Ambassador to China, representing San Antonio UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy! He even was on a team of celebrity chefs who visited military installations across the globe on Guy Fieri's show Grocery Games and the Navy's Entertainment Fleet and Family Readiness Network, which televised the shows around the world! As a Messlord, Chef Canter and other chefs filmed cooking shows and cooked for our service members during COVID. They even went to Cuba! There's not many places he hasn't been, but it all started in a small town in Texas, as a hometown hero.

When Disaster Strikes, A Chef's Heart Shines: The Story That Changed Everything

Before going global, Chef Canter had set up shop for several years in Victoria, Texas. Guerrilla Gourmet started as a very successful food truck, one of the only food trucks across many counties. Seven months, later he opened a restaurant in the historical downtown area. Little did he know that setting up so close to local infrastructures like city hall, the bank, and the police station would become a pivotal location in a moment of crisis

for Texas residents.

August 2017 brought Hurricane Harvey to the Texas coastline, leaving devastation in its wake. Chef Canter's small town of Victoria, merely 20 miles from the bay, found itself stripped of basic utilities – no power, no water, and countless homes damaged or destroyed. Yet amid this chaos, Chef Canter's restaurant stood as an unexpected beacon of hope, housed in a sturdy 1940s stone building, connected to the town's central grid. What followed next wasn't just a story of survival but of service.

Chef Canter and his wife, Maureen, felt a calling to support others in this time of need. Drawing from his family's farm and his wife's Korean heritage, Chef Canter and his wife transformed his restaurant into an impromptu community kitchen. He served smoked-kimchi-and-chicken stew, spicy chicken noodle soup, and burgers to reporters and first responders and then his neighbors and community members. As volunteers rallied and donations poured in, Chef Canter's Guerrilla Gourmet became a grassroots relief effort that would serve hot meals to thousands of people needing relief from Hurricane Harvey. The media caught wind of this quiet hero in an apron and soon Chef Canter's story traveled from local news to national headlines, even reaching Tampa Bay, where he had once wielded his culinary skills. Not long after, his name was going global! It wasn't the publicity that drove him – it was the fundamental belief that in times of crisis, a chef's place is feeding and connecting people.

This chapter in Chef Canter's career transcended typ-





Dia de Los Muertos Festival, Sante Fe New Mexico, Nov 2014.

ical culinary acclaim. It demonstrated that true success in the culinary world isn't only measured by technique or innovation but by the ability to nourish both body and spirit when it matters most. His story resonates with so many, reminding us that sometimes the most important meals aren't about sophistication or style, but about simple human kindness served on a plate. After the impact of Hurricane Harvey, Chef Canter went on to lead a successful business, but life soon led him to South Korea.

The International Move: Guerrilla Gourmet in South Korea

The Canter family now calls Pyeongtaek, South Korea home. Chef Canter's connection to Korean culture began at a young age. The doctor who brought him into this world, Chef Canter's long-time pediatrician was Korean. As Chef Canter told me this story, he reminisced in retrospect, sharing that Korea was always calling him. His pediatrician would even buy him Korean snacks and souvenirs after her travels to Korea. Chef Canter's passion for Korean culture and cuisine deepened through marriage, as his wife's Korean heritage opened

new doors for their family with the relocation to South Korea. The happy couple has been married for 19 years. Together they are raising 3 children in South Korea and fully immersing themselves in local and international flavors through travel. Trading Texas brisket for bulgogi wasn't just a change of menu for the Canter family - it was the beginning of a new chapter in his extraordinary global culinary adventure.

Chef James T Canter of Guerrilla Gourmet has found a perfect home in South Korea where centuries-old recipes meet modern appetites. In Songtan, Chef Canter is redefining community connections through food, embracing food as a universal language that brings people together. Under this banner, Guerrilla Gourmet has expanded beyond traditional catering to become a multifaceted culinary hub, offering services that range from market shopping tours to intimate cooking classes to professional consultation.

The Power of Local Connections in the Culinary World

Behind every successful food venture lies a network of vital connections. For Chef Canter, that crucial link

came through connections with Chef Ryan Phillips of Bear Foot Gardens in Suwon and the team at the South of Seoul.

Nestled in the heart of Suwon, Bear Foot Gardens stands as an organic haven, cultivated under the careful guidance of Chef Ryan Phillips. Bear Foot Gardens grows more than just produce - it's cultivated a thriving group of dedicated volunteers who transform urban spaces into productive gardens. Chef Ryan Phillips believes that shared work yields shared rewards. Volunteers, ranging from seasoned gardeners to curious newcomers, contribute their time and energy to every aspect of farm life - from the tasks of soil preparation to the satisfying moments of harvest. But what sets this garden apart is its unique reward system: participants are treated to extraordinary farm-to-table meals prepared by the creative culinary team of Chef Ryan Phillips, Chef James Canter, and Ash Loper, their versatile front-of-house manager.

This partnership has blossomed into something far beyond typical professional collaboration. When Chef Canter was finding his footing in South Korea's culinary landscape, Chef Phillips' established presence and deep connections proved invaluable. Their shared vision has resulted in spectacular dining events at Bear Foot Gardens, where fresh-picked produce transforms into innovative dishes under their skilled hands. Perhaps most significantly, this friendship has solved one of the most challenging aspects of international cooking in Korea - sourcing specialized ingredients. Through Chef Phillips' agricultural network, Chef Canter now has access to hard-to-find items. From aromatic herbs to specialty peppers, and even unique proteins like rabbit and escargot, if they can't grow it, Chef Canter and Chef Phillips can source it!"

The farm's success also relies heavily on Loper's multifaceted contributions. While primarily managing guest relations and event coordination, he's developed his own line of signature

hot sauces using farm-grown peppers. His technical expertise as IT manager ensures smooth operations, while his hands-on involvement in cooking, prep work, and farm maintenance exemplifies Bear Foot Gardens' collaborative spirit.

Community Integration and Collaboration

The South of Seoul is a cornerstone organization working to support international and Korean communities. Their role in connecting Chef Canter with Songtan Market's leadership proved transformative, opening doors that might have otherwise remained closed in Korea's traditional market culture. Through South of Seoul's established relationships with local market vendors and administration, Chef Canter found not just access, but acceptance within the historic Songtan Market's tight-knit business network. He spoke passionately saying,

"I can't stress enough how much South of Seoul has quickly educated me and continuously help me integrate and meld into the community. I'm their biggest fan. They are great! I'd also like to reiterate that the mutual respect I feel we have for each other has its moments of tough love also. They've kept me honest and grounded and that's no easy task. They helped me understand it's ok not to know about something, pronounce things the wrong way, and be corrected so the



James Canter, Monica Woodford Cobb, Guy Fieri, Kevin Lee, and Declan Horgan on the Food Network's Guy's Grocery Games



Chef James T. Canter and wife Maureen

learning process is thorough. They are great teachers at their core and their community integration courses are Master Class crash courses in learning how to make life easier and enjoyable. Not just for foreigners moving here, but for Koreans wanting a deeper connection with us as guests in their country as well."

This collaboration highlights a truth often overlooked in the culinary world... Sometimes, the most important ingredients for success aren't found in the kitchen, but in the connections we forge. The introduction through South of Seoul wasn't just a formal meeting, it was an endorsement that carried the weight of trust and respect - essential currencies in Korean business culture. This partnership continues to exemplify how international residents can successfully integrate into Korea's rich culinary landscape while honoring local traditions and relationships.

The Future of Guerrilla Gourmet

Songtan Market

The heart of this culinary revolution beats strongest in Songtan Market's community kitchen where Chef James T Canter's programs have taken root and flourished. Here, market tours transform into cultural expeditions as participants learn to navigate the seasonal rhythms of Korean ingredients. These shopping and market tours have helped international residents understand what is available and within what season, where to find ingredients, and how they can be used in their daily cooking. Shopping at Korean markets is very affordable, which

makes these tours very practical for attendees!

Perhaps most ambitious is the recently launched Songtan Supper Club, Chef Canter's latest initiative that exemplifies his commitment to cultural exchange. His cooking demonstrations incorporate intentional discussions about heritage and culture, and as a result, incorporate language exchanges. Here, language barriers seem to fade amid the sizzle of pans and shared laughter. These bi-monthly gatherings showcase Korean cuisine through a lens of respect and transformation, where traditional techniques meet contemporary creativity.

Catering Made Easy

The catering arm of Guerrilla Gourmet continues to break new ground, offering bespoke dining experiences that range from private or group cooking classes to intimate couples' dinners or grand-scale events. Chef Canter's commitment to accessibility shines through in his varied price points, ensuring that exceptional cuisine remains within reach for a diverse range of clientele. This flexibility, combined with a willingness to travel throughout Korea, has established Guerrilla Gourmet as a truly mobile culinary force. To date, Guerrilla Gourmet's catering has spanned the Korean Peninsula from the northern part of Seoul to Gwangju in the South Jeolla Province.

Culinary Instructor

If you are looking for private or group cooking classes, Chef James T Canter can offer you a specialized

class emphasizing specific cuisines or a preferred dish of the client. Chef Canter also volunteers his services within the community, teaching classes with organizations such as the Humphreys United Club's Cooking Club! If you want to learn to cook a phenomenal dish, you have found your instructor!

Consultation Services

Chef James T Canter's work also happens behind the scenes, where decades of professional experience translate into valuable consultation services for clients around the world. His partnerships thrive on a foundation of mutual learning and teaching, where adapting recipes for local palates meets innovative problem-solving.

For chefs, restaurateurs, and food enthusiasts seeking guidance, Chef Canter offers a comprehensive suite of services beyond mere menu planning. His systematic approach helps businesses define their target demographics, and streamline operations, sharing his expertise on how to source ingredients and vendors, all while developing effective staffing strategies. This holistic methodology ensures that clients receive not just culinary expertise, but the tools for sustainable success in Korea's competitive restaurant landscape.

Through these varied initiatives, Chef James T. Canter of Guerrilla Gourmet has evolved into more than just a catering service - it's become a catalyst for cultural integration in Pyeongtaek and across Korea. As locals and foreigners gather around Chef James T. Canter's tables, they discover connections, understanding, and a shared appreciation for the power of a well-prepared meal to bring people together. As Guerrilla Gourmet looks to the future, Chef Canter's vision remains clear... To create authentic recipes that bridge Korean and international cuisines while educating others about cultural food integration through hands-on cooking experiences. Whether through catering, consultation, classes and market tours, volunteering, or community building, his work continues to prove that good food knows no boundaries.

Connect with Chef James T. Canter of Guerrilla Gourmet

Email: worldcheff@gmail.com
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Lessons from the Wisdom of Dandelions

By: Naomi Nubin-Sellers

Families come in all different flavors. In the military space, our diverse familial arrangements are unified through our shared experiences of facing the joys and challenges of military life. In my previous article, Finding the Sunflower in You, I established that military life is uniquely challenging for military-connected women and partners. I identified us as beautiful sunflowers, blooming wherever we are planted while nurturing all of those around us and gravitating toward others to form our created communities. Military partners and spouses are the formidable backbone of the military organization, often operating in the shadows and occasionally doing the thankless work to support our soldiers at home and away. So... Where do our dandelions fit into this framework?

The often overlooked feature of military institutions is the experience of military children. Our sweet dandelions spend their youth blowing here and there through PCS moves, often with little say in where or when they must pack up and go. They make friends everywhere they go, only to load up and leave just a short time later. This process shapes their upbringing, vitally impacting their socialization processes. In fact, nearly half of these dandelions will grow up to become service members themselves, first sacrificing as children and then continuing their sacrifice as adults. This piece is dedicated to them, recognizing their experiences, acknowledging their resilience, and recognizing their views as military-connected children.

As the title suggests, we can learn much from the fruits of our love (or passion). You may wonder, what



can we possibly learn from children? From my experience, watching children evolve can teach you a great deal. Military children, especially with their unique experiences, have much to offer all of us; together, we can learn from their wisdom.

From Children to Dandelions

My family came late to the military. As a more seasoned and close-knit bunch prior to moving away from home, we all felt the growing pains as we worked to reestablish ourselves in our new life. New school for the kids, a new house for all of us, and (my worst nightmare) a brand new schedule for me. It was here, at our first duty station, that I saw the transformation occur. My children made friends quickly, opening up in new ways by trying new sports, adapt-

ing swiftly to their new curriculum, and settling into their new life. While they began to thrive in their new environment, I still struggled to find my place. When we had been at our new home for about a year, my husband was up for a 9-month rotation. At the time, I was completely mortified. As with many families, the first deployment is always frightening, and ours was typical in this way. At this point, I was running on fumes, and with nowhere to turn, I looked to the ones who had watched me fight for the life that I wanted, my very own children, for direction. They shared this that day; both said it in words and displayed it through their actions.

The Eldest, Matthew

"Mom, you take yourself too seriously. You should relax and try something new. You are so smart, make some friends, it's easy."

My Micah Mouse

"Mom, you don't need to worry so much. Everything will work itself out. Just do your best, and the rest will be fine."

My Best Girl, Hannah-Marie

"Mom, make some new friends, and you will be fine. You don't need a bunch; just one good one is enough. I am so shy to talk to people, and it takes me a while to warm up, but once I do, then they get to see the real me and that I am funny and smart."

The Young One, Myles

"He kicks off his shoes, and hands me one of his Hot Wheels cars. I watch what he does, and he sends it flying down the long hallway in our house. We looked at each other, and burst into laughter."

The Wisdom in Youth

Together, my children represent the embodiment of the military. Often, they show strength in situations most adults would find difficulty tolerating, displaying generosity with their families and communities, and having to grow up when those around them demand it. We have all felt the sting of PCS moves, deployments, field activities, 24-



hour shifts, and the absence of our loved ones. As adults, most of us possess a higher level of understanding that allows us to move forward through these difficult circumstances.

But what about our dandelions? Are they the choiceless and the voiceless? No, they are not. Of course, it would be unreasonable to expect them to understand all of the adult problems that we face. But, their experiences, resilience, and sweet disposition as dandelions show us that if we relax a little, trust ourselves more often, make some friends, and laugh, we can get along a little easier. And honestly, I believe them. Life is very funny in that way; just as it is seemingly inconvenient, it can also show us the inconvenient beauty that it produces through the challenges that seem to come so naturally.

I recently attended a play, The Ghost of Hip-Hop Past, which was a wonderful reminder of these notions. Through music and history, the play highlighted how, although children have not lived long enough to feel the fear that accompanies being courageous

enough to fight against injustice, they can stand up and be brave if given the opportunity. It served as an enlightened reminder that we too were once young and care-less. A potent reminder that their strength frequently reflects the little miracles innate in life. As military-connected children, they often depend more on our created community than their non-military counterparts. The creative directors of the play, Dhakeria and Will Little, provided us with this creative reminder through the theater and helped to highlight the important lesson that it truly does take a village to raise children, but it takes an entire community to build a family. My deep gratitude to them for sharing their art with us!

Sunflowers and Dandelions Connected Journey

And before you say it, yes, those of us raising the children make immeasurable sacrifices to ensure a smooth transition for our families and children as we move wherever duty calls. I am not overlooking our sunflower status, but connecting it to those periodically overlooked or dismissed. Our young ones are those whose sacrifices often go unseen while we struggle with the business of the adult world, frequently blinded by our problems and goals. And for some of us, given our upbringing, we consistently imagine our children's lives as much better off than our childhoods. Also, if you are anything like me, that means our kids are not allowed to have problems of their own, not real ones anyway. Although we are usually well-intentioned, we may also be misguided on this point. Over time, my children have proved that each child must grow up in their own way, in their own time, and make their own mistakes. And, just as we all did, they will muster the strength that they need to become resilient individuals. Military dandelions are remarkable in this regard, each in their own way, and by embracing their perspective, we can all learn a little something.



About the Author

The column "Diamonds in the Rough" is about embracing the challenges of family, career building, and all the possibilities in life. The author, Naomi Nubin-Sellers is a current PhD Candidate, holding Bachelors and Masters degrees in the social sciences. In addition, she is a current instructor for a program housed at the University of Michigan. Her career aspirations include data-driven policy research, higher education, and non-profit services tailored to young mothers. She currently resides in Pyeongtaek, South Korea, with her active-duty spouse and four beautiful children who range from ages 6 to 17.

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Friendship Park Exhibition



Lotus Lantern Parade, Moonlight in the Night Sky in Insa-dong

Yeondeung-Hoe: Korea's Festival of Light and Spiritual Harmony

By Chunghee Jung
Photography Courtesy of Yeondeun-Hoe Office

• Symbolism and Significance of the Lotus Lantern in Buddhism

A lotus lantern is a lantern in the shape of a lotus flower, which symbolizes purity and enlightenment in Buddhism. Just as a lotus blooms untainted from muddy water, the lotus lantern illuminates the darkness and represents the Buddha's wisdom and compassion, guiding sentient beings on the path to enlightenment. Lighting a lotus lantern celebrates the Buddha's Birthday, symbolizes illuminating one's own mind, and conveys the wish for all sentient beings to be happy.

Additionally, offering a lotus lantern is considered a form of practice that expresses reverence and devotion to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

• The Meaning of Yeondeung-Hoe (Lotus Lantern Festival)

Yeondeung-Hoe is more than just a Buddhist ceremony; it has evolved into a cultural festival where Buddhists and the public come together. This festival honors the Buddha's teachings. Lighting a lotus lantern symbolizes not only illuminating one's own mind, but also becoming

a light that brightens the world. Offering a lotus lantern is considered an act of devotion, expressing respect to the Buddha and a prayer for all sentient beings to walk the path of enlightenment. Beyond its Buddhist significance, Yeondeung-Hoe plays a vital role in fostering community harmony and preserving traditional culture. Every year, countless participants march with lanterns, conveying a message of unity, hope, and the aspiration for a brighter, more harmonious world.

• The History of Yeondeung-Hoe

It is known that the tradition of offering lanterns existed even during the time of the Buddha. One famous account tells of when the Buddha was staying at Vulture Peak in Rajgir, India. While all other lanterns that had been lit throughout the night eventually extinguished, only the lantern offered by Nanda, a poor woman with deep devotion and a sincere vow, continued to burn brightly until the end. Witnessing this, the Buddha bestowed a prophecy upon her in the Hyunwookyeong (Sutra of the Poor Woman Nanda), stating,

"Because of the merit from offering this lantern, she will attain Buddhahood."

Offering a lantern to the Buddha is a symbolic act of devotion. The light of the lantern represents the

wisdom of the Buddha, which dispels the darkness of ignorance and suffering, guiding sentient beings toward enlightenment. The light represents the Buddha's teachings, which guide individuals toward a deeper understanding of truth, compassion, and spiritual awakening. The light is also seen as a metaphor for the mind's awakening—shedding the darkness of delusion and ignorance and bringing clarity, insight, and inner peace. During festivals like Yeondeung-Hoe, lighting a lantern represents the practitioner's aspiration to walk the path of enlightenment and to bring light into the world for the benefit of all sentient beings.

• Silla Period: 'Gandeung' (看燈)

The history of Yeondeung-Hoe (Lotus Lantern Festival) dates back to the Silla period. According to the Samguk Sagi (History of the Three Kingdoms), in the 6th year of King Gyeongmun's reign (866) and the 4th year of Queen Jinseong's reign (890), the kings visited Hwangnyongsa Temple to observe the lotus lanterns (Yeondeung, 燃燈) being lit. The term Gandeung (看燈), meaning "watching lanterns," indicates that over a thousand years ago, temples were already holding lantern-lighting ceremonies, which later evolved into the Yeondeung-Hoe.



Jogyesa Children's Parade at the festival

• Goryeo Period: Yeondeung-Hoe as a National Event

During the Goryeo period, Buddhism was the state religion and Yeondeung-Hoe became an official national festival. Goryeo's founder, King Taejo, emphasized the significance of Yeondeung-Hoe and the Palgwanhoe (Eight Precepts Assembly) in his Ten Injunctions (Hunyo Sipjo). The government even established the Yeondeung Dogam (Lantern Festival Bureau) and appointed Yeondeung Wijang (Lantern Festival Officers) to organize the event systematically.

On the 15th day of the first and second lunar months, the King and the people would light splendid lanterns throughout the country, from the royal palace to rural villages, while holding feasts and enjoying performances. Historical records state that during the King's return from the lantern festival procession, as many as 30,000 lanterns were illuminated along the streets for two nights, making the night as bright as day.

According to the Goryeosa (History of Goryeo), Baek Seon-yeon lit lanterns on the Buddha's birthday in the 20th year of King Uijong's reign (1166). Additionally, in the 32nd year of King Gojong's reign (1245), Choi Yi organized a grand Yeondeung-Hoe, where musical performances and celebrations continued throughout the night. The traditions of Yeondeung-Hoe from the Goryeo

period continued into the Joseon dynasty and modern times, not only as part of Buddhist culture but also as a cherished Korean heritage festival.

• Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910)

Ho-gi (Flag Calling) Game, Gwan-deung (Lantern Viewing) Game

After the founding of the Joseon Dynasty, the state-sponsored Yeondeung-Hoe (Lantern Festival) was discontinued, but it remained as a folk event and was passed down as a seasonal custom. Children would cut paper to make flags and hang them on lanterns, then carry them around the capital city, collecting rice or money to cover the cost of making the lanterns. This "Ho-gi" game, which dates back to the Goryeo Dynasty, was widely practiced.

Families would erect tall poles and light lanterns corresponding to the number of children in the household, while colorful lanterns were hung throughout the streets. At night, people of all ages would carry lanterns and stroll around, creating a sea of lights in the streets, which became a spectacular sight known as the "Gwan-deung" game. Climbing up to Jamdu Peak on Namsan to overlook the lanterns was considered one of the most significant spectacles of the year, and the lantern display



Lotus Lantern Procession

at Unjongga in Seoul was famous as one of the "Ten Scenic Views of Gyeongdo."

• Today's Yeondeung-Hoe Festival

Yeondeung-Hoe is a Buddhist festival with a long history and tradition, celebrated to commemorate the birth of the Buddha and to practice the values of compassion and equality. Even in modern society, this festival plays a crucial role in illuminating both individuals' hearts and the spirit of the community while promoting the beauty of Buddhist culture. The festival aims to go beyond being just a celebration; it seeks to spread the Buddha's teachings while praying for the happiness and enlightenment of all beings. Lighting lotus lanterns symbolizes purifying one's mind, fostering harmony, and creating a more peaceful society.

Today, Yeondeung-Hoe is held on a grand scale in Seoul and other major temples and cities across Korea. The festival includes a lantern parade, traditional cultural experiences, lantern exhibitions, performances, and more, allowing participants to deeply engage with Buddhist traditions. With its inclusion on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage for Humanity National Intangible Cultural Properties, the festival has gained global recognition attracting foreign visitors.

Yeondeung-Hoe offers various programs for international visitors, along with multilingual services in English, Chinese, and Japanese. Foreign guests can experience activities such as lantern-making, temple visits, and traditional performances, helping to introduce Korean Buddhist culture to the world.

• Integrating Lotus Lanterns into Mediation Practices

For mediation practitioners, creating a lotus lantern can serve as a form of waking mediation through action, blending creativity with the principles of mindfulness. It reminds us of the lotus' journey - emerging pure and beautiful despite its roots in the muddy water, symbolizing resilience and growth. After completing a paper lotus lantern, meditative phrases of appreciation can honor the effort, the symbolism of the lotus, and the mindful state achieved during the activity.

Ritual of Lighting the Lanterns

- If the lanterns can hold a light (like an LED candle), have participants light them while silently reciting a phrase of their choice.
- Dim the room lights, creating a serene and sacred atmosphere.



Meditative Phrases

Phrases of Gratitude

- "I am grateful for the hands that created this light." Acknowledges the physical effort and creativity you bring to the activity.
- "Thank you for this moment of peace and creativity." Expresses gratitude for the time and space you dedicated to this mindful practice.
- "I honor the patience and care that shaped this lantern." reflects on the virtues you cultivated during the process.

Phrases Inspired by the Symbolism of the Lotus

- "Like the lotus, may I rise above challenges to find clarity and beauty." Draw inspiration from the resilience and purity of the lotus flower.
- "This light reminds me of the wisdom that emerges from stillness." Connect the lantern's light with enlightenment and inner growth.
- "May the lantern's glow guide me toward compassion and understanding." Use the light as a metaphor for illuminating the path to kindness.

Phrases Celebrating Connection

- "This lander connects me to all beings seeking

light in their lives." Recognize the shared human experience of striving for peace and happiness.

- "May this lantern shine as a symbol of unity and love." Dedicate the act of creation to fostering harmony with others.
- "With this light, I send blessing to all who are suffering." Offer you work as an act of compassion and support for others.

Closing Phrases for Reflection

- "This lantern is a reminder of the beauty in mindful creation." Celebrate the meditative journey of crafting.
- "May I carry the peace of this moment into my daily life." Set an intention to extend the tranquility gained into future experiences.
- "Like this lantern, I can be a source of light for myself and others." Affirm your capacity to bring positivity and guidance to those around you.

Begin with a Centering Exercise

Guide Participants or Yourself Through a Brief Mindfulness Exercise

- Breath Awareness: Invite everyone to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths, focusing on the



How to Make a Lotus Lantern

Materials

- Wrinkled Korean traditional paper (Hanji)
- Glue
- Paper cups

1. Separate stacked wrinkled paper
2. Choose a color for the flower (15–18 petals) and a color for the leaves (about 5).
3. Gently hold a flower petal between your index and middle fingers.
4. Apply a tiny amount of glue at the center of the petal.
5. Press both sides of the petal's wrinkles toward the center to shape it.
6. Pinch the tip of the held petal using the thumb and index fingernail of your other hand.
7. Twist it tightly and apply a tiny amount of glue to the tip of the petal.
8. Repeat this process for 15–18 flower petals and 5 leaves.
9. Apply a small amount of glue about ½ inch from the bottom edge on the inside of the curved part, forming a "U" shape.
10. For the first layer, attach a twisted petal 2 inches below the top of the cup.
11. Attach another petal on the opposite side of the cup, aligning the tips of both petals.
12. For the second layer, attach a petal ½ inch lower than the first layer, positioning it between the two petals of the first layer.
13. Repeat the process for the third layer.
14. For the fourth layer, apply a small amount of glue to the outer curve of a leaf and attach it to the bottom edge of the cup.





Korean Buddhist Jogye Order Culture Lanterns

in-and-out rhythm.

- Hand Awareness: Ask participants to place their hands on their laps, feeling gratitude for the hands that created the lantern.

Introduce the Symbolism of the Lotus Lantern

Reflect on the Lotus's Symbolic Meaning

- Its journey from muddy waters to blossom in purity and light.
- Explain that the lantern represents their creativity, patience, and the illumination they bring to their lives and others.

Use the Phrases in a Guided Reflection

Begin a Slow, Meditative Reflection

- Pausing between phrases to allow for contemplation:
- Gratitude for Effort
- "I am grateful for the hands that created this light."
- "Thank you for this moment of peace and creativity."

Symbolic Reflection

- "Like the lotus, may I rise above challenges to find clarity and beauty."
- "May this lantern's glow guide me toward compassion and understanding."

Dedication to Others

- "With this light, I send blessings to all who are suffering."
- "May this lantern shine as a symbol of unity and love."

Invite Personal Sharing

- Ask participants to share how they felt during the creation process.
- Encourage them to express what the lantern and phrases mean to them personally.

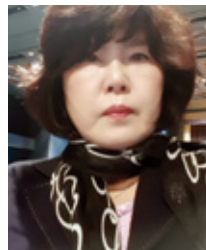
Closing Intention Setting

Closing Affirmations

- "May we carry the peace of this creative moment into our daily lives."
- "Like this lantern, may we each be a source of light and kindness in the world."

About the Author

Chunghye Jung is the Former Senior Vice President Overseas of the International Dharma Instructors Association. She is a professional meditation teacher and certified Buddhist Instructor. With a deep passion for exploring the mind, she majored in psychology to understand the intricate workings of human consciousness, including neuroscience. She enjoys sharing the benefits of meditation, introducing Korean culture to service members and their families, and promoting cultural exchanges at Osan Air Base, USAG Humphreys, and Seoul.



About the Photographer

The Yeondeun-Hoe Office is a pivotal organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of South Korea's Lotus Lantern Festival (Yeondeunghoe). Established in the heart of Seoul, the office coordinates all aspects of the festival, which marks the birth of Buddha and the vibrant traditions of Korean Buddhism. With a mission to celebrate light, spirituality, and community, Yeondeun-Hoe is responsible for organizing large-scale lantern parades, cultural performances, and Buddhist ceremonies that draw thousands of visitors each year. The office also works tirelessly to educate both locals and international audiences about the significance of the festival, focusing on the deep-rooted history, symbolism, and artistry of the lanterns themselves. Through its initiatives, the Yeondeun-Hoe Office fosters a sense of unity, peace, and cultural exchange, bridging the past and present of Korea's Buddhist practices and traditions.

By collaborating with local artisans, Buddhist temples, and cultural institutions, the Yeondeun-Hoe Office ensures the Lotus Lantern Festival remains an essential part of South Korea's vibrant cultural calendar, honoring the spirit of light and enlightenment.

United on the RoK Magazine would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Yeondeun-Hoe Office for graciously allowing us to use their stunning photographs for this article. Your support has been invaluable in helping us showcase the beauty and cultural significance of the Lotus Lantern Festival to our readers.

To learn about the Lotus Lantern Festival, visit: <http://www.llf.or.kr/>
To view more photos from their gallery, visit: <http://www.llf.or.kr/archive/index.php>

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Celebrating Tomorrow's Leaders: Osan Youth & Teen Center and the Military Youth of the Year

By Samantha Rowse, Teen Coordinator, Osan Youth Programs



At Osan Air Base, the Osan Youth & Teen Center is more than just an after-school program—it's a vibrant community for youth 9-18 years old to learn, grow, and lead. The center provides a dynamic environment that blends fun with personal development using Boys and Girls Club of America and 4-H programs. From late-night events and themed celebrations to academic support and career preparation, the center tailors its activities based on what youth want and need. The impact of the program fosters personal and



academic growth while creating a strong sense of community among military youth.

One of the center's programs is Keystone, a teen leadership club dedicated to academic success, career preparation, teen outreach, and community service. Keystone members mentor younger peers, collaborate with the Korean Tourism High School, and organize events that make a real difference in their community. It's no surprise that this year's Military Youth of the Year winner and two participants are active Keystone members—a testament to the program's role in shaping future leaders.

What is Military Youth of the Year?

Military Youth of the Year (MYOY) is the Boys & Girls Clubs of America's recognition program, celebrating military teens who demonstrate leadership, service, and academics. Since its introduction in 2013, MYOY has highlighted the resilience and achievements of youth growing up in military communities.

The competition is more than just a title—it's an opportunity for teens to develop essential skills, refine their personal narratives, and gain confidence in public speaking and professional settings. To support participants, the Osan Youth & Teen Center launched a MYOY Club, offering workshops with guest speakers, personalized coaching, guidance, and mentorship throughout the competition process.

On January 24th, 2025, Osan held its local MYOY competition, celebrating four outstanding teens who showcased their achievements and shared their stories.

2025 Military Youth of the Year: Isabella C.



Isabella "Izzie" embodies everything MYOY stands for. A dedicated member of the Osan Youth & Teen Center since 2019, she has been a driving force in Keystone, using her passion for service to uplift those around her. Her commitment earned her the 2020 Presidential Volunteer Award and she remains an active volunteer in her community.

Izzie's talents extend far beyond leadership—she excels in academics and the arts. From playing on the Girls Varsity Soccer team to earning a spot in Honors Jazz Chair and Advanced Drama, she is a well-rounded student with a bright future. Her exceptional ability to communicate and advocate for important issues helped her stand out in the MYOY competition, where she delivered a compelling speech and wrote insightful essays.

Izzie continued her journey at the next level of the competition, placing second against fourteen competitors virtually on March 13th! We are incredibly proud of her achievement in such fierce

competition! Her dedication and spirit will undoubtedly lead her to great success in all her future endeavors.

Osan's MYOY Participants

The Osan Youth & Teen Center is also proud to recognize three other remarkable teens who participated in this year's competition.

Ayden C.



A member since 2022, Ayden C. is a dedicated leader both in the center and at school. He actively participates in Keystone, student government, and multiple sports teams, showcasing his ability to balance diverse commitments and excel in multiple areas.

Beyond his involvement in the center, Ayden is an active Boy Scout and volunteers with the VFW. He is passionate about music, sports, and astronomy and he has set his sights on attending the U.S. Naval Academy to study mechanical engineering and pursue his goal of becoming a Navy SEAL. He also shares his musical talents with the choir at Our Lady of Peace Osan.

Joseph M.



Since joining the center in 2024, Joseph M. has been an integral part of the teen community. He is passionate about art, film, and cosplay, dreaming of bringing stories to life in the film industry or as a novelist.

Joseph quickly became an active participant in Keystone, as well as events like #WeOwnFriday and Osan-Con. A dedicated Eagle Scout, he continues to give back to his community through volunteer work at his church. His creative spirit and commitment to service stands out among Osan's youth.

Mack

A member since 2023, Mack has an extraordinary gift for languages, having learned both German and Korean after spending most of his life in Germany and Korea. His linguistic skills have helped him serve as a class president and assist military members facing language barriers in emergencies.

Beyond academics, Mack is a published author for United on the ROK magazine and an active church member. He also practices

Taekwondo and has a passion for performing magic tricks. With aspirations of graduating valedictorian, Mack hopes to use his language abilities to make a meaningful impact on others.



Congratulations to all of Osan's MYOY participants! Your dedication, leadership, and service are an inspiration to military youth everywhere.

Osan Youth & Teen Center's Commitment to Youth Excellence

The Osan Youth & Teen Center remains committed to empowering its youth by providing mentorship, scholarship opportunities, and career workshops. These initiatives ensure that young leaders like Izzie, Ayden, Joseph, and Mack continue to thrive.

The MYOY competition is more than just an award—it's a platform for military teens to share their stories, develop their skills, and inspire others. As Izzie moves forward in the competition, she carries with her the unwavering support of the Osan community and the legacy of excellence that the Youth & Teen Center instills in

every participant.

Parents and teens interested in getting involved with the Osan Youth & Teen Center can explore a variety of exciting programs and opportunities. The center offers affiliation with reputable organizations like the Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) and 4-H, ensuring a well-rounded experience for all. Teens can join classes and clubs such as Torch Club, cooking, art, dance, music, and fitness classes, or participate in other specialized programs. The center also offers community outreach initiatives and summer camps. Parents can visit the center or contact staff for more information on how to get their teens involved in these valuable activities, helping them grow as leaders and active community members.

Resources



- Osan CYP Website: <https://51fss.com/youth-center/>
- Facebook: Osan Air Base Child and Youth Programs
- Osan CYP Information
 - Osan Air Base Bldg. 492
 - DSN: 784-1492
 - From Cell: 0505-784-1492
 - Email: 51fss.fsyy.youthcenter@us.af.mil
 - School Days: Monday-Friday 1030-1300 & 1400-1730
 - No-School Days, Early Release, and Summer Hours:
 - Monday-Friday 1030-1200 & 1300-1730
 - Closed: US Holidays & Combined 7AF & 51 FW Down Days



A Life-Altering Journey: Advocating for Change in Civilian Employee Healthcare Overseas

Part 2 of Heather's Story

By Heather MacLeod

Nearly

a year ago, what should have been a simple visit to a South Korean café turned into a life-altering medical crisis. A dislocated leg escalated into a severe, life-threatening emergency when a severed artery went unnoticed, leading to compartment syndrome and, ultimately, the loss of my leg above the knee. This experience exposed the harsh realities of navigating foreign healthcare systems as a civilian employee—delayed treatment, language barriers, and financial burdens compounded an already dire situation.

Through this journey, I learned the power of self-advocacy, the necessity of patient advocates, and the critical role leadership plays in supporting civilian employees during medical emergencies. Now, reflecting on the

challenges I faced, I see an opportunity to improve the system and ensure others receive the timely, comprehensive care they need.

The Challenges of Navigating Foreign Healthcare Systems

Expatriates often find themselves facing unexpected challenges when seeking healthcare abroad, as I did during my treatment after the accident in a cafe in South Korea. A pivotal moment occurred when I had to undergo a leg reset without the aid of painkillers—a harrowing experience that was made even more difficult when an artery was severed during the procedure. This event starkly illustrated the cultural and procedural differences between the healthcare system in South Korea and the medical practices I was familiar with in the United



States. Such experiences can be shocking and serve as a reminder that expatriates need to be prepared for differences in how care is delivered.

Another challenge is the bureaucracy and red tape that can surround healthcare benefits, particularly when it comes to using medical evacuation services. The time difference and logistical hurdles make it essential to tap into your network for support, whether it's through your chain of command or reaching out to representatives who can advocate on your behalf. This proactive approach can make a significant difference when facing delays or complications in your care.

The road to recovery can be equally complex. After my leg reset, the lengthy process of obtaining a prosthetic leg was a battle with both insurance and the South Korean healthcare system. Negotiating through the differences in procedures and practices took months, highlighting the importance of being persistent and prepared for delays. Additionally, adapting to physical therapy in a foreign country can be a challenge, particularly when language barriers complicate communication with healthcare providers. Despite these hurdles, asking questions and using translation apps can help bridge the gap, allowing you to stay involved in your recovery.

The emotional and physical toll of being wheelchair-bound during this period added another layer of difficulty. As I navigated Korea's streets, it became apparent that accessibility for individuals with disabilities was not always prioritized. This realization was a stark reminder of how vital it is to adapt to new environments and to find strength in the face of adversity. Yet, by embracing these challenges, I continued to live my life and

build a new normal, learning that resilience is key to overcoming obstacles when navigating healthcare in a foreign country.

Advocating for Changes in Civilian Employee Emergency Care

The broader implications of this medical emergency demand attention. Healthcare leaders, particularly within military-affiliated systems, must find ways to empower their staff to act with compassion and flexibility in critical situations. Doing what is right should never come at the cost of an employee's life or career—it

should be celebrated and encouraged. I hope that this story can serve as a call for change, inspiring leaders to embrace compassion as a guiding principle in patient care.

The Army operates an Issue Management System where I am advocating for enhanced support and protections for civilian employees' services overseas. Despite our critical contributions as civilian employees, there is a lack of formalized and immediate protections for these civilians in the event of accidents or life-threatening scenarios. This gap is particularly concerning given the challenges mentioned with navigating healthcare in a country not our own. There is an absence of a standardized response framework to ensure civilians with medical emergencies are treated with dignity and respect as valued team members as part of the mission.

Civilian employees stationed on overseas military installations should not have to rely on grassroots advocacy or leadership fighting uphill battles to receive proper care and respect during such times of crisis. We need a streamlined, policy-driven response that ensures their well-being and reinforces their role as part of the Department of Defense team.

After careful consideration, these are the recommendations that I believe could make a difference:

Formalized Emergency Protocols: Develop and implement standardized emergency protocols to support injured or incapacitated civilian employees OCONUS. This should include immediate access to military healthcare services and support without delays caused by bureaucratic hurdles.



Advocacy and Case Management: Assign a dedicated case manager or liaison to assist injured civilians with navigating healthcare, administrative processes, and legal rights during recovery, ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect.

Command Support Enablement: Provide commanders with the authority and resources needed to support injured civilians effectively. Remove unnecessary bureaucratic barriers that hinder their ability to act in the best interest of their personnel.

OCONUS Civilian Employee Bill of Rights: Create a formalized document outlining the rights and protections of civilian employees OCONUS, emphasizing their inclusion as part of the military team and ensuring consistent treatment in line with Army Values. Adding this to the National Defense Authorization Act would be ideal as OCONUS civilian employees support the military mission abroad.

Mandatory Training for Leadership: Require all military and civilian leadership OCONUS to undergo training on the unique challenges faced by civilian employees and the importance of immediate, respectful support in crisis situations.



Independent Oversight: Establish an independent oversight mechanism to ensure timely and effective responses to civilian injuries and accidents OCONUS.

Policy Review and Expansion: Conduct a comprehensive review of policies governing OCONUS civilian employees, expanding protections and aligning benefits with those of military personnel in similar situations.

Each civilian employee stationed overseas serves alongside our military and I believe we should all be treated with the same care and concern, especially our civilian employees who are veterans. We are one family, one team—it's one mission. We are brought here for security and sustainment of peace in the Pacific. We pursue global peace, but sometimes personal peace and well-being during emergencies aren't considered. In sharing my story, I hope to inspire others to find strength in the face of adversity. This journey has taught me to face each day with gratitude, knowing that my life, while different, is no less fulfilling or meaningful.

If you are reading this and want to support this cause, share your story, or give insight into policy changes and advocacy, please reach out. Check back next month as I explore reasonable accommodations in the workplace.



About the Author
Born in Trenton, Michigan, and a proud Air Force veteran, Heather now serves as an Army civilian. Passionate about exploring new places, Heather enjoys traveling throughout South Korea, immersing in its rich culture and vibrant landscapes.

INTO THE HEART OF BORNEO



A Riverboat Adventure to Meet Orangutans and Other Jungle Wonders

By Dan Romano

Borneo: A Unique Island of Biodiversity

If you ever want to meet the king of swingers, the jungle VIP, and some of its cousins, consider a trip to Borneo, the third-largest island in the world located in Southeast Asia. This island is very unique as it is shared by three countries: Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. The island is known for its rich biodiversity, tropical rainforests, and unique wildlife, including orangutans.

A Journey Into the Heart of the Jungle

When we landed in the city of Pangkalan Bun, Indonesia, our guide was waiting, and we were off to the jungle in about an hour. Our trip would take us through Tanjung Puting National Park near Pangkalan Bun, one of only two places where orangutans still live in the wild. A two-night trip might be all you need to see a lot, and it is a fantastic place to get away from work for a while and relax in nature.

A comfortable way to see what the jungle of Borneo has to offer is by klotok, a small riverboat designed to take people on the narrow rivers that meander through the jungle. Klotoks are small and rustic with basic amenities, and ours had accommodations for two. We floated down the silty brown Sekonyer River with lush green banks full of sago palm trees and lots of other vegetation. During our lazy ride we sat in oversized beanbags on the bow and watched orangutans, other monkeys, and birds in the trees along the banks. Each night we stopped at a rickety dock along the river to spend the night.

Camp Leakey: The Orangutan Sanctuary

The Tanjung Puting National Park is best known for Camp Leakey, which was founded in 1971 by Dr. Biruté Galdikas for the conservation, protection, understanding of orangutans, and their rainforest habitat in Borneo. The camp cares for and rehabilitates former captive or displaced orangutans for release into the wild. Deforestation is a significant environmental issue on Borneo that is primarily driven by the expansion of palm oil plantations. Borneo is the world's largest producer of palm oil, resulting in the most deforestation. Logging and mining for





minerals, whether legal or illegal, also contribute to deforestation. Today more and more orangutans and other animals continue to be displaced on the island.

There are many orangutans throughout the park that are either no longer or never were part of Camp Leakey's rehabilitation program. Every day, at three locations, rangers empty a few burlap bags of mangoes, and the orangutans gather for a free lunch! Some are already in the surrounding trees and swing down when they see the ranger. After the ranger calls out with a few shouts that echo through the jungle, distant trees begin to sway, and the sound of breaking branches can be heard as more orangutans make their way over!

Now, if you are wondering if these orangutans are wild or captive, they are wild. However, over time, they have grown accustomed to the park rangers providing free lunch. It seems some of the orangutans that once were cared for at the camp remained near the camp after release. These orangutans made families and now bring them along to feed, and the cycle continues. We saw more along the riverbanks that do not visit the stations, and considering there are over 80,000 orangutans on the island of Borneo, few seem to be close to the camp or come for the free lunch.

The Pecking Order of Orangutans

Within a group of orangutans, there is a definite pecking order when the lunch bell rings, and the first orangutans to arrive are always on edge. The juveniles and mothers with babies cautiously eat as fast as they can, knowing the flanged male will arrive soon. Once they sense he is near, some dispersed into the trees and others kept at least an arm's length away, most of the time. There were instances when an orangutan got too close to the flanged male and paid the price. The flanged male grabbed it, pinning it down, but eventually just let go. He could have injured the smaller orangutan or worse, and primarily seemed like a show of force, a message of intimidation to all of them.

The flanged male can steal the show because when he struts in, every other animal takes notice. However, another highlight was all the protective mothers with a baby clinging onto them tightly. Every infant looked petrified to see the flanged male and was completely dependent on their mother.

It truly was a sight to see as the mothers protected themselves and their baby while cautiously foraged mangoes for both to eat.

Other Wildlife Encounters Along the River

A leisurely ride on the klotok, up the Sekonyer River offers much more than just encounters with orangutans. There are two other species of primates endemic to Borneo, which are the proboscis monkeys and the red leaf monkeys.

The proboscis monkey gets its name from its long protruding nose that only a mother could love. They are abundant in the trees along the riverbanks and are quite acrobatic. If lucky, you might see them jumping from tree to tree, sometimes across the river.

The red leaf monkey gets its name from its fur color and that their diet consists mainly of leaves. They seemed timid and were more comfortable at a distance, deeper in the forest, away from any of the other monkeys.

Another type of monkey that lives all over the world and frequents the riverbank is the long-tailed macaque. They were the only other monkeys to feed at Camp Leakey with the orangutans. They nervously scampered around picking up whatever scraps they could find while staying clear of the flanged male orangutans.

Exploring The Jungle After Dark

Is a night hike in the jungle your idea of fun? As night descended, we set out to see what was sleeping and waking. The impenetrable darkness was only lit up by our head lamps to find many birds sleeping in the trees, snakes, tarantulas, interesting insects, and more that we could not see.

The Best Time to Visit: Wet or Dry Season?

I would like to leave you with my take on the age-old question of the best time to go. There is no right or wrong answer, but more about what you prefer and if you want to take the risk. Most online sites will say May to September is the best time because it is the dry season. Keep in mind this area has two seasons, wet and dry. While the dry season has less chance of rain, let us put the wet season in perspective.





It does not rain 24/7, and we did not experience any rain that prevented us from doing anything during this three-day November trip. It sprinkled a couple of times, which was insignificant, and it rained one evening after our day was over, and relaxing on the boat was all we wanted to do. The overcast also made the temperature more tolerable.

The wet season often brings up the issue of mosquitoes. During the day and dry nights there was none to speak of. The evening after it rained, the bugs came out; however, the boat staff had effective tactics to keep them at bay and we used a combination of permethrin on our clothing and bug spray. I came away completely unscathed from bug bites while my wife had a few. When considering other bugs you might encounter, remember this is the jungle!

While the dry season has less risk of rain, there are more tourists than any other time. Our guide indicated that the dry season is very crowded with upwards of twenty-five boats along the river and hundreds of people. The phrase that has been coined about the dry season is the 'orangutan market' due to so many people.

During our trip, there were about four to six klotoks with two to four tourists each and the rain was not an issue. This is not meant to substitute a weather forecast, but is about what you prefer, mild weather with crowds or the chance of rain with no crowds. Hopefully, this perspective gives you something to consider and if you have a flexible vacation schedule, the 'rainy season' can expand your travel options and give you a chance to appreciate the quiet serenity of the wild side of Indonesia.

How You Can Help Protect Orangutans and Their Habitat

Everyday people can play an important role in preventing deforestation and protecting orangutan habitats by making conscious choices as consumers. Palm oil is extremely versatile and is an ingredient in many products we use daily, including processed foods, cosmetics, personal hygiene,

household cleaners, animal feed, and many industrial applications. Supporting sustainable palm oil production is one of the most effective ways to help, as palm oil plantations are a major driver of deforestation in Borneo. Look for products certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), which ensures that the palm oil used is harvested responsibly. Additionally, reducing the use of single-use plastics, supporting wildlife conservation organizations, and spreading awareness about the impact of deforestation can also make a difference. By making informed decisions and advocating for environmental protection, we can all contribute to the preservation of these incredible creatures and their natural habitat for generations to come.

Tour and Guide Resources

- To know more about orangutans and their habitat, visit: <https://orangutan.org/rainforest/tanjung-puting-national-park/>
- Need a guide? Check out Jungle Papa with Orangutan Trekking Tours. In my opinion, there cannot be a more seasoned guide than Bain, the owner, operator, and guide of all our trips. He is a very accomplished photographer and has been active in the community working as a park ranger for about ten years before moving on to guiding tourists. For more information about their offerings, visit: <https://www.orangutantrekkingtours.com>
- To learn more about Camp Leakey and their preservation efforts, visit: <https://authentic-indonesia.com/activities/camp-leakey/>

Travel Resources

- Aircraft and Personnel Automated Clearance System
<https://apacs.milcloud.mil/>
- Theater Travel Requirements, Travel Tracker/Individual Antiterrorism Plan (TT/IATP)
<https://www.pacom.mil/Resources/Travel-Requirements/>
- US Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Indonesia.html>



About the Author

Dan Romano retired from the Air Force after 30 years of service. Dan was based at United States Forces Korea for several years over two assignments. He recently returned and enjoys living in Korea.

He is a nature lover, photographer, and traveler. His adventures take him to some of the most beautiful places in the world where he captures the beauty of nature both on land and in the water.

Ube Crinkles:

A Sweet Taste of Home and a Pop of Purple for Spring

By Joanna Mae Marshallsay



For the past five years my kitchen has been filled with the delightful scents of butter, vanilla, and the nutty sweetness of ube as I baked batch after batch of ube crinkles. This tradition began while working at a hospital in Arlington, Virginia, where I shared these treats with my coworkers during the holiday rush. These soft, fudgy cookies, dusted with powdered sugar, were always a hit at cookie exchanges. Now, living in Korea, I continue this tradition, sharing with new friends who have quickly come to love this Filipino favorite.

While these cookies are a staple for me, during the Christmas season, they also feel perfectly suitable for spring. As cherry blossoms paint the streets pink and lavender fields begin to bloom, the beautiful shades of purple blend seamlessly with the season's soft palette. The deep violet hue of the ube crinkles makes them a fantastic sweet treat for spring gatherings—whether it's a picnic under the cherry blossoms or an afternoon tea with friends.

What is Ube?

Ube (pronounced ooh-beh) is a vibrant purple yam native to the Philippines. It is a staple in Filipino desserts, known for its subtly sweet and nutty flavor, often described as a blend of vanilla and pistachio. Traditionally used in dishes like halo-halo, cakes, and jams, ube has gained international popularity for its striking color and unique taste.

This deep purple ingredient enhances the flavor of desserts and makes them visually stunning. Ube pairs beautifully with the soft pinks of spring, making ube crinkles a perfect seasonal treat. When made with homemade ube halaya (purple yam jam), the flavors become even more decadent.

Homemade Ube Halaya (Ube Jam) Recipe

To make ube crinkles, begin with homemade ube halaya. If you can't find store-bought ube halaya, you can easily prepare it at home. This ube halaya is perfect not only for cookies but also for spreading on toast or using in other desserts.

Ingredients

- 2 cups grated fresh or frozen ube (thawed if frozen)
- 1 can (14 oz) sweetened condensed milk or the ube condensed milk
- 1 can (12 oz) evaporated milk
- 1 can (14 oz) coconut milk
- 1/2 cup butter, salted
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tsp ube extract
- 1 tsp purple food coloring (optional)

Instructions

1. In a large pan over medium heat, combine evaporated milk, coconut milk, condensed milk, and butter. Stir well until the mixture is warm and fully combined.
2. Once it is warm, add the grated ube, stirring continuously to prevent it from burning. As the mixture starts to thicken, reduce the heat to low.
3. After about 30-40 minutes, add ube extract, vanilla extract, and purple food coloring. Keep stirring until the mixture becomes thick and sticky, pulling away from the sides of the pan.
4. Transfer the mixture to a container and allow it to cool before using.

Ube Crinkles Recipe

Ingredients

- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tsp ube extract
- 1/2 cup homemade ube halaya (or store-bought)
- 1 tsp purple food coloring (optional, for a deeper hue)
- 1 cup powdered sugar (for rolling)





Instructions

1. In a bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Set the mixture aside.
2. In another bowl, beat the butter and sugar together until the mixture is light and fluffy. Add in the egg, ube extract, and vanilla extract, mixing well.
3. Incorporate the ube halaya, ensuring it is evenly mixed throughout.
4. Gradually add the dry ingredients to the wet mixture, stirring until just combined. If desired, you can add a few drops of purple food coloring for a more vibrant appearance.
5. Cover the dough and refrigerate it for at least 2 hours or overnight. Chilling the dough makes it easier to handle and results in better crinkles.
6. Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C) and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
7. Scoop tablespoon-sized portions of dough and roll them into balls. Generously coat each ball in powdered sugar.
8. Place the balls on the prepared baking sheet, making sure to space them apart as they will spread slightly while baking.
9. Bake for 10-12 minutes, or until the tops are set but still soft in the center.
10. Allow the cookies to cool on the baking sheet for a few minutes before transferring them to a wire rack.

With their rich purple color and soft, chewy texture, ube crinkles are a nostalgic comfort and a delightful addition to springtime treats. Whether you bring them to a cookie exchange, enjoy them with a cup of tea, or pack them for a picnic under the cherry blossoms, these cookies will brighten any gathering.

So this season, embrace the beauty of purples and pinks—why not do it with a cookie that's as pretty as it is delicious? Would you consider making these for your next spring gathering? Let me know how they turn out!

About the Author

Joanna Mae Marshallsay is an Air Force wife currently stationed at Camp Humphreys, South Korea. A dedicated nurse leader with a Master's degree in Nursing Administration, she has a strong background in various fields of nursing. She actively volunteers with the Red Cross and Brian D. Allgood Army Community Hospital (BDAACH), continuing her commitment to service and quality care.

Beyond healthcare, Joanna is passionate about community support and philanthropy. She was featured on WJLA ABC7 News in Washington, D.C. for leading a successful initiative to support the homeless community and victims of domestic violence. Her dedication to supporting others extends to her role as a K-Market Supporter; she was recognized by the Gyeonggi Province Government for promoting local businesses and international cooperation.

An avid traveler and foodie, Joanna loves exploring new cultures, experimenting with food, and sharing her experiences through her social media platforms. She helps military families, nurses, and expats navigate life abroad with confidence, providing valuable insights on travel, food, and cultural integration. Whether discovering hidden gems in South Korea or guiding others through overseas transitions, she is dedicated to inspiring and educating her audience while fostering a strong sense of community.

Follow her on her socials at [@annaioanna](#) and [@jojo_and_andrew_eat](#)



A Simple Guide to Reading and Writing Hangul

By Bianca Del Carmen

As founder of Boram Language Institute, I've been working diligently to create a Korean language course that teaches you how to read and write hangul. I'm excited to say it's finally complete! This course is designed to help you read and write Korean quickly and efficiently. Once you master these foundational skills, you'll be ready to start speaking with confidence and enjoying life in Korea even more.

At first, learning the Korean alphabet might seem like a challenge, but with a little effort, you'll pick it up in no time. Not only will you learn to recognize and write each letter, but you'll also gain a deeper understanding of Korean language structure — both in letter formation and sentence construction. Knowing how to read is a game-changer, whether you're ordering at a restaurant, navigating signs, or tackling everyday tasks in Korea.

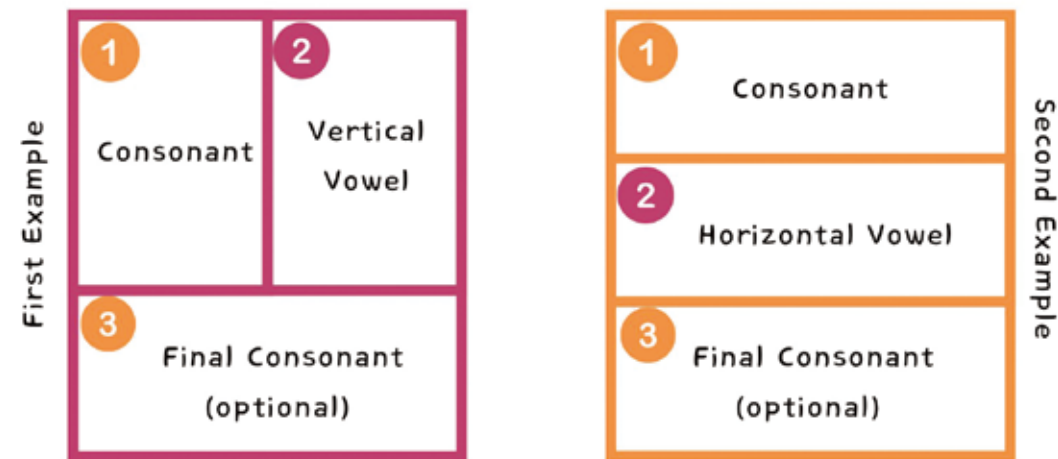
Let's dive right in! First, we need to start with the Korean alphabet. I like to break it down a bit differently than most teachers online. Take a look at the Korean Hangul Alphabet Cheat Sheet I created below. You'll see that the alphabet consists of 10 basic consonants, 5 double consonants, 4 hard consonants, and 10 simple vowels. While there are also complex vowels, we'll focus on the basics for now. My online course dives deeper into the shapes of these characters and provides helpful techniques for memorizing them.

Korean Hangul Alphabet

10 basic consonants	ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅎ
	g/k	n	d	r/l	m	b/p	s/sh	ng	j	h
5 double consonants	ㄲ		ㄸ			ㅃ	ㅆ		ㅉ	
	kk		dd			bb	ss		jj	
(faster sound/higher pitch)										
4 hard consonants	ㅋ		ㅌ			ㅍ			ㅊ	
	k		t			p			ch	
(stronger sound)										
10 simple vowels	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	
	ah	yah	uh	yuh	ee	o	yo	oo	yoo	euh
	Vertical Vowels					Horizontal Vowels				

What are “syllable blocks”?

Syllable blocks consist of at least one consonant and one vowel to form words in Korean. How they are formed depends on if the vowel is a vertical vowel (ㅏ, ㅑ, ㅓ, ㅕ, ㅗ) or a horizontal vowel (ㅜ, ㅠ, ㅡ, ㅟ, ㅡ).



Looking at the cheat sheet, you’ll notice phonetic spellings under each character to make them easier to remember. Practicing these characters for just a few minutes each day will have you reading like a pro in no time! You’ll also see some characters grouped within vertical rectangles — this indicates that they share similar sounds. This is great news! Instead of memorizing every letter individually, you can start with the basic vowels and build on patterns that connect similar letters.

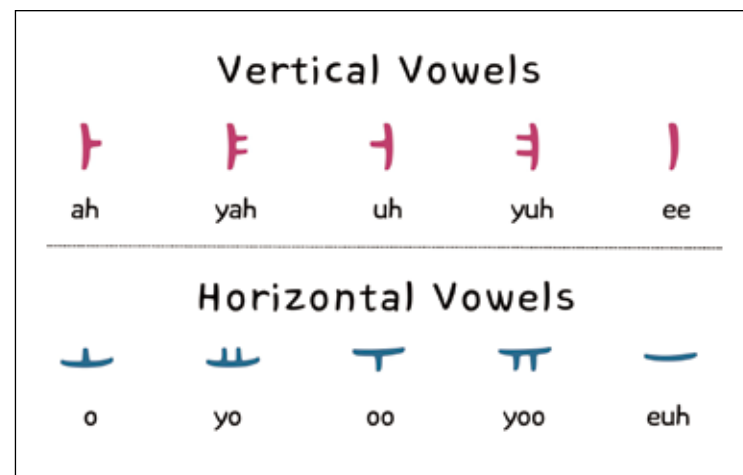
Let’s take a closer look at the double consonants. They share the same sound as their single consonant counterparts but with a higher pitch and faster pronunciation. As for the hard consonants, they’re simply a stronger version of the basic consonants they resemble.

Once you start recognizing the letters, the next step is putting them together to form syllable blocks. You might be wondering, “What are syllable blocks?” In Korean, syllables are formed by combining consonants and vowels into smaller units called syllable blocks. Each block represents one syllable. This makes Korean words look organized and square-shaped.

Let’s break it down further by understanding vertical and horizontal vowels. Vertical vowels include ㅏ, ㅑ, ㅓ, ㅕ, and ㅗ. When paired with a consonant, the vowel is placed to the right side of the consonant. For example, “ㄱ + ㅏ = 가” notice how the ㅏ sits to the right of ㄱ.

In contrast, horizontal vowels include ㅜ, ㅠ, ㅡ, ㅟ, and ㅡ. When combined with a consonant, the vowel is placed below the consonant. For example, “ㄱ + ㅜ = 구” here, the ㅜ is placed below the ㄱ.

Mastering these simple combinations is the first step toward reading Korean smoothly. As you practice, you’ll start recognizing patterns and reading with ease. Take your time, enjoy the process, and remember that every small step brings you closer to confidently reading and writing in Korean. In a few weeks, you’ll be able to recognize many consonant and vowel combinations, and you’ll be glad you started now!



I also wanted to mention that Korean sentences are formed a bit differently than in English. In English, we say, “I eat an apple.” In Korean, the sentence structure follows a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) pattern, so it becomes “I apple eat.” Let’s look at a couple more examples: “I home go” and “He Korean studies.” As you can see, we must remember that the verb always comes at the end of the sentence. It might feel a little strange at first, but once you get used to it, it becomes second nature.

One of the most exciting moments in learning Korean is when everything starts to “click.” Suddenly, you’ll find yourself recognizing words on menus or reading signs with ease. You’ll also start noticing Konglish — words borrowed from English and adapted into Korean pronunciation — like “computer” (컴퓨터), “cake” (케이크), and “coffee” (커피). These familiar words make the learning process even more fun and rewarding!

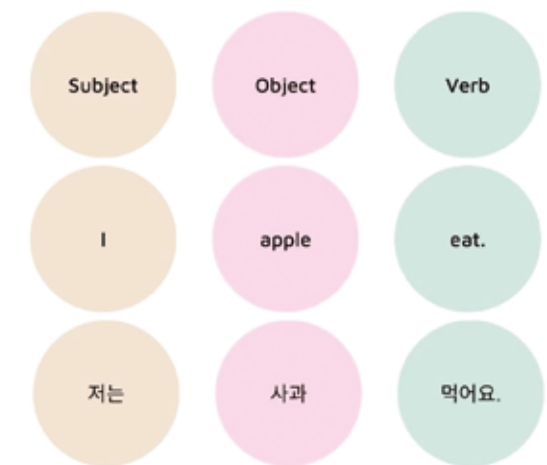
Keep this article as a little cheat sheet for learning Korean. Take it with you when you’re out and about and try to read some of the Korean words around you! Even if you only recognize a few characters at first, celebrate those small wins. They’ll add up before you know it.

If you feel up to it, I invite you to try my Hangul course that can be purchased on our website below. *United on the RoK* readers can receive a \$15 discount by using the code ONTHEROK when you purchase the course! This course goes deeper into understanding Korean characters and provides guided practice, helping you build confidence in your reading and writing skills.

You’ve already taken the first step by reading this quick guide to Hangul, and I couldn’t be prouder. Happy learning, and I hope to see you in the course soon!

Sentence Formation

S-O-V



About the Author

Bianca Del Carmen was born in Las Cruces, New Mexico. As a military-connect child, she grew up all around the world, allowing her to experience many cultures. Bianca graduated from the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University with a major in Business Marketing. Bianca has lived in South Korea for over 12 years now and resides with her husband in the Daegu area with their three children. As the founder of the Boram Language Institute, Bianca offers Korean lessons online.

- Website: www.boramlanguageinstitute.com
- Hangul Course: <https://www.boramlanguageinstitute.com/hangul>
- Facebook group: Korean Language Support (for the RoK Military Community & Friends)
- YouTube: [Boram_in_Korea](https://www.youtube.com/Boram_in_Korea)
- IG: [Boram_in_Korea](https://www.instagram.com/Boram_in_Korea)



A day spent with family at the Korean Folk Village in Yongin.
Captured by Heather Banner.



Muhly Muhly. Captured by Kate Nelson.



Sibling Fun. Captured by Michael Berkley.



Sisters in Spring. Captured by Ysamar Gómez.

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