



Most Americans are familiar with the Republic of Korea through either K-pop music, the North-South political issues or the spicy, delicious cuisine. But for me, my awareness and interest grew through Korea's association with the U.S. Peace Corps. My dad, a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV), served in Korea in the late 1970's and I grew up looking at pictures of Korea from that time period.

This past October, I had the honor to continue learning about life on the peninsula through a RPCV Revisit Program to Korea sponsored by the Korea

Foundation. From October 13 to October 18, fifty-five RPCVs and family members were hosted by the Foundation to reconnect with life in Korea. It was an unforgettable visit that allowed me to see different generations of Koreans and Americans sharing memories and new experiences together.

Peace Corps was in Korea from 1966 to 1981 and many of the RPCVs had not been back to Korea since that time. In fact, a few of the Revisit members were in the first group of Volunteers who came to Korea in 1966! At that time Korea's Per Capita Gross National Income (GNI) was about \$254; by 2010 it was about \$21,000. The RPCVs marveled at the changes that had occurred in Korea since their time of service.

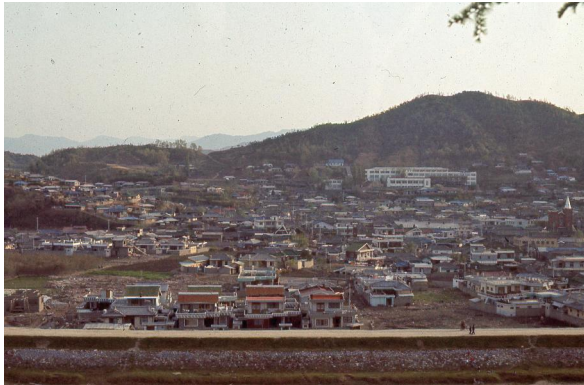
The highlights of the week were receptions hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT), visits to the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) – Korea's version of Peace Corps, overnight site visits to the RPCVs' former schools and health clinics, oral interviews of the RPCVs at the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, and an afternoon visit to the Korean National Assembly hosted by Speaker H.E. Kang Chang-Hee.



I enjoyed all of the activities. At KOICA, I had the opportunity to speak in front of the RPCVs and KOICA volunteers to describe how my dad's time in the Peace Corps has influenced my career decisions, especially my current job now working in International Admissions at OSU. I gave the speech in Korean, and although I was nervous at first, the warm welcome by the audience quickly

made me feel relaxed. From my visit there, I learned that KOICA is modeled after the U.S. Peace Corps. The Korean government recognized how the assistance from the Peace Corps helped Koreans during a difficult time in their history and now was reciprocating by sending their volunteers to other countries. Many of the KOICA volunteers I talked to were getting ready to go to countries in South America and South Asia.

Each of the RPCVs had the opportunity to re-visit the schools or health clinics where they



had served. These re-visits were the perfect opportunity for the volunteers to reconnect with their past students and colleagues. It was a walk down memory lane for the Americans and the Koreans. Many of the volunteers tried to find memorable spots in their former cities. My dad tried to find the boarding house where he used to live as well as the old roads where he would walk to the school. He took



pictures during this trip and matched them with his old photographs taken at the same location. The change was incredible. Instead of the old mud roads and low buildings, there are now concrete roads and tall skyscrapers. It is amazing to see how Korea has become a modern, advanced country in such a short period of time.

At the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, I was able to

participate in a ceremony celebrating the Memorandum of Understanding between the Museum and the Friends of Korea (FOK), the organization that the RPCVs have now formed. In this agreement, the FOK members will donate items to the Museum and work to collaborate on future conferences and presentations. The Museum staff also interviewed each RPCV about their time in Korea. These taped oral interviews will be a part of the Museum's oral history collection.



During the revisit, I was able to meet one Ohio State University Alumnus – Russ Dynes. He had served as a tuberculosis control worker in a rural public health center in Cholla Buk Do from July 1972 to July 1974. His revisit trip to Korea this year was a great experience. He told me that during



his revisit to his clinic he found that the personnel and facilities had changed. The clinic was now in a beautiful new facility. He also said that the staff welcomed him like a “lost son who had returned home.” Listening to him talk about his time in the Peace Corps in Korea, it was clear that it had a dramatic impact on his life. After Peace Corps, he continued working in health and human services and recently retired from the State of Delaware’s Division of Public Health.



By participating in this revisit, it was evident to me that the Koreans and Americans who came into contact through the Peace Corps shared warm feelings and appreciation for each other. The Korea Foundation went to extraordinary lengths to show their appreciation. The receptions not only allowed the RPCVs to meet old friends and colleagues but also to meet influential national figures such as National Assembly Speaker Kang, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lee Kyung-Soo, and Kathleen Stephens, former U.S. Ambassador to Korea.

Many of the Korean hosts had been taught by Peace Corps Volunteers during the 1960s and 1970s. Ambassador Stephens had been a Volunteer in Korea in the 1970s.

It was touching to see the RPCVs and their Korean colleagues shed tears of happiness when they brought up past memories and met each other after so many years had passed. To me, it showed the strong and deep influence that Peace Corps had on people from both countries. The RPCVs through their organization “Friends of Korea,” plan to continue their association with Korea through initiatives such as the Museum Project. Since it is no longer possible for me to go to Korea as a PCV, I did the next best thing -- I became a member of Friends of Korea! If anyone wants to learn more about the revisit, I suggest going to the Friends of Korea website at [friendsofkorea.net](http://friendsofkorea.net). You will be able to understand the warmth of the relationship between Korea and America that was established by the Peace Corps.