

Preface

(Some words to the reader)

Please regard this humble writing merely as some stories that I have wanted to tell through my life rather than a biography.

I would be very grateful for the tolerance of my views. I am well aware that everyone has a different perspective on everything as we each possess a unique face.

I would love to show my personal gratitude to Yin-su Yi (a Korean/Korean-Chinese teacher at Yihwa High School) for his encouragement; he was my classmate at the education school and has dedicated his life to help others as a voluntary work leader.

I also want to say thank you to Dr. Yeongcheol Ko (a surgeon in Ohio, USA) who has led me to recall my youth and put all of my passion and energy into life.

As my writing progressed, I realized that I have only included my stories of strength and success without mentioning my weak points and failures. I would like to ask you to tolerate the book's shortcomings because I thought success stories, rather than failures, might be more helpful to readers.

I will remember every person associated with this book and especially CEO Baegeun Bak who has made it possible to publish.

Deukgwon Han, Year of 1984

Biography of Deukgwon Han

1. Grandfather, Heung-gyu Han

I didn't have the chance to know my grandfather because my grandparents had already passed away before I was born. Perhaps there is the possibility I cannot remember them because I was too young. How disappointing my memories are! The only things I can recall were the tales from my mother who was short and stocky, truthful, and could touch people's heart.

I never asked my mother whether my grandparents were alive after I was born, even though she told me so many stories of them. Now, my parents are both buried and laid next to each other in Manguri Cemetery, so no one can clarify this. Therefore, the truth will remain unknown forever.

Today, I am a grandfather to 26 grandchildren. I feel slightly bitter not to have been able to taste my grandparent's love as I love my grandchildren. I wish I had been born before they passed away.

2. My Hometown

My hometown is Sandae-dong, Yanggwang-myeon, Yongcheon-gun, Pyeonganbuk-do (transferred to Pihyeon-myeon, Uiju-gun, Pyeonganbuk-do*).

In the north, there was a small mountain which blocked cold winds from Siberia, and in the south there were two unnamed streams. These were merged into a river called Yonggol-cheon or Pihyeon-cheon. This river flows through Pihyeon-si (or Chema-si), and washes the body of the city and is swallowed by the Gojin River (Samgyo-cheon Stream). Gyeonguiseon rail runs like a huge python in front of Pihyeon River.

To the west, there was an old castle ruin called **Yocheongeup** and a pond and a pavilion used to entertain government officials. There is a road (about 6m wide) which runs from Pihyeon to this '*gueup*' (old area). In the east side of this road there is a small hill called Wonmoreu and on the top of the hill, you can see the whole of Chema-si, Pihyeon-myeon.

500m west from this hill, there is a big roof-tiled and double gated house (roof-tiled houses used to be considered for the rich) on a wide road running to Yongcheongu-eup. This house was built by a powerful man about 200 years ago. My mother told me that my grandparents used to live at this house after their retirement. I do not have any portraits of my grandfather so I don't know what he looked like. However, my mother described that he had a small build and was stocky; he was a brave man and a government official called 'Gwasu' – this is equivalent to a mayor of a small region during the Joseon Dynasty. The position was not a high official, but his influence seemed to be great.

My grandfather was not highly educated but gained merits working as a liaison to the central government so that he could obtain the position. Judging by this fact, I can guess he was a healthy and athletic man, and that I took after his athletic and stamina genes.

Even though his great athletic health was at his disposal, doomsday arrived to my grandfather. A donkey bit his arm, eventually leading to his death. One day, one of his unbridled donkeys which he rode at the stable of the big house, ran away. Somehow he caught and tried to bridle it again. The enraged donkey bit his arm and did not let go of him even though many people beat it in order to to free him. Fortunately, a Japanese person staying in the region in order to construct a railway from Seoul to Sinuiju, struck the donkey's forehead with a metal hammer and my grandfather was freed from its teeth. However, poison from the donkey's teeth spread to his body and cost him his life. Subsequently, many grandchildren took the donkey to the nearby stream, tied it to a tree, and beat it to death. Then, they buried it there. Maybe this is why I have a severe phobia of animals like donkeys and horses and sometimes I dream that I have been bitten by these animals.

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12. Independence Day – August 15th

On August 12, 1945 I witnessed a huge flux of Japanese families fleeing to the south riding on packed Anbongseon and Gyeonguiseon cargo-trains that didn't even have roofs. These Japanese used to have absolute power over people and could even decide an individual's life and death – also killing many Manchurians in Manchuria (*Manju*). Finally, I heard the Japanese Empire's surrender on radio. I was so excited to hear the news and dropped by the Pihyeon-myeon Office. I found that the office was occupied by Communist Jaegap Kim who shouted hoorays on a donkey. I tried to take public order into my own hands and paid a visit to the police substation. There were two Korean policemen at the substation, and I asked them whether they would cooperate to establish a nation. They then told me that they would join us. I took charge of requisitioning firearms from Wolwhamyeon Police Substation and *repossessing* the wealth of Japanese elementary schools.

Since we (Koreans) took charge of administrative and judicial powers, I was very enthusiastically engaged in all affairs such as gearing up to put out a fire by my own hands and swimming to flooded homes to help flood victims. These memories remind me of my passionate and brave self during my youth. I can vividly recall once chasing a robber into a mountain. The robber held a cow seller at gunpoint, took the poor man's cow trade money, and ran away to the mountain.

Excerpt from Duck Han's personal memoir, pp. 70-72

14. Crossing the Line of Latitude 38

I spread a rumor that I would come back and work at the Regional Public Hospital after receiving my surgical education in Pyeongyang City. I started to sell all the medicine I had. My brother-in-law Yeonggeun Bak went to Sinuiju City by bicycle to sell them even though the distance was great (three stops away), and it was a bitterly cold winter day. This brother-in-law was my youngest sister's (Aegwon) husband who always had a smile on his face. I always feel gratitude towards him.

The preparation during the winter was completed. With encouragement and help from my sister-in-law (an older brother's wife) and older Sister Gyeongae, we, 80 years old father, my wife, and the seven children, left behind Jiseong Clinic, each of us carrying a bag. On March 10, 1947 we arrived at Pihyeon Station. Out of our expectation, a security person demanded us to show our bags. However, this security member was one of my students when I worked as a teacher. I told him these bags were all mine. He let us pass the check point without a package-check. Even though he was an enthusiastic communist and wanted to do his job well, he couldn't be free of the culture to respect teachers.

The sun was rising when we got off the overnight train at Pyeongyang Station. Security personnel at Pyeongyang Station asked me to come into their office because they couldn't find any signs that I had dug judging by my hands. There was no investigation even after an hour, and they asked me to practice marching with a strange arm movement. I asked them to swiftly process my case. They then went through my medicine bags and demanded scabies medication. Fortunately, I had some scabies treatment on me and handed one over; they let me go.

As soon as I was out of the office, the young guide who was set to take all of us into South Korea took us to a house and fed us breakfast as planned. After breakfast we went out to the city centre to meet my niece's husband. He was a surgeon at a public hospital, kindly took us to his place, and explained a more detailed and clear way to cross the 38th Parallel. We got on a Soviet military *truck* at the guide's lead, and when we reached

Sariwon, we were all asked to get off the truck in order to deliver rice tendered to the government. I suspect this was a trick to get paid twice judging by the Communist organization truck's appearance.

When the sun was about to set, we got off the *truck* on a rural road. He said we had to be armed with a bat and walk all night after dinner. It was extremely tiring and difficult because we had to avoid roads and pass through vegetation in order to not be seen by other people. We reached the line of the 38th Parallel when the sun was about to rise. All of a sudden, we heard some noises and noticed that some people were approaching us. We all ran away into a pine tree forest without consideration of fighting the people.

We could hear they were also talking about crossing the line. The voices murmured that there were no guards right now so they should cross the line. These were the same people who wanted to go to South Korea. When we reached an orchard, the guide told me the line of Latitude 38 was in the middle of this orchard. Stupidly, I was looking for each of my family members at that pressing moment.

I went forward and arrived at Cheongdanjiseo Police Substation. The policemen inspected me, but they didn't find any suspicious signs so they let go. When I reached a boarding house and unloaded my bag, I realized that I was no longer in the communist territory but rather in South Korea where Americans governed. Even though I waited for another night, my father and the other family members didn't come to the house, so I decided to go to Seoul alone.

My mother crossed the line with my older sister, older brother Sigwon, and younger brother Hyogwon, arriving in Ganggu, Yeongdeok-gun, Gyeongsangbuk-do before me.