

On the Outside

Interview with Participant

1. In coming to Canada, what has been the biggest challenge for you?

The biggest challenge is culture and language difference. I came from a collectivistic society and we are interacting with relatives and we have the idea that family, the name of family is very expandable – from grandfather to grandchildren. Sometimes we call family members like my sister and my husband’s sisters or brothers, we interact together. Sometimes when I buy a new car, my mother-in-law said, “Oh, did you buy a new car? Is it expensive?” Those kinds of questions are asked a lot. But in Canada it is an individualistic society and if the mother-in-law said, “Oh, did you buy a new car? Why? Do you really need it?” Those kinds of questions are not allowed but we easily do that. That makes it a little bit uncomfortable for daughter-in-laws but actually it sometimes helps out when we meet challenges. They help together but in Canada they are very, very individual. Sometimes I feel alone and I need some help. In Korea even my friends will help but in Canada it’s kind of weird. If I do that here, if I help out, I will be known as a weird person.

2. What’s been the best part about coming here?

When I came to Canada for the first time, my main purpose was supporting my children but I found my way to study. I completed another degree – I already had two degrees but another degree here in Canada makes me different compared to other Korean families. They admire me because it made my language better than before and it was my opportunity to become a member of the society. It made a big difference for me.

3. What is the most important message that you want Canadians to take from the photo essay – On the Outside?

Someone who comes from another cultural background – I already mentioned about cultural and language differences – they don’t know how to adjust to a new society. If someone comes from another country and doesn’t have English as a native language, then they feel so difficult to become involved in that new society. Language is such a big part of their life. One of my friends said that a friend of hers who is living in Korea said, “Oh, I envy you! You live in another country and you travel in the United States and you see beautiful scenery in lots of places!” And my friend said, “Really do you think so? Do think that after living like you’re deaf for three you’ll still be happy after that?” Because her language is very low and sometimes she doesn’t understand what the Canadians say. If she receives a document from government, like CIC, her heart is beating because she has to understand but she’s not able to understand. She assumes that the message will be a warning or something bad – the yellow envelope has a bad meaning. Newcomers really need help. 2

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You gave me some casual work and my understanding about the society and of how I have to work in this society, this improved little by little. That became one of my experiences in Canada and when I sent my resumé to several positions, they said, “Oh, you were a research assistant.” That made my resumé stronger. I like you as an individual who has a warm heart but I like you because you gave me a chance. It is a big encouragement. The opportunity may be something little but it becomes bigger than you expect.

When I was driving one day, somebody yelled at me. A guy and his girlfriend – they were young people with a nice car – they were laughing and yelling. I didn’t do anything wrong but they said, “Oh stupid Asian!” How do they know I’m stupid? They don’t know that I have three degrees – maybe they don’t even have one degree. That is inappropriate and those things are so discouraging. On that day I couldn’t do anything. I have a strong personality – I like challenges to break through. On that day I couldn’t do anything. I just returned back home and laid down on the sofa and until sunset I couldn’t concentrate on anything and that made me so discouraged. Sometimes it leads to depression.

In the photo essay I want show them that those people who came from another country – a little tiny help can lead to a big difference but a little tiny discrimination can lead to discouragement.