

## Kimchi Kimchi! Kimchi!

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Many of the culture shocks that stick in my mind (and I really should have kept a diary, as I know I am forgetting some doozies) are food related, and naturally so; I am Irish, and to my mind we do not have Korean *people* in Ireland, let alone Korean food. I quickly had to make up for a lifetime of fish avoidance; I did not dislike fish, *per se*, but I had always done everything in my power to not eat any, ever. Cabbage I had actively disliked and picked out of my food since motor skills allowed me to accomplish such a task, but that quickly wilted under the expectant gazes that followed every dip of my chopsticks from bowl to mouth.

I had promised myself I would eat everything presented to me. No matter how spicy, or fishy, or patently *cabbage* something was, I vowed I would not only eat said article, but I would do so with gusto and *without making a face or even twitching*. This was as tough a test of my resolve as I had heretofore experienced, but I like to think I passed. Certainly, I never placed something in my mouth, only to spew it out moments later, nor did I ever throw food away. However, this led to a completely unforeseen (by me, at least) consequence: I began to crave kimchi. KIMCHI! As a man who has never been addicted to anything (I regularly give things up for months at a time, just to show others how easy I find it; and yes, I know that is not something “cool” or even “nice” people do), this was a particularly nasty shock. Was I, the man who boasts about his will power in essays for English programs abroad, about to become addicted to CABBAGE? RAW cabbage? FERMENTED raw cabbage? The one food I had decried and reviled my entire life? The shame was too much for me. I felt like one of those anti-gay campaigners who, it turns out, had a secret boyfriend for 20 years.

I tried to do something about it. I chatted to friends on facebook when I had spare time, so that I wouldn't daydream about kimchi. I tried to cut back on the amount of kimchi I had at lunch, but that only made matters worse, if anything, as now I was bemoaning all the kimchi I hadn't eaten all day. I even tried going cold turkey, but that was no good as then I had to undergo the mock sympathy of my co-workers, who pondered as to whether kimchi was “too spicy” for me, and had to endure monologues on how Koreans “believe it is good for (their) health and stamina” (I shuddered slightly as I typed that last sentence as I recalled not only the (advanced) age and rotundity of the lady who said that, but also the look in her

eye as she said it.)

I even got to a stage where I made inquiries as to how I might make some kimchi. Happily, the daydreams, the cold sweats and the bleeding from the ears soon passed, and now I simply “like” kimchi. I don’t “need” it anymore. Really, I could stop anytime. I just don’t want to. I put it down to the possibility that my body was deficient in something contained in kimchi, and that it worked itself into a frenzy to get all it could in the shortest time possible. That’s probably what it was

Just do me a favor, yeah? Don’t tell my friends. They wouldn’t understand, you know?