

One of the Family

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One of the biggest worries I had before I packed up my life and jetted off to Korea was how I was going to deal with homesickness. Although I have lived outside of my family home for years, the thought of being thousands of kilometers away from my family and friends for an extended period of time did add a dash of uncertainty to this exciting new venture that lay before me.

The EPIK orientation definitely did a lot to dissolve this anguish because within the week spent there I already felt I had made friends who I knew would quickly turn into my family in this foreign land. I wasn't wrong. Over the past year I have had some truly incredible experiences with this diverse group of adventurous teachers. From kayaking on the Yellow Sea and covering each other in body paint and sparkles at Korea's very own Burning Man



festival to celebrating Christmas with all the trimmings, trappings and a sense of love and belonging, these people have ensured that all the homesickness gremlins have stayed far, far away.

But that's not where my sense of community starts and ends. I was lucky enough to have been 'adopted' into a Korean family too! From the moment I arrived at my school my old co teacher welcomed me not only into her country and workplace but into her home and family life too. Jeon Jong Sook is the mother of two incredibly sweet and charismatic teenage girls and the wife of a very thoughtful businessman, she is also my 언니 (older sister) and has shown me a side of Korean life and culture I know I never would have been exposed to otherwise.



From family hikes up to the Sandang Sansang fortress in our city of Cheonju, to exciting new culinary adventures where my taste buds are always carefully considered before the restaurants are selected, and trips to the cat café with my two ‘nieces’; some of my best memories in Korea have been made inside the car, around the table or out in nature with this family.



And just like members of any regular family around the world we have celebrated together and helped each other out. I was touched when the family invited me out to celebrate their youngest daughter, Jeewoo’s, graduation from elementary school and felt equally as special when the family handed down a bicycle after they once saw me trekking up the road with my shopping.

Aware that I have wanted to learn the language Jong Sook has been taking me for one-on-one Korean classes on a weekly basis, but during this time we don’t just zone in on the work, it’s also a time to chat and catch up on what’s going on in each others’ lives. And although I try and reciprocate this kindness by helping the girls with their English and treating them all once in a while I know that this is not at all expected of me. Just like my family back at home, we do things for each other not because we have to, but because we want to.

And just like my mom and sister back home, time spent with the ladies in this family is never awkward or forced. Conversation and giggles flow naturally as does the sharing of secrets, hopes and dreams.

I still have at least one more year to share my Korean experience with Jong Sook and her family, but I know that long after I leave this country we will stay in contact not only as friends but as sisters, aunts and nieces too.

