

#2



REFLECTIONS

SOCIAL WELFARE
"OPEN GARAM"

**"Please write about
your most treasured
memory."**

Editor's Note

Reading each piece of writing of the elders, I find myself deeply moved by the simplicity of their cherished memories. Before reading their accounts, I expected to be regaled with tales of grand achievements or monumental life events. Yet, what I encountered was something far more profound—a collection of memories from days that, at first glance, seemed ordinary, almost insignificant.

These elders didn't write about the pinnacles of their careers, the awards they won, or the milestones they reached. Instead, they spoke of quiet moments—a three day vacation with family, the warmth of growing mushrooms, and the laughter shared over a simple meal. These memories, despite being so modest in their occurrence, were imbued with a significance that I hadn't fully appreciated before.

What I learned from their writing is that life's true richness isn't found in the extraordinary, but in the ordinary. It's the small, everyday moments that often carry the most weight, that stay with us long after the grand occasions have faded into the past. They are the quiet joys, the gentle connections, the instances of peace that, when stitched together, create a life of meaning and contentment.

This realization has led me to reevaluate how I approach my own life. I've begun to pay closer attention to the small things—the taste of my morning coffee, the sound of leaves rustling in the breeze, the brief exchanges with loved ones that brighten my day. I've learned that these moments, while easy to overlook, are where life's true beauty resides.

Yubeen Lee
Editor-in-Chief

My Life Book

Our welfare center announced the opening of “My Life Bookroom” last April. “My Life Bookroom” uses children’s books as a medium to reminisce and tell stories about ‘me’ from long ago. This is a program to relieve stress by expressing stories through words and pictures.

When the instructor enters, the classroom quickly becomes noisy. From greetings to asking how you've been, how you've become so pretty in a week, what book you'll read today... It seems everyone must have been waiting to ask the questions. When the instructor opens a book and starts reading, I fall into the story. I don't know why reading a book alone is boring, but listening to a book being read by an instructor is so much fun. I think it's more fun to listen to with friends.

At first, I didn't want to talk about bad things that happened in the past. I'm not good at writing, so I just wanted to tell the stories out loud. It is not easy to share my story with others. However, when the instructor started a conversation, even though I was sitting with my back pressed against the chair, I soon moved forward and started telling my story. You may not believe it, but when I was young, my skin was as white as jade and my body was slim. I was quite popular.

On spring days when pretty flowers bloom, I draw a bouquet of my favorite flowers to give myself, and in summer, I listen to the cicadas chirping and reminisce about my mother and father. When autumn came, when the colorful leaves were falling, I tried to pick up the fallen leaves, stick them on paper, and write the story of my trip to Naeyeonsan Mountain with my son. My spring, summer, fall, my family, my life. The memories were written down as my complete story was compiled into one book along with the cold winter.

I thought I couldn't draw, but it was so cool to turn it into a book like this. I wanted to go and brag to my son and daughter that my book was published.

I used to say that I didn't like drawing or talking, but when I received a book containing my stories, I realized that these meetings every Tuesday were very valuable.

The Happiest Birthday of My Life

My whole life, I never remembered my birthday. Birthdays passed like every ordinary day. This year was the first time I received a birthday celebration. Last year, I first heard that the Garam Home Integrated Senior Support Center was providing birthday services to my friends. When the year passed and my birthday came, they prepared seaweed soup, japchae, bulgogi, vegetables, cake, fruit, etc. and visited my house to prepare a birthday table.

Tears flowed as we sang happy birthday together. I didn't know how to express my gratitude to them for so carefully preparing my birthday when even my children didn't take care of me. While eating, they listened to my story, cried and laughed together, and I felt the warmth of their hearts. I was embarrassed when they prepared birthday props such as a headband and sunglasses and tried to take a picture, but secretly, I was thankful for being able to take a picture with a big smile. When we made a heart shape together with our hands, I laughed like a child again. It was the happiest birthday I ever had.



Volunteering with Responsibility

My name is Mi-seon Kim, and I am the leader of the cooking team at the side dish service at the Garam Senior Citizens Integrated Support Center. I started my first volunteer work 14 years ago thanks to an acquaintance, and I continue my work to this day. I first came only to observe. Yet it was so fun and rewarding to see the elderly happily eating the food we made, so I decided to continue volunteering until now.

In the past, I cooked side dishes and delivered them directly to the elderly near my house. When we delivered side dishes, one senior always came out to say that the food was delicious and to thank us for our work. But one day, when I went to his house, he did not respond no matter how many times I called him. I found him lying in his room, so I quickly contacted the social worker in charge and checked with him, and found out that the elder had passed away. My heart ached so much.



I have no special plans in particular, but I will continue volunteering until my health allows. When it comes to volunteering, it seems like there are a lot of people who think, 'If I don't go, someone else will come and do it,' but that's definitely not the case. I believe that volunteer work must be accompanied by sincerity and responsibility. I would like to tell those who do volunteer work in the future to be sure to engage in volunteer work with a sense of responsibility.

Lastly, this is what the elders say to Ms. Kim Mi-seon: We would like to express our deepest gratitude to volunteer Kim Mi-seon, whom we have had a long relationship with. Thanks to all of the volunteers who work hard and take responsibility, I am able to receive a meal today.

We Capture Happiness!

For a long time, I have been providing free family photos to disabled users through the 'Moving Family Photo Studio in Memories' project.

When I was young, my family's circumstances were not great. I received support from external organizations such as Good Neighbors as my father was diagnosed with brain lesions when I was in my second year of middle school. Because of this, we didn't even have a single common family photo in our house. These situations have made me who I am today, and I feel a lot of joy through volunteer photography. People with disabilities are not different people, just because their situation is different from ours. I believe that they have the right to enjoy as much joy and happiness as anyone can, and I believe that one way to do so is through family photos.

I remember so many people, but if I were to pick one family, I remember the day an elderly mother and her son came together. I remember that the son had an intellectual disability, and the mother telling me that she was preparing step by step for her son, who would be left alone when she passed away, and that today's photo shoot was one of them. Although the photo shoot lasts only an hour or two, I feel a lot of reward and joy from being able to capture happy moments through the photos I take.

I plan to continue volunteering in the future and would like to film at any time. This year, I want to gift more memories to more diverse people.



Jeju Bucket List

My family has many grandchildren, so it is not easy for us to go somewhere all together. There are a lot of things to consider, both financially and in regards to planning. But I wanted to make special memories with my grandchildren for them to remember.

When my family travelled we usually only thought about the destination and went on a spontaneous trip without a plan, but as we planned the trip one by one, we found that there was a lot to think about, from travel time to locations. But we spent a lot of time planning everything together, becoming even more close.

There were so many memorable moments, but the most memorable ones were Chocolate Land, Yeomiji Botanical Garden, and riding the transparent kayak. I made chocolate with my grandchildren, and I was proud to watch my youngest granddaughter make chocolate without much help. I also enjoyed the botanical garden and kayaking because there were a lot of things to see and do.

After the trip, my grandchildren want to go on a trip again. We gained a lot of confidence. As I communicated more with my grandchildren, I became confident that our family was moving in a better direction and could continue to do so. I was also able to gain the strength to move forward while being refreshed through this trip.



Happy Day with Pretty Hair!

My name is Aewon Lee, and I am president of the Pohang City Buk-gu branch of the Korean Beauty Society. We are an organization that continues to provide training to improve the professional skills of hairdressers, as well as volunteer work to return those skills to the local community. Pohang City Northern Welfare Center for the Disabled conducts hairdressing volunteer work for people with disabilities every third Wednesday of every month.

While working in the beauty industry, I have met many people who are hesitant to visit a beauty salon because they have difficulty moving around. These common concerns led us to start sharing our technology with disabled people who have limited access to beauty salons.

There is a very memorable episode from a few years ago. I remember a time when a person I often saw while volunteering at a welfare center told me that she was very happy that day after getting a haircut. When she recognized me first, greeted me warmly, and pointed me out as your dedicated hairdresser, I felt pride and great energy.

For me, volunteer work is an 'energy source.' After completing volunteer work, my body feels tired, but my mind feels filled with pride. I think that energy becomes a driving force to work hard again. I hope that everyone too will receive a lot of energy through volunteer work and be able to give that energy back to many people.

Mushrooms, Grow Up Well

Not long ago, the Garam Home Integrated Senior Support Center conducted a survey of depression prevention education using the 'Growing Shiitake Mushrooms' kit for seniors in customized senior care services.

At first, I started raising it out of curiosity, wondering if this would work. Yet eventually I began to care for the mushrooms, looking at them while I was sleeping and went to the bathroom, and even prayed carefully. At first it was as big a small pebble, and then it grew as big as a cigarette holder. It was a waste to pick it so I just left it until it grew even larger. Mushrooms are taking over all my love and attention these days.

Growing something is great in itself. After sleeping overnight, they grew a little more, and picking healthy mushrooms little by little to eat as a side dish made growing them even more fun.

Every morning I would say, "Mushroom girls, did you sleep well? "Grow up well." When I say this, it's amazing how it grows like a blooming flower. It's so pretty and fun that I have no time to feel depressed anymore.



Imagine Rotary

My name is Hee-kyung of Sinpohang Rotary Club and I am serving as the 27th president. In the beginning, everything from recruiting members was not easy, but thanks to the mutual respect and cooperation among members and everyone's efforts to ensure that there is no loss in the organization's 27-year history, we have reached a great success. Currently, we are engaged in a variety of activities, but most notably, we regularly volunteer or sponsor at local children's centers where children from multicultural families study in difficult environments. At other child welfare facilities, we host sports days and picnics where children can directly participate. During the winter, we have signed a business agreement with a briquette bank to deliver briquettes to low-income households through donations.

After delivering briquettes to low-income neighbors around us, we sit down and talk together. Most of the houses where we take out the briquettes are elderly families who live alone, so we see them shed tears of joy or gratitude for coming and helping us when they are lonely. I feel rewarded. I feel most rewarded when I hear that the students who grew up in broken homes or low-income families, whom I supported through scholarship projects, have become proud adults and are helping their neighbors through volunteer work.

Now that I am getting older, I have come to value health. It would be nice if we could get everything we want, but my biggest wish is to be able to stay cool and warm in the summer and winter. In the summer, we would like to help provide supplies such as mosquito repellent, mosquito coils, fans, etc., and in the winter, we would like to help everyone maintain their health and have a warm winter by providing heaters and heating oil. More than anything, I hope I can put a smile on everyone's face.

A Precious Relationship Along a Difficult Path

I was born and raised in Busan, and after getting married, I followed my husband to Pohang. Struggling from my husband's violence and beatings, I ran away with my two sons and became a recipient of basic livelihood security. Due to my husband's violence, my eldest son suffered a serious head injury and has an intellectual disability, which means he has the cognitive level of a 7-year-old and has difficulty doing basic things like eating on his own. After a recent knee surgery, my health condition deteriorated rapidly and I was in a desperate situation where I could not receive any help from those around me. I was able to receive the services of the Garam Senior Citizens Integrated Support Center through the introduction of an acquaintance who felt sorry for my situation. It is very difficult to provide meals for my adult son, who has a low intellectual level but a strong physical development, but the side dishes delivered every Thursday are a great help to my son and I. And I, who had suffered from recurring suicidal thoughts and the loneliness of being alone, decided to participate in this program with the feeling of grasping at straws.

As my situation grew more difficult, last winter, my suicidal thoughts worsened and I lost the will to live. I began receiving counseling from a specialized service. For me, as someone who is good with my hands and enjoys learning everything, scent therapy was like a sweet treat. There were times when I was alone and in pain, obsessed with suicidal thoughts and unable to live my daily life with depressing thoughts like, 'What am I doing with my life? The wonderful, youthful days are gone, and all that remains is a shell of a life.' However, as I participated in the program, I learned from the teachers I met every week. Those warm words were a great comfort.

Individual counseling gave me an opportunity to learn about myself. I was usually very impatient, my heart trembled at even the smallest things, and I had a restless personality. Yet after receiving treatment, I am not in a hurry, I think about everything more carefully, and I am trying to fix anything that is wrong.

For me, who has lived a life full of ups and downs, and who doesn't have a story to tell at this age, the warm, attentive consideration and words of the Garamjaega teachers were a great comfort to me. I am just grateful that I was able to form a precious relationship with them as I endured day after day in despair. As I watched the teachers listen carefully to the complaints that were forming in my heart, I felt that I should not feel weak and overcome this feeling. Although I am alone without any friends or neighbors due to my bad situation, the people who I meet through this program make my heart warm.

These days, I spend each day waiting for the day when I can participate in a specialized program. Only during that time I am able to let go of the burden of my life and spend time reflecting on myself. Garam Jaega is a precious relationship that I met along the difficult path of life with many stories.

We Protect Safety

After the business I started after retiring from work failed, I continued to experience not only financial difficulties but also mental hardships. After living without a steady job or source of income for several years, not only was it difficult to make a living, but the tremendous stress raised a red flag for my mental health. As my activity level decreased due to my lazy daily life, I felt my physical health also getting worse. As gatherings and interactions with others decreased, I spent more time alone, and often felt lonely. More than anything else, I was accumulating frustration and boredom in my daily life of inaction. Then, in 2019, I happened to learn about the Senior Citizen Job Project, and fortunately, I met the qualifications and was able to participate in the public interest project for two years. Although it was a short activity period of 3 hours a day, 10 days a month, and a low wage of 270,000 won (\$194) per month, not only was it possible to work steadily and regularly, but it was also possible to reduce loneliness by interacting with other workers of similar age, and to achieve self-fulfillment through work. I began to feel a sense of satisfaction.

The sight of a colleague warmly welcoming another worker who came back after being quarantined for a week due to COVID-19, and seeing the worker handing out drinks and chocolate pies that he had prepared is truly the beauty of working together with a sense of compassion. In addition, monitoring the safety of senior citizens in other public interest activities, encouraging and caring for each other, and exchanging friendly greetings with children going to school while directing traffic in school zones are the images that senior citizens like us can see through work. 'The blue bird is never far away.' I am keenly aware that happiness is close to us and in our own hearts through my participation in the senior job creation project.

