

January 20, 2020

On behalf of my brother and sister, greetings to the Seoul National University College of Medicine, Class of 1964. As many of you know, we lost our father and your classmate, Youchan Rhee, after a protracted battle with Parkinson's Disease in July 2015. This past autumn, on September 30, 2019, we said an emotional goodbye to his beloved wife and our loving mother after a short battle with pancreatic cancer. Hwa Ja Rhee graduated from the Seoul National University College of Nursing in 1964. Our parents married on October 10, 1966, moved to the United States in 1967 and became naturalized U.S. citizens in January 1977.

Like many of you, our parents dedicated their entire lives to caregiving with a quiet but determined grace. They came to the United States with their respective degrees, sprinkled with hope and determination. For most of our childhood, our mother served as primary caregiver for us, providing the foundation for our father to build a successful private pediatric practice based in Long Island, New York. Later in life, our mother renewed her nursing credentials after a two-decade sabbatical and ultimately served as a supervising nurse at the Long Island State Veterans Home at Stony Brook University for twelve years. They did and learned everything together: American customs, the English language, how to play golf, eat McDonalds, buy a home, and raise three children in a strange land. My mother was the sole caregiver for my father while he battled Parkinson's for over a decade.

As I approach 50 years old, I look back with fond memories of the 1984 reunion in Seoul and all of the get togethers in the United States during our childhood. Life must have been hard for my parents, and they must have been incredibly lonely at times. Their education from Seoul National University enabled them to build a life in a foreign country, but it is their relationships with you, their classmates and friends, that sustained them. You were their only family in the United States and, for that, we wanted to express our sincere gratitude. Please accept these two scholarships, one for a young man and one for a young woman, as our way of saying thank you and celebrating the lives of our courageous parents.

On behalf of John, Jennifer and my parents' seven grandchildren,
James Rhee

