

Memorial Service for Hoon Kyou Whang (68년), MD.

Thank you for coming out today to help us celebrate the life of my father, Harry Hoon Whang, and to wish him a peaceful journey to the afterlife. When he started to feel ill a couple of months ago, he told me that: “Dying is hard. Living is hard, too.” Everyone can draw their own conclusions about what that meant. There are no wrong answers. He didn’t explain his statement. He simply left me to ponder it.

The “Dying is hard” part is easy to understand. There is obvious suffering from cancer. We take solace in the fact that Dad died peacefully in his sleep, in the comfort of his own home, and with loved ones around him. My mother was at bedside holding his hand for his last waking moments. Few could hope for a more merciful passing.

The “Living is hard, too” part is a little more difficult to decipher. Let me share with you my thoughts on it, starting with a little background information. Dad was born in Korea under Japanese occupation in WWII. He grew up during the Korean War, during which time he experienced first-hand what it meant to go from relative wealth and comfort to sudden abject poverty and threat of homelessness. Yet with destruction all around, he kept hope and persevered. While helping to support his struggling family, he somehow managed to become a doctor and find a wife to start a family of his own.

Then, despite his horrific childhood experiences, he volunteered for combat duty in Vietnam. He told me that the thoughts of returning home to his family kept him alive there. Perhaps he had a guardian angel through all this. Because after returning home, he was offered the wonderful opportunity to emigrate to the United States. So, began another journey that many of you might also find familiar.

Coming to the United States is a dream for so many around the world. The promise of opportunity and prosperity can be thrilling. Yet, we all know that emigrating to America is no quick or easy task. Upon arrival he had only his wits and the debt of the cost of airline tickets. Time to “put your head down and work,” as he used to say. And so he did, for 30 plus years of

grinding it out through all the struggles well known to immigrants. The language and custom barriers, the xenophobia in both directions, the isolation, the limited opportunities, the burden of supporting family left in Korea and his own family on very sparse resources.

I have two brothers and the three of us together certainly did not make life any easier on this man while we were growing up. He tried to raise us in the disciplinarian style that is the norm for Koreans. Of course, my brothers and I were rebellious. But we came to understand that perseverance and hard work are the foundation for survival and any hopes for success in life anywhere.

Our father continued to make so many sacrifices to ensure that my brothers and I would be given the opportunities to find prosperity. He pushed us to seize these opportunities as they came, and to make the most of them. We did not concern ourselves too much with how long or difficult these struggles might be. We knew that it was possible to overcome these adversities, because we saw it every day by watching our father.

Now that my brothers and I have our own families, we can reflect on the influence our father has had on us. Life can be hard. We learned from this courageous man that we can overcome all things with hope, faith, and a lot of hard work.

To me, that's what it means that "Living is hard, too." Dad, we wish you peace in heaven and thank you for all the things you have done for us here.

On an end note, our family would like to thank everyone here in the church for your support. Community is important. Many of the opportunities afforded my family have come through the tightly knit Korean community that rallies around the church. We hope you continue to find strength in each other. God bless you all.

Kevin T. Whang