

September 24, 2008:

"I Shall Go To Korea"

In the words of Dwight D. Eisenhower, I, too, shall go to Korea.



I Like Ike.

On September 25, 2008, my friends Hyung Hyup Kim, Justin Ambrosino, Joe Tramontana and I will travel to Seoul and Pusan to attend the Pusan Film Festival and the Asian Film Market. On our travels, we shall have many adventures yet to be revealed. But what do we really know of Korea? (Except for Hyup, because he's Korean). Let's take a look....

Korea has two parts - North Korea and South Korea. We're going to South Korea because North Korea is crazy. Here is a depiction of South Korea:



As you can see, South Korea is kind of small - less than the size of Lake Michigan. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's see what Wikipedia has to say:

South Korea, officially the Republic of Korea and often referred to as Korea (Korean: 대한민국, IPA: [tɛː.han.min.guk], Hanja: 大韓民國), listen (help·info)) is a presidential republic in East Asia, occupying the southern half of the Korean Peninsula. Also known as the "Land of the

Morning Calm", it is neighbored by China to the west, Japan to the east and borders North Korea to the north. South Korea's capital and largest city is Seoul, the second largest metropolitan city in the world.

Korea is one of the oldest continuing civilizations in the world,[2], founded in 2333 BC by the legendary Dangun according to Samguk Yusa. The Korean Peninsula was first inhabited as early as the Lower Paleolithic.[3] Following the unification of the Three Korean Kingdoms under Silla in AD 668, Korea went through the Goryeo and Joseon Dynasty as one nation until the end of the Korean Empire in 1910. After division, South Korea was established in 1948 and has since developed a successful democracy, maintaining a strong alliance with the United States and its allies. South Korea is now working towards a peaceful reunification with North Korea.

South Korea is a major economic power and one of the wealthiest countries in Asia. It had one of the world's fastest growing economies since the 1960s, now highly developed[4] and the fourth largest[5] in Asia and 13th largest[6] in the world. Forming the G20 industrial nations and the world's top ten exporters, it is an APEC and OECD member, defined as a High Income Nation by the World Bank and an Advanced Economy by the IMF and CIA. A major non-NATO ally, it has the world's sixth largest armed forces and the tenth largest defence budget in the world. The Asian Tiger is leading the Next Eleven nations and is still among the world's fastest growing developed countries.[4] Today, its success story is known as the "Miracle on the Han River", a role model for many developing countries.

South Korea is leading several key industries in the world, particularly in the fields of science and technology.[8] It has a very advanced and modern infrastructure[9] and is a world leader in information technology such as electronics, semiconductors, LCD displays, computers and mobile phones, led by Samsung and LG. Home of the world's third largest steel producer, POSCO, it is the world's largest shipbuilder, the world's fourth largest oil refiner[10] and one of the world's top five automobile producers, headed by Hyundai and Kia. It is also a leading country in biotechnology, construction, engineering, machinery, petrochemicals, robotics and textiles.



Wow. Neato. And that's just the beginning.

I don't want to get too far ahead of myself, since I'm still in California. But, as my trip progresses, I'll be posting little tidbits and impressions of my travels - maybe even a photo or two. If you're interested, you can tune in here for some cool Korea info.

So, before I sign off, I'd just like to quote my Seoul brother Hyup:

저희가 2개의 극을 가진 이발소를 찾아내게 하십시오

Have a good night, and tomorrow we'll learn some Korean history.

Septemer 25, 2008:

Korea - The Calm Before The Storm

So it is 10 p.m. in Los Angeles. My bags are packed, the bills are paid, I've had Mexican food with Joe "Cubby" Tramontana, on whose floor I will be sleeping tonight in anticipation of the code phrase "wounds my heart with a monotonous langour", at which point, I will know that it will be time to depart.



Cubby Tramontana and his ceegar

In 24 hours I will still be flying toward Seoul. Whew. That's a long way. Let's just see exactly what the route will be:

- 1: Start out going NORTHEAST on S ALBANY ST toward W 11TH ST. 0.0 mi
- 2: Turn RIGHT onto W 11TH ST. 0.1 mi
- 3: Take the ramp toward I-110 S. 0.3 mi
- 4: Merge onto I-110 S via the exit on the LEFT toward ADAMS BLVD. 7.5 mi
- 5: Merge onto I-105 W toward LA AIRPORT. 6.9 mi
- 6: Merge onto S SEPULVEDA BLVD/CA-1 N via EXIT 1C toward LAX AIRPORT. 1.2 mi
- 7: Turn LEFT onto W CENTURY BLVD. 0.1 mi
- 8: Keep LEFT at the fork in the ramp. 0.1 mi
- 9: Turn SLIGHT RIGHT onto WORLD WAY N. 0.2 mi
- 10: Turn LEFT onto EAST WAY. 0.1 mi
- 11: Turn LEFT onto CENTER WAY. 0.2 mi
- 12: End at 1 World Way Los Angeles, CA 90045

Then we get on a plane and fly to Seoul.



Hmmm. That 's weird. I thought South Korea was west of Los Angeles. Oh well. The main thing is that we'll be having fun.

And what could be more fun than a primer in Korean history?

As promised, let's learn a little about the country itself. Once again, we turn to Wikipedia - the most trusted name in information delivery - for some insight into the "Land of Morning Calm";

“Archeological findings indicate that the Korean Peninsula was occupied by humans as early in the Lower Paleolithic period.

Korea began with the founding of Joseon (The name Gojoseon is almost always used to prevent confusion with another Joseon dynasty founded in 14th century; the prefix Go- means 'old' or 'earlier') in 2333 BC by Dangun. Gojoseon expanded until it controlled much of the northern Korean peninsula and parts of Manchuria. After numerous wars with the Chinese Han Dynasty, Gojoseon disintegrated, leading to the Proto-Three Kingdoms of Korea period.

In the early centuries of the Common Era, Buyeo, Okjeo, Dongye, and the Samhan confederacy occupied the peninsula and southern Manchuria. Of the various small

states, Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla grew to control the peninsula as the Three Kingdoms.

The unification of the Three Kingdoms by Silla in 676 led to the North-South States period, in which much of the Korean peninsula was controlled by Unified Silla, while Balhae succeeded the northern parts of Goguryeo. In Unified Silla, poetry and art was encouraged, and Buddhist culture flourished. Relationships between Korea and China remained relatively peaceful during this time. However, Unified Silla weakened under internal strife, and surrendered to Goryeo in 935. Balhae, Silla's neighbor to the north, was formed as a successor state to Goguryeo. During its height, Balhae controlled most of Manchuria and parts of Russia. It fell to the Khitan in 926.

After the North-South Period, successor states fought for control during the Later Three Kingdoms period. The peninsula was soon united by Wang Geon of Goryeo. Like Silla, Goryeo was a highly cultural state and created the Jikji in 1377, using the world's oldest movable metal printing press.

The Mongol invasions in the 13th century greatly weakened Goryeo. However, Goryeo continued to rule Korea as a tributary ally to the Mongols. After the fall of the Mongolian Empire (Yuan Dynasty), Goryeo continued its rule. After severe political strife and continued invasions, Goryeo was replaced by the Joseon Dynasty in 1388 following a rebellion by General Yi Seong-gye.

General Yi declared the new name of Korea as Joseon in reference to Gojoseon, and moved the capital to Seoul. The first 200 years of the Joseon Dynasty was marked by relative peace and saw the creation of hangul by King Sejong the Great in the 14th century and the rise and influence of Confucianism.

In the latter of the 16th century, Joseon was invaded by a newly unified Japan. During the Japanese invasions of Korea (1592–1598), centuries of peace had left the dynasty unprepared, and the lack of technology and poor leadership from the Joseon government and generals led to the destruction of much of the Korean peninsula. However, continued Korean dominance at sea led by Admiral Yi, the rise of local militias, and the intervention of Ming China put Japan under great pressure to retreat in 1598.

Today, Admiral Yi is celebrated as one of Korea's foremost heroes and his turtle ships, used with success against the Japanese, are considered the world's first ironclad warships, although lack of hard evidence of iron plating sparks much debate.

During the last years of the Joseon Dynasty, Korea's isolationist policy earned it the name the "Hermit Kingdom", primarily for protection against Western imperialism.

In the aftermath of World War II, Soviet Union and United States troops controlled the northern and southern halves of the country respectively. The two Cold War rivals

established governments sympathetic to their own ideologies, leading to Korea's division into two political entities: North Korea and South Korea.

Despite the initial plan of a unified Korea in the 1943 Cairo Declaration, escalating Cold War antagonism eventually led to the establishment of two separate governments: the communist North and the capitalist South. In the North, a former anti-Japanese guerilla and communist activist, Kim Il-sung and in the South, an exiled Korean political leader, Syngman Rhee, were installed as presidents.

On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded the South leading to the Korean War. The Soviet boycott of the United Nations at the time, and therefore, no veto, allowed the UN to intervene when it became apparent that the superior communist forces would easily take over the entire country. The Soviet Union and China backed North Korea, with the later participation of millions of Chinese troops. After huge advances on both sides, the war eventually reached a stalemate. The 1953 armistice, never signed by South Korea, split the peninsula along the demilitarized zone near the original demarcation line. No peace treaty was ever signed, and the two countries are still technically at war.

In 1960, a student uprising led to the resignation of the autocratic and corrupt President Syngman Rhee. A period of profound civil unrest and general political instability followed, broken by General Park Chung-hee's military coup (the "5.16 coup d'état") against the weak and ineffectual government the next year. Park took over as president until his assassination in 1979, overseeing rapid export-led economic growth as well as severe political repression. Park is heavily criticized as a ruthless military dictator, although the Korean economy developed significantly during his tenure.

The years after Park's assassination were marked by, again, considerable political turmoil as the previously repressed opposition leaders all campaigned to run for president in the sudden political void. In 1980, there was a coup d'état, by General Chun Doo-hwan against the transitional government of Choi Gyu Ha, the interim president and a former prime minister under Park. Chun assumed the presidency. His seizure of power triggered nationwide protest demanding democracy, in particular the city of Gwangju, in Jeollanam-do where Chun sent in special forces to violently suppress the city, in what is now known as the Gwangju Massacre.

Until 1987, he and his government held Korea under despotic rule when Park Jong Chul — a student attending Seoul National University — was tortured to death. The Catholic Priests' Association for Justice revealed that Park was tortured, igniting huge demonstrations around the country. The demonstrations snowballed when another student from Yonsei University, Lee Han Yeol, was killed by a police-fired tear gas bomb while he was demonstrating against the military government. The period of resistance is called the Resistance of June when all joined the national movement. Eventually,

Chun's party, the Democratic Justice Party, and its leader, Roh Tae-woo announced the June 29th Declaration, which included the direct election of the president.

In 1988, Seoul hosted the 1988 Summer Olympics, a cause of national celebration in contrast to great turmoil of the past. In 1996, South Korea became a member of the OECD. As with many of its Asian neighbors, South Korea suffered the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, but the country was able to re-emerge and continue its growth towards a major economic power after a swift recovery.

In June 2000, as part of South Korean president Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy of engagement, a North-South summit took place in Pyongyang, the capital city of North Korea. That year, Former President Kim received the Nobel Peace Prize "for his work for democracy and human rights in South Korea and in East Asia in general, and for peace and reconciliation with North Korea in particular.

In 2002, South Korea and Japan jointly co-hosted the 2002 FIFA World Cup. The South Korean national football team became the first and only Asian nation to reach the semi-finals, beating Spain, Portugal and Italy in the knock-out stages.

In 2005, South Korea's GDP broke the US\$1 trillion mark, with its per capita GDP now comparable to that of Greece, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal and Spain. The economy is continuing to grow rapidly and per capita GDP has been forecasted to surpass Canada, France, Germany and the United Kingdom by 2025 and overtake Japan by 2050."

Wow. That's a lot of information, huh? Thanks Wikipedia.

I'll let you digest while I get some shut eye. Big day tomorrow.

Until then, in the words of Justin Ambrosino:

커피 잔을 위한 60 달러? 나는 나의 꿈을 그것을 위해 세척되어 얻어야 한다

And now, to bed.

September 26, 2008:

The Second Inchon Landing

After 16 hours in the air, the Second Inchon Landing occurred at 8:30 last night. What exactly am I referring to?

The First Inchon Landing:

The amphibious landing of a huge and well-armed force - 261 vessels - of UN troops at Inchon on 15 September 1950 was an early turning point in the Korean war. Before it, UN forces were struggling to hold off the persistent North Korean offensive at the Pusan

perimeter.

In attacking from the sea rather than on land, General Douglas MacArthur was counting on the element of surprise. His intent was to cut off enemy supply lines and seal off the southern peninsula. The North Korean forces could not act in time to stop the subsequent march of UN forces. The Inchon landing provided a foothold from which the allies could fight to reclaim South Korea. Eventually, they were able to recapture Seoul and cross the 38th parallel.

Wow.



Doug going ashore



General Douglas Macarthur

Thanks Doug. If not for you, we couldn't have had the Second Inchon landing.

The Second Inchon Landing:



The Second Incheon Landing. 09/26/08



Welcome to Korea

Not as impressive as Doug, I know, but, then again, we don't have weapons.

How did all this come about?

Cubby and I awoke at 6:30 am PST and went to LAX to catch the flight.



That's Joe, driving to LAX



That's Los Angeles traffic.

After a small panic due to an accident on the 105, we parked at LAX and Joe barely made his flight to San Francisco to catch his plane to Seoul.

I met Justin and Hyup at LAX and, after a nice breakfast, we barely made our plane to Tokyo.

After a 12 hour flight, we arrived in Tokyo at 3:30 pm.

A few impressions of Tokyo:

Like Paul's granddad in "A Hard Day's Night", it's very clean. No trash.



Mr. Sparkle

<http://www.milkandcookies.com/link/20638/detail/>

The airport is very sterile and perfunctory. And efficient. Everything is well planned and executed.

Curiously, flying in to Narita Airport looks very much like flying into DFW. The terrain looks very much like North Texas and the airport layout is a lot like Dallas. The weird thing is, there were no Japanese other than people who worked at the airport. All the travelers were American. I wonder why that is.



Hyup and Justin at Narita Airport.

One difference: The poo poo facility. I don't know what it was but it looked a lot like a porcelain bassinet. After considering this for a moment, I decided I didn't have to go all that badly.

We got on our Japan Air flight. Japan Air planes are not built for big strapping Texans like myself. There was like zero legroom. But, 2 hours after taking off, we landed in Seoul.

We met Joe at the airport and, after getting through customs, we got on a bus for the trip into Seoul itself.



The Cub needs to sleep.



Hyup and Justin ready to Seoul and Roll.

Surprisingly, Seoul looks a lot like Paris. Very cosmopolitan. Everybody's too cool for school and there doesn't seem to be anyone older than 30 in the entire city. More Coffee Beans than Starbucks. The usual proliferation of logos: Nike, Louis Vuitton, McDonald's, etc. No homeless, and I only noticed one piece of trash.

We finally got to our hotel at midnight and immediately conked out.



The view from our room.

We were awakened 7 hours later by Hyup 2-3-4 and, after a hearty breakfast, we are now off to see Seoul and our AFI friend Hanvit Kang who is the Camera Operator on "Beverly Hills Ninja 2" which is currently filming here in Seoul.

The weather is bracing - low 60s and it feels like England outside.

In the words of the Cubster:

나는 까만 후보자의 아내와 뒤에서 육체 관계를 갖고 싶으면

Will report more later.

September 27, 2008:

Korea: Day 1 - Food, Friends, Sights

The day began with a great buffet breakfast in our hotel. Pretty much anything you can think of to eat, both from an American and Korean point of view. I opted for a cheese omelet, underdone bacon (my friend Candice Cage would hate it because it's not crispy), some Korean sausages (which were pretty good despite not looking like they were cooked) and some yummy rice bread.

We then got a cab into Seoul proper. Saturday is the worst traffic day in Seoul as everyone is out. Going into Seoul looked like the 405 at rush hour.



An example of Seoul Saturday traffic. What's wrong with the sign?

There are numerous parks in Seoul and the weather was glorious, so it took us a while to get to our first stop - lunch. From what I could gather, we ate at a fairly upscale local restaurant in the Seoul version of Montmartre. We were surrounded by galleries and were across the street from the Museum of Korean Folk Art.

We hooked up with a friend of Hyup's, whose name is Yaahp. Yaahp composes and produces music for video games and is something of a minor celebrity in Mexico. Apparently, he has 300 pieces on Youtube and he gets mobbed at the Mexico City airport when he goes there.



That's Yaahp to the right of Hyup.

Lunch was good - boiled beef, kimchi (cabbage), boffo dumplings, and noodle soup. Justin and Yaahp began their Soju contest which did not stop until late last night (Justin won - or lost, depending on your point of view about hangovers).

After lunch, we went to the Korean National Museum of Folk Art.



On the way in, we were greeted by totems of Korean antiquity, one of which looked eerily familiar:



Doh!

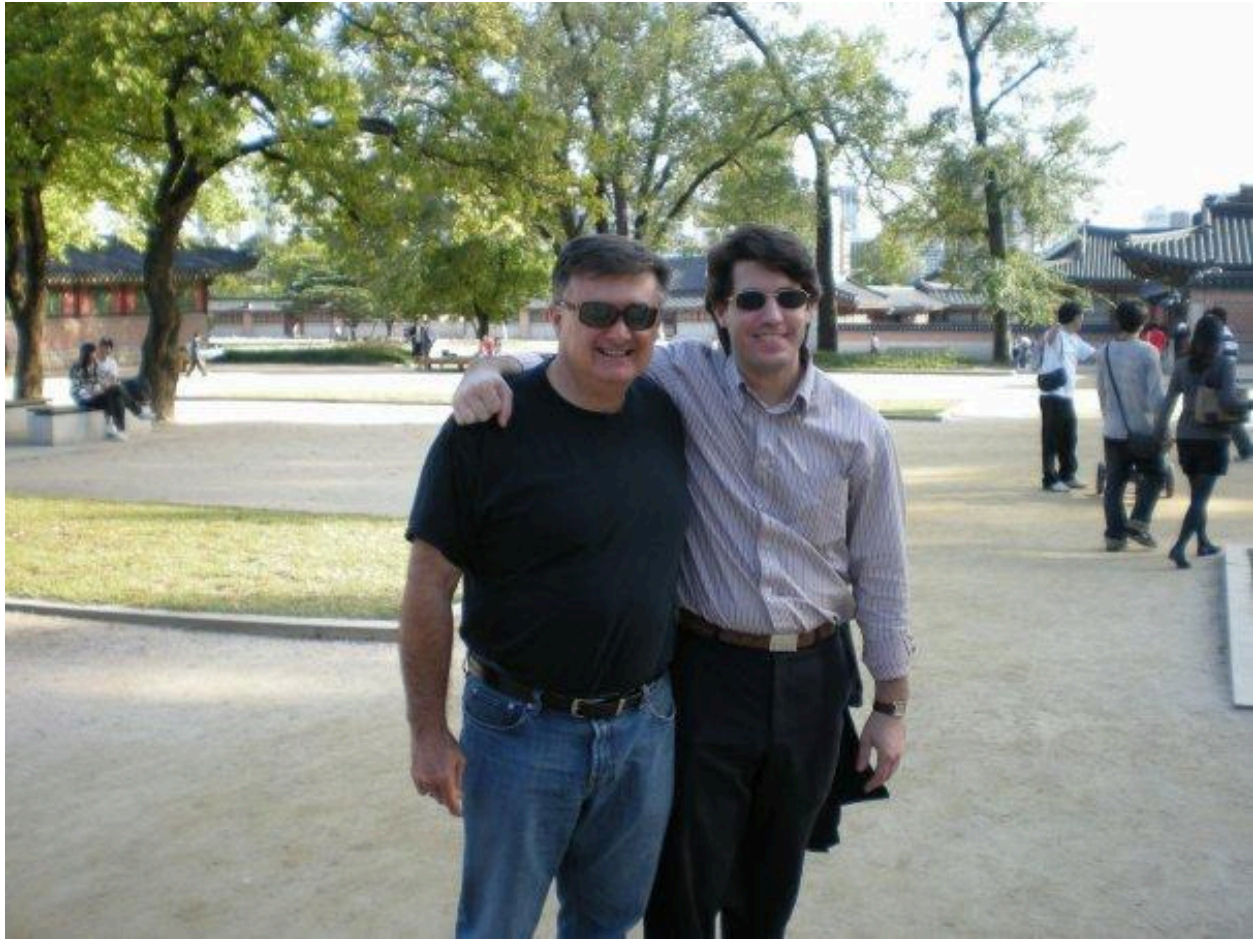
Strolling about the grounds, we were alerted to a complicated totem network that apparently describes how the female genitalia is rooted in the earth and is the source from which all life springs:



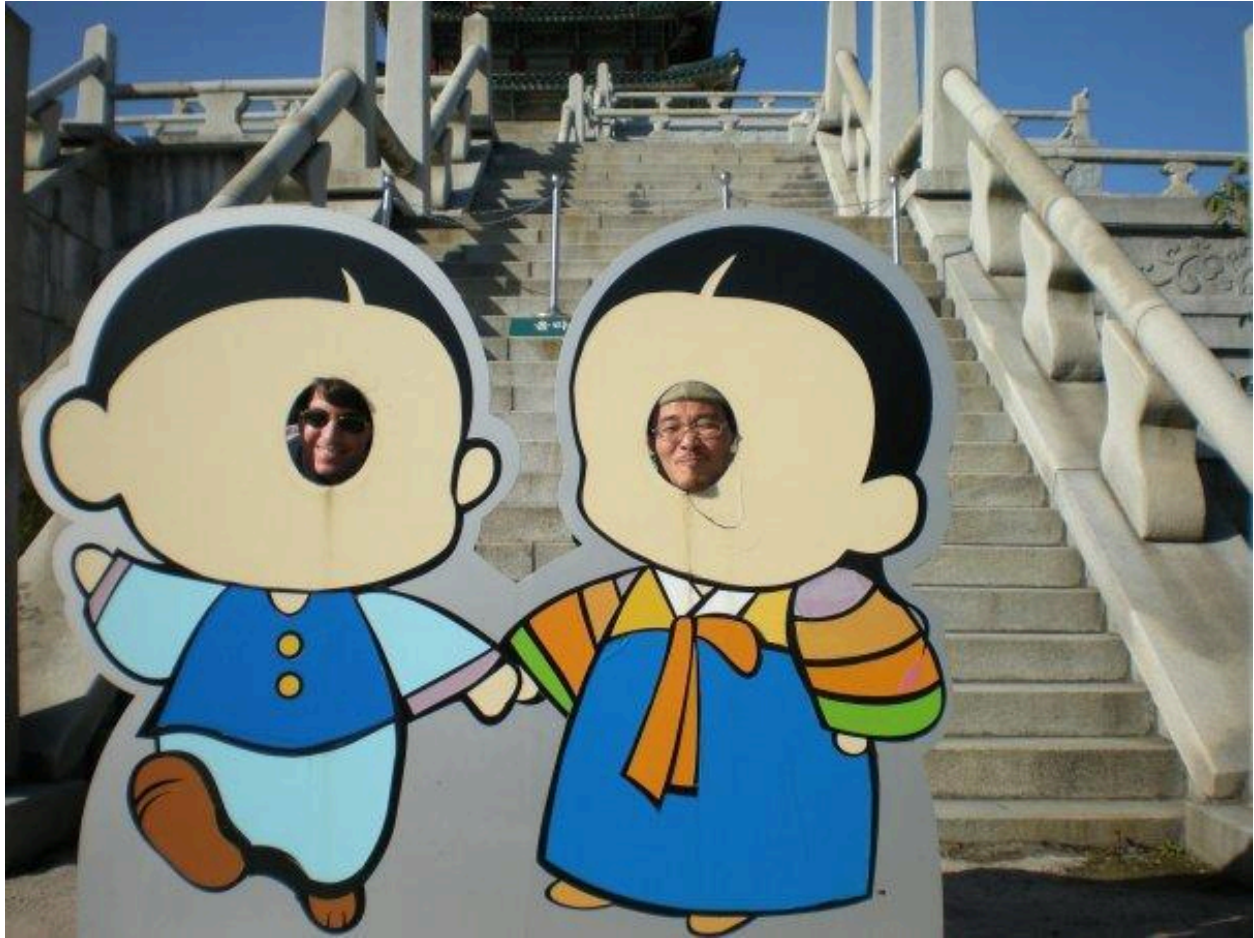
The Happy Planters.

While considering this vital information, we took in the museum - which was good, but not great and contained much of the information that I've already told you about in our Korean history lesson. Remember?

One cool display is a series of holograms that shows modern Korean people morphing into ancient Korean people. Cool and creepy at the same time as their eyes move and their faces twitch.



The Knickerbockers on holiday.



Dang. It IS a small world after all.

Our next stop was the Gyeongbokgung Palace. That's where the head guy lived in the old timey days.



The Gyeongbokgung Palace.

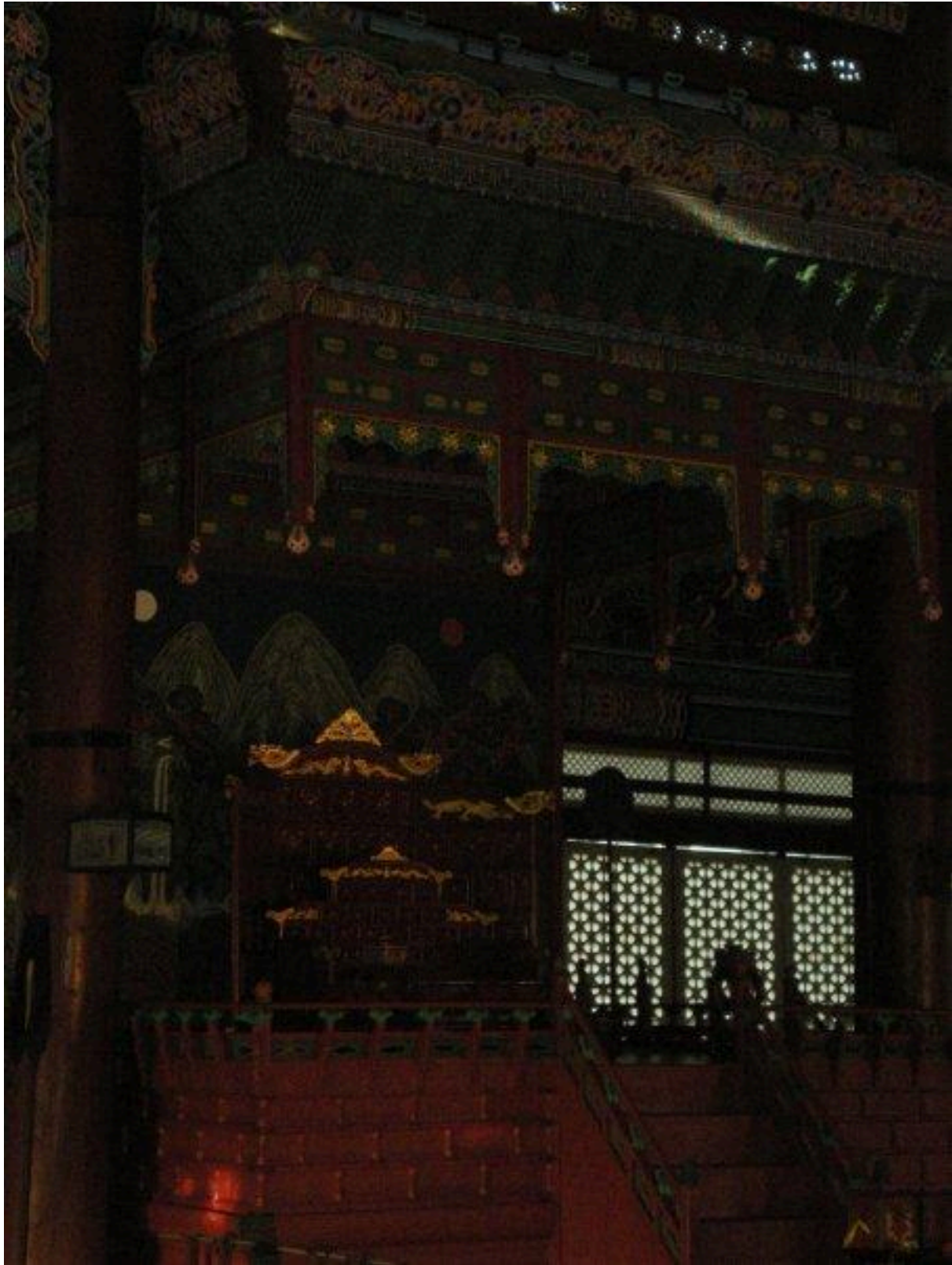
The palace is a complex of interlocking buildings that formed the royal city back in the day.



Detail of interior design.



The party place.



The throne.

The grounds are beautiful and very tranquil. I can see why it's such a popular place to come. Very peaceful.



Heckle or Jekyll? At any rate, it's a Korean magpie.

After the palace, we got on the subway to go meet Hyup's friend, Agnes.



The subway is neat, efficient and easy to understand as all the signs are in English as well as Korean. It never ceases to amaze me that every city I go to that has a subway is so much tidier than New York's. I wonder why that is.



The Daniel Boone of the Seoul subway system.

While transferring from one line to another, I discovered that I had an admirer. I assume that homosexuality does not officially exist in South Korea, but, apparently, it does unofficially.

While going down the escalator with my hand on the rail, I felt someone scratching on my wrist. Thinking that it was just a by-product of so many people crammed into a small space, I moved my hand and exited onto the platform. While standing there waiting for the train, I turned around and saw this Korean guy smiling at me and gesturing something with his eyes. As was explained to me, he was trying to pick me up. Now why in the hell would some young Korean guy want an old fat fart like me? Oh well. No accounting for taste I suppose.

Leaving my admirer behind, we proceeded to meet Agnes at a sidewalk cafe. After a couple of cups of coffee we decided to get a meal and went to a really cool place. Very small - only 3 tables - on a side street that only locals seem to know about.

We sat on the heated floor - which felt really great on my tired ass and had a magnificent spread:



That's Agnes on the left behind Joe.

Now, those of you who know me know that I only eat one thing at a time so it has been a big adjustment for me to sort of pick and choose from a myriad of selections served family style.

But I like it. Tons of small portions that everyone picks at. It doesn't seem like a lot of food, but, somehow, it's very filling and easy to digest - which is no small thing for me (those of you who know my digestive habits know what I'm talking about).

After dinner, Cubby and I went back to the hotel where a huge outdoor wedding reception was taking place.

Hyup went to go visit his mom (who is in the hospital so please send good wishes) and Hyup and Yaahp apparently killed 7 bottles of Soju.

It was a splendid day.

Favorite moment: An 8 year old kid absentmindedly singing Abba's "Super Trooper" in broken English while his mom was hauling him around the grounds of the Gyeongbokgung Palace.

Well, the laddies are currently at the spa, so I think I'll go check in on them.

In the words of Justin "Soldier Soju" Ambrosino:

너무 무리하지 마세요 그 얼굴을 책에

Talk to you later.

September 28, 2008:

Korea Day 2- The High Ground

So, yesterday, being Sunday, was a little slow. The lads went to the spa while I blogged. They all got haircuts which look pretty good if they were in the military or auditioning for the role of Curly Howard. At any rate, after their shearing, Justin went off to meet a friend and Hyup, Joe and I went on a podiatric exploration of Seoul.

First stop - lunch. duh. As before, we stopped at a local place. We rely on Hyup for these things and, other than my vetoing the octopus, the meal was pretty good. I don't understand why the food is so filling. The portions are so small. Weird.

And, before I forget, speaking of yesterday's imponderable regarding the New York subway system, thanks and kudos to alert friend Tyler Ward for explaining that the NY subway system was basically designed without a unified plan. Thanks Tyler. That explains a lot.

We strolled down the main tourist street of Seoul - the name of which I forgot (and probably couldn't pronounce anyway). It was typical big city tourist schlock. Looked a lot like Bourbon Street. There was one street performer. A juggler. He was very good. He looked American. I always wonder about stuff like that. What is that guy's story? How do you get from the U.S. to being a street juggler in Seoul?

Leaving this imponderable behind, we next went to Namsan Park (at last! something I can pronounce!!)

To get to Namsan Park, one must take a cable car like this:



The Eiger Sanction.

After we and 38 other intrepid travelers went where only eagles dare, we got to the top and saw how truly immense Seoul is.



Yup. Pretty dang big all right.



Yup.

Seoul is the 7th most populous city on earth at right around 8 million (Mumbai and Karachi (14 mil), Sao Paulo and Moscow are bigger) and the two pics above don't even begin to encompass the vastness of the city. Imagine a 360 degree panorama of what's in those 2 pics and you start to get some idea.



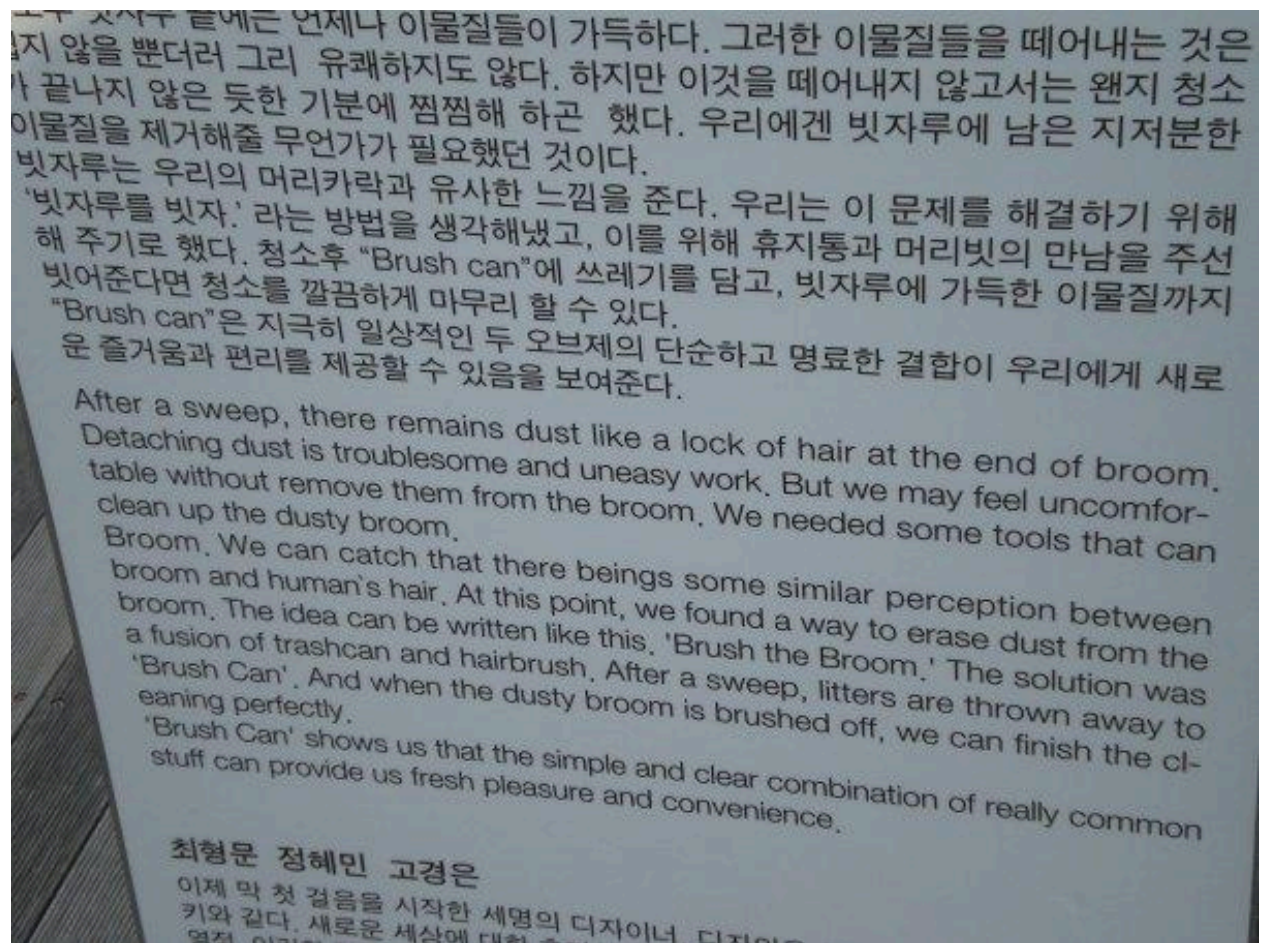
Hyup and the Cub at the top of Mt. Crumpet.

One tradition at Namsan Park involves affixing padlocks to the restraints encircling the observation deck. Apparently, lovers write their names on the lock and, by affixing it to the restraints, ensure that they will always be together.



Isn't there a Madonna song about this?

While at the top, we also saw a wonderful conceptual art exhibit that was a stack of plastic trash cans with a little grid around the edge that looks like the teeth of a comb. Oh heck, I can't do the darn thing justice, why not let the artist explain for himself:



Now we know.

After descending in the cable car, we decided to walk a bit. During our peregrination, we stumbled upon the Korean Film Institute - in association with AFI:



한국영화교육원

Korea Film Art Institute

- 교육인적자원부 인정 영화전문교육기관
- 2년제 전문학사, 4년제 학사 과정
- 일반인 네오피름아카데미 과정
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The weird thing was that the building was closed for the day. Don't Korean film students have cycle films they're supposed to be working on?

After lamenting that they just don't build film students like they used to, we kept walking and ended up on the trendy shopping street of Seoul (think Champs Elysee or the Ginza). A veritable cornucopia of rampant consumerism. However, we did have a real bargain at Starbucks. 15 bucks for 3 coffees. Travel Tip: When in Seoul, don't order "Cafe Americano" because the coffee is really watered down. Stick with cappuccino so you'll get a normal amount of caffeine bang for your buck.

One really cool thing I see all over the place is this yellow brick road type of trail. I asked Hyup about it and he explained that it is to assist the blind. How clever. Blind people can literally walk all over the city by following the path. The raised nubby part alerts blind people to approaching intersections. We even have the nubby stuff in the hotel in front of the elevator signal. Very cool.



You could follow the yellow brick road - if you could tell it was yellow

We got back to the hotel early. Hyup went to check on Justin, I noodled around and Joe caught up on Japanese baseball. Now, a new day is beginning here in the Land of the Morning Calm. Hope your Sunday was relaxing. It's Monday here and everyone is running around - gotta make that money.

In the words of Hyup:

그것은 아직도 움직이고 있는 동안 최상 물고기를 먹기 위하여 이다

Have a great evening! Go Cowboys!

September 29, 2008:

Korea Day 3 - Many Rivers to Cross

The day started with a belch. Not a repressed little burp. Not a discrete expulsion of air. But a BELCH. A whopper. And when I turned around to see who was able to summon up such sonic power, it was a little Chinese guy who was obviously very satisfied with his breakfast.

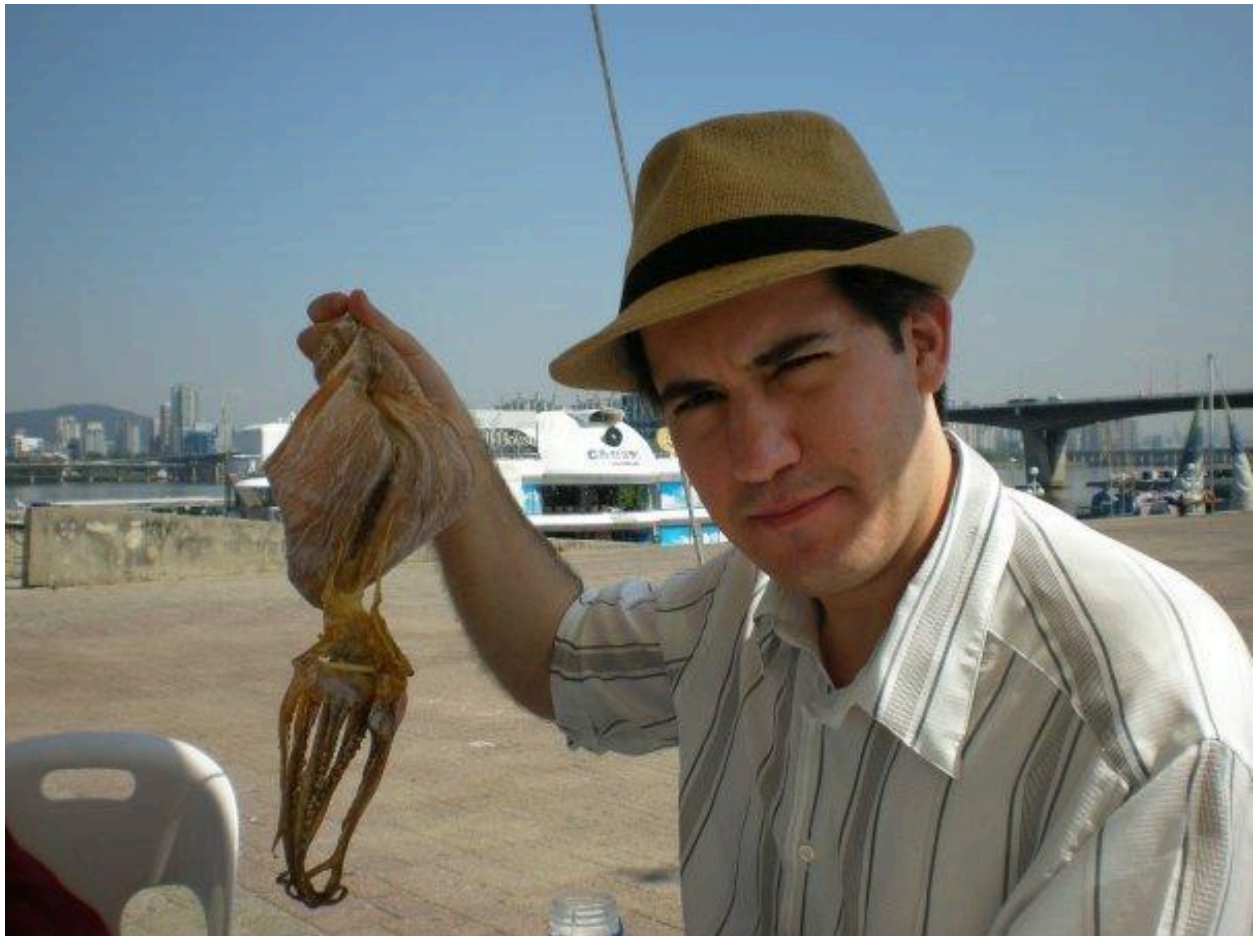


I have seen the Seine, the Thames, the Danube, the Moldau, the Rhone and have lived on the banks of the Big Muddy, The Father of all waters, the Mighty Mississip. Now I have seen the Han.

Whenever I travel, for some reason, I feel compelled to see whatever river flows through the city I'm visiting.

We started off by going down to the pier. The Han does not support commercial traffic and not many Koreans are private boat owners, so, what little traffic there is on the Han is devoted to pleasure cruise boats.

When we got to the pier we decided to grab a bite at one of the little stands. I opted for Gatorade. Hyup and Justin opted for dried and salted squid. Yum.



Yes. He really ate that.



A pigeon. You don't see many in Seoul. They were all killed off by the bird flu.

For those of you who are fans of "The Host", here is the snack stand:



The tallest building in Korea (64 floors) is located near the river.





Words to Live by. Would we could all do that.

Before boarding the boat, we took in the river vista. Seoul has 29 bridges spanning the Han - more than twice the number of bridges in Paris.





Everyone in Seoul lives in an apartment. There must be millions of them. A typical apartment building along the river looks like this:



After saying hello to an old friend we boarded our boat, "Caribbean Pirates"





The Han is instantly relaxing. I totally mellowed out and returned to our hotel ready for a nap.



A river Scene.



The Korean Congress.



An island in the middle of the Han to where, in olden days, "sinners" were exiled.

After getting back to the hotel, I went to the spa. AHHHHH. Hot whirlpool, mineral bath and dream bath. Marvelous. Really hit the spa-t. Nyuk Nyuk.

Like an idiot, I left my camera in the room when we went out last night. I took some pics on my cell phone but can't seem to get them transferred to my computer. Sorry. But, if you could see the pics, you'd see that we went to a restaurant all festooned with Korean war memorabilia. In celebration of that great conflict, we had "camp stew" which consists mostly of hot dogs, ramen noodles and onions. My, that was tasty. We met up with Hanvit (AFI DP), the costume designer from Justin's thesis, and her friend. Got home around 10 and watched some Japanese baseball.

A few words about Korean television:

Now, I'm no expert, but I know entertainment when I see it. I watched a Korean sitcom. The main characters were a woman dressed to look like Edith Prickley on SCTV and another woman dressed up like Morticia Adams. Apparently, the plot revolved around parking. The laugh line I understood involved not having enough change for the parking meter. Wow. Funny.

The next show I watched was some type of game show. The Korean host was wearing a blonde wig and the contest involved contestants seeing how many raw eggs they can smash with their foreheads. The camera was positioned under the plexiglass screen so we got a head-on view of the smashing. The winner broke 37 eggs in 30 seconds. Now that's entertainment.

Then I watched some overwrought soap opera that mostly consisted of this obviously sensitive young man making doe eyes at this young lady who was being courted by an obviously wealthy and ruthless older business man. That wouldn't have been so bad, except that I was watching this in the cab. So was the driver. EEEK.

A few impressions of Seoul:

All the young ladies walk arm in arm down the streets. Charming.

Taxis are cheap. Local food is cheap. Non-Korean food is not cheap. Yesterday we ate lunch at this trendy, supposedly Italian restaurant (Justin wanted bread). Not terribly expensive but more than it was worth. The soundtrack was something out of a James Bond movie from the 60s, and, when we got done and left the restaurant, there was an Aston Martin parked out front. Who knows, maybe 007 was there after all.

I need to go grab some breakfast before our guest lecturing gig today (more of that tomorrow). Have a good night, and, in the words of Justin Ambrosino:

저 오징어의 품미는 나가 죽는 일까지 나의 입에 있을 것이다

September 30, 2008:

Korea Day 4: King, Father, Teacher

Yesterday we went to the country. We were guest lecturers at Yong In University at the invitation of our AFI friend, Hyun Wook Ko, who is now teaching at his alma mater.

Hyun Wook picked us up outside Yangjae station at about 11 and we drove about 30 miles outside of Seoul to the University. On the way we stopped to get gas.



3 attendants per car. I haven't seen anything like that since I was a kid (except for New Jersey)



And you think prices are bad in the States? That's per liter.

We arrived at the University around noon and met with Steven, the head of the Film Studies Dept.







Steven and Hyun Wook.

Steven told me that, like Chinese, the Korean word for "King", "father" and "teacher" is the same.

Hyup was the belle of the ball. I have never heard him talk so much or seen him be so animated. We screened "Texas Girl" and talked about filmmaking in Hollywood and answered questions about filmmaking in general. Justin was charming and eloquent as usual in his responses.

The class was 3 hours long and the kids were mostly freshmen. Now I know how the AFI guests feel at the HLMS.



Us with Professor Hyun Wook.



The class.

We were treated to a magnificent dinner by the University. It was the best meal I've had so far in Korea and the interior of the restaurant was wonderful.





Can I just stay Here?



After dinner, we took a stroll and discovered a martial arts academy. The arena you see is where the Korean version of Samurai are trained. They chop off stalks of wheat instead of guys' heads. The tiger speaks for itself.





We got home late and conked out.



Today, we're off to the army base. We'll see how it goes.

In the words of "King" Hyup:

우리는 욕조에 있는 적나라하게 음료 Soju에 얻어서 좋다

Talk to you tomorrow.

October 2, 2008:

Korea Day 5: Looking for Gomer

Just to let you know, I write this in Pusan for later publication, The hotel in Seoul turned off our internet connection before I could post this and we were on the road all day yesterday. There does not seem to be an internet connection in our motel in Pusan, so, who knows when this will get posted, but I wanted to get it down while it's still somewhat fresh in my mind.

Wednesday turned out to be kind of a bust. We were supposed to go to the army base and do a

little research for 8.6 Seconds, but things got messed up. First, Hyup was having computer problems and had to find some help in Seoul. He also had to pick up the car so, by the time we even got going, it was 4 p.m. Prior to leaving, Cubby and I just walked around the neighborhood and had an 8 dollar Starbucks. Travel Tip: Starbucks is overpriced here.

When Hyup returned, he had his father with him. Hyup's dad is kind of like Hyup – quiet and introspective with an impish grin and a sly sense of humor. We ate at a restaurant near our hotel at which the President of Korea has apparently eaten. Hyup said the food wasn't up to Presidential standards. After dinner, we dropped Hyup's father off at the hospital at which Hyup's mother is recovering and got on the road.



Hyup and his Abuji.



Korea says "Thumbs Up!" to health.

On the way, I finally saw a slum. I assumed they had to exist and this one was off the highway and sort of hidden. It looked like a shanty town and I couldn't tell how big it was.

We went about an hour and a half south of Seoul with the aim of going to see what we could of the base and the attendant red light district of which we have heard so much. Problem is, we couldn't find it. We got to the town. No army base. A cab driver sent us on a convoluted route that ended us up in a rural neighborhood. A gas station attendant sent us in the opposite direction. You'd think it wouldn't be all that hard to find an army base and a bunch of hookers, but we couldn't. So, we gave up and went back to Seoul.

In the words of Homer Simpson: "Shazam. Hee, hee, hee"

October 3, 2008:

Korea Day 6: Pusan/Busan

Pusan (or Busan as the signs spell it) is 300 km southeast of Seoul. It took us 6 hours to drive there - 2 hours to get out of the Seoul area, an hour to get through Pusan/Busan, and 3 hours on the road.



Seoul is above Hyup's head. Pusan/Busan is at his fingertip.

Hyup had us on a strict urination regimen, so we were only able to stop a couple of times at an “Oasis”.



Midday at the Oasis.



Put your camel to bed.



Moonbeams in your head.

Once we got out of Seoul, it was nothing but hills for 300 km. The countryside is absolutely beautiful. It reminded me of how Virginia or upstate New York looks when you drive the thruway.



Take me home, Country Road..."



"Land is Life"

We got into Pusan/Busan (no one seems to know why it's sometimes spelled with a "P" and sometimes with a "B") around 5 pm. There is no way to describe how big the cities are here. Just miles and miles of high-rise apartment complexes. Pusan/Busan is the second largest city in Korea and approximately 40% of the nation's population lives in either Seoul or Pusan/Busan.



Welcome to Pusan/Busan.

Now I can't tell for sure, but it is possible that we are staying at a no tell motel. The sign out front reads "Have a Good Night. Have a Good Time." Could just be Korean humor. Don't really know for sure.

I am in the Japan room. So I slept on the floor last night. I didn't sleep much.

Joe is in the India room – because it has a tapestry of a guy on an elephant on the wall.

Justin is in the Africa room - it would do Elvis proud.

Hyup is in the Mediterranean room - because it's blue.

I haven't seen any obvious hourly customers come and go, but I do have my suspicions. The internet doesn't seem to be working. There's no CNN so we can't monitor the considerable debating skills of Sarah Palin today, no sports channel so I won't know for a while how my Red Sox are faring against the Angels. But there is a lot of Japanese porn. So we're good.

We met up last night with our AFI professor, Barry Sabbath. Barry is in for the festival and is some muckety muck on a couple of panels. We had an endless meal, but we were all road weary and called it a night around 10.



Course 4 - and counting.



Barry and the Jets.

Tomorrow, we hit the festival. While it seems efficient in terms of moving people around, the information does not seem to be complete and there has been a fairly serious lack of communication in response to some of my queries. Barry also feels a bit in the dark, and he's an official. So, it should be interesting. More later.

In the words of our onboard navigation system:



Pa-ship! Pa-Ship! Pa-Ship! Pa-Ship!

October 4 and 5, 2008:

Korea Day 7 & 8: Captain Tuborg

The Pusan Film Festival is a bewildering place. We spent most of the first day trying to figure out the system – which is no small feat as there doesn't seem to be much of one – although there are many staff members all over the place who cannot seem to answer any question one might have. At least, they're very polite about not being helpful.

2008



**13th PUSAN
International
Film Festival**
2-10 October

This morning, as I was waiting for Hyup and Joe to come down (Justin wanted to sleep in), I heard my first American songs in ten days – “Pictures of You” and “We’ve Got the Beat.”, They were followed by “Moon River” sung in Korean. Go figure. For some reason, the coffee shops and the big hotels all play Big Band music from the ‘40s. I think I’ve heard “Sing, Sing, Sing” about 20 times since I’ve been here.

It is hot in Pusan. Think New Orleans in September. The mornings are cool but it rapidly heats up although the ocean breeze starts to kick in around noon time which at least blows the pollution around so one gets a sense of moving air. Here are some shots around the festival:



Save dem bones....



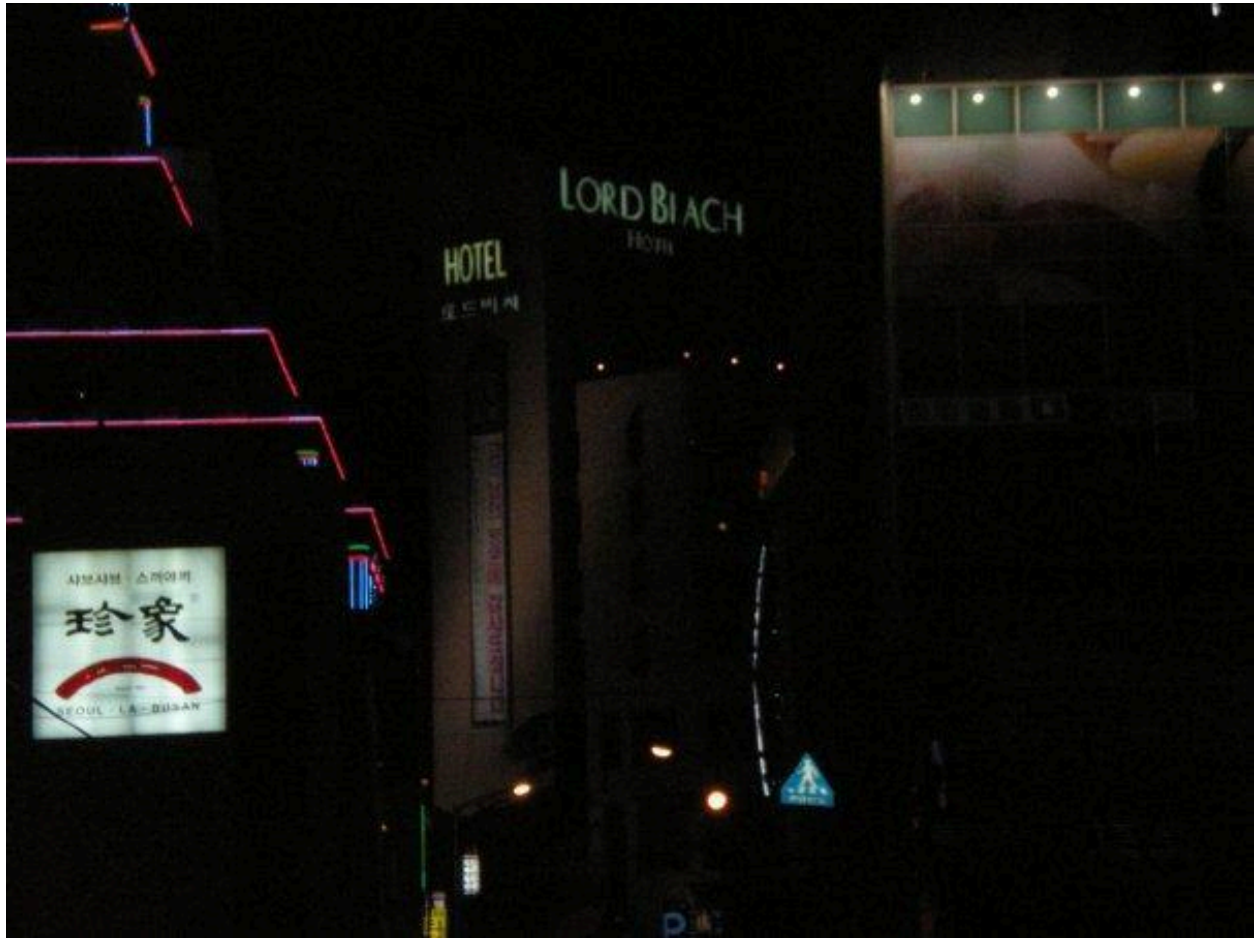
D.W. at dawn



Cats - Now and Forever



The Lobby of the Grand Hotel - Where the Stars come to play



Who you callin' a biach?



A grace note in the middle of chaos

I saw my first bums in Pusan/Busan. Winos sleeping on the sidewalk. Out of respect, I didn't take a picture. There also seems to be a lot of displaced Americans in Pusan/Busan. I don't think they are connected to the festival; they just seem to be drifting along with dirty backpacks and hollow eyes.

One thing that intrigues me and that I keep forgetting to mention is the fact that most Korean cars have little blue sponge-like plastic cubes adhered to the edges of their doors in order to keep from scratching their neighbor in a parking lot. Very sensible idea and I can't help thinking I'd make a fortune if I could get such a thing to catch on in Los Angeles.

Although the Festival has been frustrating, I will say that I've attended some good and informative seminars. I keep going back to the Asian Film Fund seminars which are well run and the speakers are entertaining and well-informed. They have been the most useful activities in which I've participated so far.

One interesting thing: I went to a pitch session for 5 Korean films. The producers were apparently selected to pitch as the finalists of a nationwide contest. Their pitches weren't that good. About on a par with first year AFI producers. They were nervous, they didn't know their stories and they were trying to sell by analogy to other films. Pitching is hard. Really hard.

After two days of banging my head against a wall trying to get meetings (and, believe me, we've all tried very hard), I finally got to pitch "8.6 Seconds" to a Hong Kong based company called "Irrestible Films". They liked the pitch and have asked for the script, so at least all the effort has not been totally in vain.

We went to the opening night party last night and met a very interesting character. He is a Danish actor of Falstaffian proportions. During our brief chat, he downed 4 beers and about 10 cigarettes. He told us about how well known he is on the international film scene. I didn't ever catch his name, so I dubbed him "Captain Tuborg". Cubby's reaction to Captain Tuborg: GTFOOH.



Captain Tuborg - He smiles and sounds like Nana Bundesen.

We then wasted the next two hours trying to get into the famous Korean actor party. Despite the intercession of the Korean Film Council and Barry (it's always fun to watch Barry bob and weave), we couldn't get in as it was "very restricted." That seems to be the way around here. There seems to be lots of parties (which would provide good networking opportunities) but one never knows where they are or how to get in. There was a totally obnoxious Canadian UPM who kept raising holy hell about being excluded – wanting to see supervisors and such. By that time of the evening, I either had to punch him or leave. So, I went and had an orange juice at 7 Eleven.

An interesting thing about Korean movie stars - instead of riding in limos, they ride around in campers. They have drivers and bodyguards and all that, but they ride in what looks like the Good Times Vans from the '70s. Weird.

I was interviewed by a Pusan/Busan newspaper today, so, perhaps, I'll get about 15 seconds of fame tomorrow morning.

After last night's meal of fresh Korean sashimi (yes, the octopus was still moving on the plate) I think I might go for a little less exotic fare.



The happy octopus eaters. Watch it...

Tomorrow will be long and hot. A screening of "Arn" in the morning – a Knight's Templar tale starring Vincent Perez and Simon Callow (one of my favorite actors). Then, a Producer's Roundtable discussion, the European party (to which I managed to get us invited), a screening of 2 shorts by a couple of acquaintances we've made here and then the Korean Film Council party. Hopefully, we'll be able to pitch some more and justify the time we've spent and the miles we've traveled.

Whew. I am really freaking tired. Gonna lie down for a rest before dinner. Will write again later.

In the words of Captain Tuborg:

나가 매일에 훈련하고 있는 아침꾼

October 6 and 7, 2008:

Korea Day 9 & 10: Boxing Kangaroos; Topless Gladiator Biker Babes

So yesterday was all about business. We tried to go to the screening of Arn at 10:30 on a Sunday morning. It had been sold out since before we ever got to Pusan/Busan. That is typical of how things seem to work around here. Then it began to rain. Not bad, just enough to be annoying.

After drowning our sorrows in a watered down coffee-like liquid water substance, we went to a producers' roundtable. Pretty interesting. The Hong Kong producer of The Dark Knight was there and talked about the pre-production of the Hong Kong sequence - one year of pre-pro for 10 days of shooting. The insurance problems alone were staggering as (so he says) there was no CGI in the Hong Kong stuff.

After sort of being a fly on the wall for 3 days, here's my take on the various Asian producers I've seen, heard, and met. The Koreans seem to be one beat behind and a bit cowed by the Japanese, who, like a skillful politician, never answer the question asked but, rather, advance their own agenda, often (so it appears) at the expense of the Korean film community.

The Hong Kong producers are the most helpful, personable and approachable and mostly give a direct answer to a direct question (maybe that's because they have all the money).

The Thai producers are extremely knowledgeable and are the most charming of the producers here. But they have no money.

We went to the European cocktail party last night and got a fairly major bite on 8.6 Seconds. Justin went in for another meeting this morning and they seem very interested.

We then went to the screenings of the shorts made by a couple of new friends we've made. One involved the lives of the women divers of Jeju Island. The other was about a guy who was struck by lightning. They were both pretty good.

We then went to the Korean Film Council party. We were greeted by a guy who kind of looks like Jackie Chan (but wasn't) wearing a zebra print cowboy hat, a lime green shirt, red plaid golf pants and two-tone wing tip shoes. He welcomed us to "his" party. I have no idea who he was.

We left early to get back to Seoul for one last pitch - with Sidus. They seem interested, but not enthusiastic. At least they want the script, so, we'll see. Many thanks to Soojin Chung (AFI editor) for facilitating the meeting.



Our pal Soojin

I write this just after 10 pm. Joe and I leave for the airport at 5:30 a.m. Justin has decided to stay in Korea until the end of the week. Hyup is going to visit family for a few days.

Pusan/Busan was a trial, but we did manage to get three meetings and got past the first step with all three. Not bad I suppose for a bunch of people (meaning us) who were kind of flying blind this week.

Which got me to thinking.

On the cab ride back to the hotel this afternoon, we conceptualized an action picture that we think will make a boatload of money: Topless Gladiator Biker Babes. The premise is simple. Women of various nationalities riding motorcycles and participating in a blood sport using major weaponry. You have speed, topless women, and things blowing up. Whaddya think Froelich? Will Europe buy it?

Also, it's almost time for another boxing kangaroo movie. Those of you who know me well know that boxing kangaroo movies are near and dear to my heart. There seems to have been one about once a decade since at least the 1940s (I've researched this) and Kangaroo Jack has to be 6 or 7 years ago now. Perhaps it's time.

That's the great thing about travel, it broadens one's creative horizons.

I need to sign off for tonight as I am butt tired and tomorrow will be a butt long day. I have a 4 hour layover in Tokyo, so I'll post one last blog as I bid adieu to the "Land of Morning Calm." It has been an adventure indeed. Some good, some frustrating, some weird. But I couldn't have had better traveling companions. Thanks to Hyup for your generosity of spirit, to Justin for always having a smile, and to Joe for keeping it simple. You are all treasured friends.

In the words of Hyup:

당신은 아무것도를 살 필요가 않는다. 그것은 어쨌든 중국제 모두이다.