

Englishman in Korea (end.)

who has the authority to make your life miserable.

Indeed my head employer fit somewhat into this mold, but those experiences are overshadowed by the incredible times I enjoyed there. After settling into our apartment, I soon discovered some of the subtle differences between our culture and theirs.

Drifting off to sleep one night, I was startled by the sound of a yelping animal. At first disturbing, this noise became quite a nuisance as it continued on for an extended period of time. Discussing this the next day with my boss, I was informed that we had the pleasure of living in close proximity to a dog farm, which provided dog meat to the local dog restaurants. It is a widely held belief among the older Korean men that this dog meat is good for their sexual potency.

Myself, I prefer to do a little role-playing, but to each his own. What was most disturbing about the whole thing was the fashion in which they killed the dogs. First their hair was burnt from their bodies, followed by a severe beating with wooden poles to tenderize the meat, all done while the dog is alive. Of course as they go to work on one dog, all his buddies in the cages sympathize with his pain and join in a chorus of tortured dog screams. This created a finely crafted lullaby to help me drift off into slumber.

I was soon to discover another nuance between our cultures after a discussion on health with a Korean acquaintance of mine. During the course of our conversation, he told me about when he was younger, his grandfather would wake him up early in the morning so he could urinate in a glass. His grandfather in turn would let the urine "breathe" for about half an hour and then drink it. This was done with the belief that it would lead to improved health.

I was shocked and disgusted. Thinking about all that money I spent having that lady to do something like that to me, when I could have been

here, getting it for free.

Despite these kinds of problems and the language barrier, I soon recovered from the culture shock and settled into my new job. I worked at a hogwon, a private language school, and was put to work at very strange hours.

We would work from six to nine in the morning and then again at six to nine in the evening. But school was located right beside the university and thus attracted mainly university students. I was therefore able to ingratiate myself into certain social circles, which would optimize my good times.

Korea does indeed have some spectacular and interesting sights and these remain as fond memories of my trip. Yet what I will always remember most are the people I met and the friends I made. I am quite sure that I will never be treated with such respect, kindness and hospitality here, as I was there. This no doubt was aided by the fact that I lived in a smaller city, by Korean standards, where foreigners were a lot less common. I enjoyed countless invitations to visit people's houses, to go on trips throughout Korea, and most importantly to go out drinking.

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The nights I spent drinking with my friends resulted in many of my best times in Korea. This brings me to the nightlife in Ulsan. Unfortunately the nightclubs in the city were completely sub-standard. They operate under a bizarre system in which they "sell" you a table rather than charge cover for entrance. At these tables you were permitted to seat eight people, and absolutely no more, for the scintillating rate of about four hundred bucks. Included in this deal were four bottles of beer, a bottle of Korean whiskey and a

couple of side dishes. The side dishes in these clubs usually consisted of one plate of sliced fruit and one plate of what were essentially cocktail wieners.

In Korea drinking is generally always accompanied by side dishes which range in variety from steamed maggot larvae, giving off a stench you wouldn't believe, to kimchii, a spicy cabbage dish that is eaten with virtually everything. This shabby state of the nightclubs resulted in most nights out visiting what are called *pojong machas*.

These were huge tents, which held several tables and a small cooking area, generally operated by an elderly lady. The atmosphere at these places was always festive as the whole evening would be fueled by soju; the primary alcoholic drink in Korea which is made from rice at about 25% alcohol. In Korean tradition, this drink is always shot and is always poured freely. It helps that a "mickey" sized bottle sells for about two dollars Canadian. Unfortunately my time in Korea was to end prematurely.

My girlfriend, who could not tolerate the male dominated society, promptly deserted me after two and a half months. When Christmas rolled around, my unsettled visa situation and my girlfriend's desire for me to return home prompted me to in effect, sneak out of the country between shifts at work. I was told that this was necessary as English teachers can encounter difficulties when trying to leave the country prior to the end of their contract (1 year).

It troubled me that I was not able to bid adieu to all my friends, but I still keep in contact with several of them. In the end it was a fabulous experience in which I got to visit a beautiful country, populated by genuinely kind people; people who have a great sense of pride in their country and culture; and people who took great pride in helping me discover this.

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