

*A fascinating story of rags to riches, back to rags,
and back again to riches, all in an effort to fight
for democracy, social justice and equality*

JOSEPH CHO, Ph.D.



My Calling

Autobiography of Joseph Cho, Ph.D.

Founder, Korea-US Peace Institute (KUSPI)

Publisher and Editor, Korean Street Journal (Ret.)

The First Korean-American Mayor of the City of Cerritos (Ret.)

Fighting against a military dictatorship and winning!!

In this condensed biography, Dr. Cho details how he came to the United States in the '70's with his wife and nothing but the shirts on their backs just to escape the military dictatorship in South Korea. Starting from scratch, Dr. Cho and his wife were working various menial jobs to support their growing family. Within a few years, they opened up their own realty business which was very successful, and made them millionaires. Then, the May 1980 massacre by South Korea military dictator Chun Doo Hwan in the city of Gwangju made him and his wife change course. They sold their realty business, and opened up a newspaper publication to shed light on the oppression of the Chun Doo Hwan regime. As expected, the regime did not appreciate the publication, battling Cho on every front, almost driving him and his wife to bankruptcy. The Chos stood up to the regime and kept the newspaper going until Democracy was installed in South Korea. Afterwards, Dr. Cho opened a printing business, which was very successful and allowed him to comfortably retire just before reaching 60. Dr. Cho then wanted to take all the experience he gained in fighting for justice and Democracy in Korea to his new homeland of the USA, running for city council in his adopted hometown of Cerritos, CA. Undeterred by two losses, he ran a third time which he won comfortably. After winning a seat on the Cerritos City Council, Dr. Cho vigorously fought for the residents of the City of Cerritos, as well as for the hard working men and women of the city who made it possible to provide the services for the residents. Councilmember (and at times Mayor) Cho fought to make sure residents' tax money stayed in their city, and did not go to Sacramento.

This biography is a fascinating story of rags to riches, back to rags, and back again to riches, all in an effort to fight for Democracy, social justice and equality.

My Calling

Everyone experiences turning points at various phases of their lives. I am no exception. In addition to this universal truth, the world that Koreans of my generation lived in was upheaval itself. Born towards the end of the Japanese colonial period, life always felt like waves crashing against a rock, in the midst of epoch-making events of history, such as Korea's liberation (1945), the Korean War (1950), the Student Revolution (1960), the Military Coup (1961), the Kwangju Massacre (1980) and the June Democratization Rallies (1987). During this time, I also had the additional turmoil of immigrating to the United States with my wife, Lucy.

I feel that I have come this far in life by industriously navigating through my past, which now grows faint in my memory. Although I was born into an era torn by war and severe poverty, I have many more beautiful memories than miserable ones. My wife always says that I "now have nothing left to do but to give thanks." As she says, I have truly been blessed. Through the Lord's special grace and the help of many good people, I am where I am today.



This is a condensed version of the 286 page biography (left, photo of book cover) published in Korean in 2010. A similar condensed version was published as a chapter in a 2013 book containing biographies of several prominent Korean Americans that was published by Queens College in New York.

My Early Years: a Poor Farmer's Son Leaves South Korea and its Military Dictatorship System of Yushin

In 1943, I was born in Kyushu, Japan as the first son of Korean laborers. I have no memories at all of this period in Japan. This is because my parents hurriedly brought me and my older sister to Korea in 1944, the year the U.S. began in earnest its military offensive against the main islands of Japan.

Danyang, my hometown, is located at the foot of the Sobaek Mountains. Our house was in a small farming village of only 30 or so families. In 1950, I was seven years old and in the first grade of elementary school when the Korean War, the tragedy of all Koreans, broke out. After the war, all of Korea was impoverished. When the lean spring season came, people would peel the bark off pine trees and dig up arrowroots, mixing them together for a meager meal. When I was in fourth grade, my father was conscripted as a soldier, leaving the farm work to my mother. My sister and I began to help with household chores. Farming with the sweat of my brow and hearing the weak groans of my parents at night after a long day in the fields, my dream as a child was a world in which farmers could live well.

Just before I graduated from elementary school, I had gone out of town by myself without my parents' permission to take a middle school entrance exam. This caused upheaval in the family. I was accepted to Ch'ungju Middle School, but my parents insisted that they could not afford to send me to Ch'ungju. Thus, I entered Danyang Middle School instead. In middle school, I did not dream of my future as my family could not afford to send me to university. However, throughout elementary and middle school, I grew up receiving a great deal of attention from the adults as well as my colleagues. So, I always felt that people were watching my every move and tried my best to choose the difficult but correct path over an easy one.

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High school senior Cho (center, 1960)

After middle school, I went on to the Andong Normal School, a high school that trains its students to be future elementary school teachers. It was a state school with no tuition and a small stipend was given to all students. At

first, I had no interest in being a school teacher and did not purchase a single textbook. I would deliver newspapers door-to-door in the morning and arrive at school with one remaining copy, always late. During class, I would look through the newspaper, and after class, hang out with students from other schools. At times, I would get into open brawls with delivery boys of other newspapers. I continued this lifestyle for about three months. One day, my science teacher, who had never raised his voice, began to yell at me, unable to calm his anger after my disruptions in class. He said that I was not a proper human being let alone a proper student. After the class period ended, my other teachers, in their turn, made me stand up after roll call and lectured me about my behavior. Several days later, the director of instruction, Mr. Na Dongsong, called me into his office. He told me about his own experiences during the Korean War and how he put himself through Korea University by selling military uniforms at Dongdaemun Market. He said that as long as I had the desire to learn, I could receive a college education and even promised me that as long as I got accepted somewhere, he would help me however he could. Mr. Na opened up a new world for me, prior to which I had never dreamed of attending school in Seoul. After that day, I became an entirely new person in order to meet the expectations and challenges Mr. Na laid out for me. I was never again late to class or absent, and sat

quietly in the back preparing for the university entrance exam. I took the entrance exam for the Seoul National University College of Education and received the highest score out of all applicants to the Social Science Department.

When I first set foot on campus at Seoul National University in April 1961, I was just a country bumpkin and Korea's universities were overflowing with the spirit of reunification in commemoration of the first anniversary of the Student Revolution that forced South Korean President Syngman Rhee out of office in 1960. Under the cause of reunifying the country, students shouted the slogan "Let's go north, come south" and marched to Panmunjom in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) to meet North Korean students. But in May 1961, the military coup changed everything and students no longer spoke about reunification or nationalism. Looking back, the military coup was a turning point for me. In the midst of the rapidly changing atmosphere from the student revolution to a military government, the change from life in the countryside to Seoul, the contrast between the affluent homes where I tutored and the makeshift barrack where I now lived, I began to seriously contemplate the discrepancies and injustices of society and I would wander the streets of Seoul, at times, full of rage.

I once lived as a tutor in the home of a president of a dye company, but found living in an affluent home uncomfortable. After that, I usually worked by the hour as a private tutor. I even lived for a while in a makeshift barrack on top of a hill in Changsin-dong. Lying on the floor, you could see the sky through the cracks of the boards; the roof always leaked rain in the summer. In the winter, we had to carry water from the well at the bottom of the hill back up to our house and wash rice with it. Carrying water up the hill was difficult; I worked part-time carrying water for others living on top of the hill.

During my freshman year of college, I would listen to lectures on the bible given by the great spiritual leader, Hahm Sokhon, at the World University Service Center. In Hahm's interpretations of the Bible, he would occasionally speak of current events. I was enraptured by Hahm's edict that "only a thinking people can live" and respected his spirit and severe criticism of the military government. However, it was difficult for me, a Buddhist at the time, to accept the teachings of the Bible. I have since been baptized in the Catholic Church and interpret the Bible according to what Hahm taught me decades ago.



ROK AirForce Lieutenant Cho (2nd from right, 1969)

In November 1967, I entered the Republic of Korea (ROK) Air Force as an officer candidate and was commissioned as Air Force Second Lieutenant in March 1968. Korean men all have a treasure trove of stories about their

time in the military, but I do not have that many from my days as a speechwriter of the Air Force Chief of Staff. On January 25, 1972, one month before I was scheduled to discharge, I married my wife, Lucy SookHyaе Kwon. The first impression I had of Lucy was that she was beautiful and smart. At the time, Lucy was a home economics teacher at Sungie Girl's High School in Kimchon. My wife grew up in a middle class household, but went through a great deal of hardship after marrying me.

In March 1972, I began teaching at Bosong High School while I was planning to leave Korea. In October 1972, the military dictator, Park Chung-hee, suspended the Korean constitution to consolidate power, marking the start of the Yushin Period. This turn of events plunged

me into a state of hopelessness. My students would often ask me about the logic behind the centralized authoritarian system of Yushin and its incompatibility with democracy. This period, in which I refused to become a Yushin supporter but, at the same time, could not bring myself to shout for democracy and push my students into the dangerous world of anti-government politics outside the campus gates, was one of the most difficult in my entire life. The thought that I should leave Korea became ever stronger with my experience as a Yushin teacher. Our newlywed life, summed up in one phrase, was a "Mission to escape Korea".

In February 1973, Lucy gave birth to our first child, Andy, at her parent's home in Kimchon. Andy, who was the first grandchild in Lucy's family and the first to carry on the family name in my family, was much loved by everyone. However, upon receiving my acceptance letter from the University of Wisconsin, we made the difficult decision to leave Andy with Lucy's mother in Korea. On July 5, 1974, Lucy and I left Korea from Kimpo Airport for Los Angeles, California and in a way, it felt as though we were running away.

My Coming to America: From Janitor to First "Global Korean"

I had originally intended to go to the University of Wisconsin, Madison to pursue a master's degree in economics. However, plans changed. I never reached Wisconsin and ended up settling in Los Angeles. I realized that with or without a master's degree, a return to Korea would necessitate my working for the advancement of Yushin, a reality with which I could not live. Thus, I decided to change course and started looking locally for a job in the computer industry. While conducting this job search, I began working as a janitor and gas station attendant, or as known at the time, a "Pump-man". My Korean education and work experience were not recognized. Finally, after six months of driving all over Los Angeles and Orange Counties and going through over 60 interviews, I was hired in January 1975 as a computer operator at the Los Angeles County Data

Processing Department in the City of Downey.

I had not been working at the department for long when the computer system was changed to UNIVAC. None of the senior operators volunteered to receive training on the new system, so I took three newly hired operators with me to the temporary UNIVAC training center in the Hall of Justice building (40 years later, my second son, Tony, is working in the same building as a Deputy District Attorney of County of Los Angeles). After we completed three months of training and we were ready to return to the county data processing department, the head of the UNIVAC consulting company asked the department if I could stay on with them. Thus, I stayed at the training center to assist with training other county employees. When the consulting team left after a year and a half, I became the most knowledgeable person about the UNIVAC system within the Los Angeles County Data Processing Center. I was the only person at the department who knew how the entire system worked. The department eventually created a position for me, Production Controller, at the level of assistant managing programmer. I managed to be promoted from computer operator to assistant manager in only three years when it normally took more than ten. My coworkers predicted that I would be the first Korean to become Manager I. However, I realized that Manager II was the 'glass ceiling' that I would never be able to surpass. Accordingly, when I was offered the opportunity to become the first Korean manager in August 1978, I turned it down and left the Los Angeles County Data Processing Department with no regrets.

In April 1975, our second son, Tony, was born. My wife quit her job as a keypunch operator at Bank of America and we brought our first born son, Andy, who was by then two years old, to live with us in the US as the 10 months of separation became too much for us to bear. In July 1975, we moved to Bellflower and my daughter, Jia, was born in September 1976. At the time, I was working for the County of Los Angeles while

also enrolled as a graduate student at California State University, Northridge. But with a family of five to support, I decided to drop out of the university and got a second job as a computer operator at Audio Magnetic Corporation in Irvine. This enabled me to save enough money over the span of several months to purchase our first home in October 1976, when Jia was less than one month old. It was a small, single story house in Cerritos, but for us, who had moved to the United States not three years prior, it felt like a palace. At the time, there were only a few Koreans in Cerritos and only a handful of Korean real estate agents in the Los Angeles area. I pondered the prospect of selling real estate on weekends and it compared favorably with my situation back then of working two full-time jobs, five days a week, from dawn to midnight. In 1977, I earned my real estate sales license and began selling houses on the weekends. Upon obtaining a real estate broker license in 1978, I established Best Property and Investment Realty, the first Korean-owned real estate brokerage in Cerritos. It was at this time that I quit my position at the county data processing department.

Setting aside my plans to return to Korea with a degree in computer science, I focused entirely on making money. The commissions were

such that selling even just one house a month, I was able to make more money than at a regular full-time job. There were even months in which I was able to sell over ten houses. After working as a broker for three years, I purchased several houses in



*With three children together
in front of statue of the Holy Mother Mary (1981)*

Cerritos and a 20-unit apartment building in Los Angeles. My external assets ballooned to over \$1 million (\$3 million in 2018 dollars). After I attained this financial success, the Korea Broadcasting Service (KBS) chose me as the first subject of their program “Global Koreans.” In April 1980, a broadcasting team from KBS came to produce my story. But while they were in New York filming the second installment of Global Koreans, on May 18, 1980, the Kwangju Massacre broke out and the program was cancelled.

My Transformation: Kwangju Massacre Changes the Course of My Life

Politics came to me as if by accident and my life took an unexpected turn in May 1980 as a result of the Kwangju Massacre, in which the South Korean army, under the leadership of military dictator, Chun Doo-hwan, crushed a popular uprising and killed as many as 2,000 civilians in the southern city of Kwangju. I wanted to distance myself from Korean politics so that one day, I could return to live in my homeland but the massacre made me give up this dream. On August 1, 1980, I swore my allegiance to the Stars and Stripes and became a U.S. citizen. Shortly afterward, my family went on our first visit back to Korea to celebrate my mother’s sixtieth birthday.

The Seoul that I returned to in August 1980, seemed even more suppressed than the Seoul I left during the Yushin period six years earlier. My hometown also looked very alien. Nevertheless, my hometown felt as warm as my mother’s embrace. My mother kept running back and forth, to and from the kitchen, bringing things for my children to eat. My father looked at the children, who played and talked loudly in English with each other, with an expression of pity, but my father looked very pleased. The night before we were to leave, my mother said, “I think it is a good thing that you went to America. Wherever you live, I am happy as long as you raise your children right and are able to live well”. She

had forgiven the unfilial son, who had now returned as a father of three children. However, she probably had no idea that this would be the last time she would ever see her oldest son. One day, she fell from the bridge where she used to wait for me to return home and was never able to see me again. The Korean government refused to allow me to return to Korea until after my mother had passed away on November 28, 1987. I came to Korea for her funeral service and when I arrived at Kimpo International Airport, I was taken to a separate room by agents of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) and presented a declaration stating that I would not engage in any political activity during my stay in Korea. After signing the declaration, a KCIA agent and a police officer followed me everywhere from the moment I left the airport until I left Korea.

Soon after our 1980 trip, I was sucked into the thick of the anti-dictatorship/pro-democracy movement. On February 2, 1981, I started



*Lucy and Joseph Cho with Kim Dae Joong (1984)
Kim later became president of ROK
and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize*

to publish the Weekly Ad, later renamed as the Korean Street Journal, which became a leading voice in the Korean Democracy Movement for ten years. The Korean Street Journal was popular with readers for its unrestricted and faithful reporting on issues that

were taboo in the Korean press, including the Korean political scene, peace movements, and the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula. In response, the Korean government attacked the newspaper and myself as being communist. The Korean consulate did its best to devastate me financially and to alienate the Korean community at large from the

newspaper by urging Korean-owned businesses not to advertise with us.

On June 11, 1984, I published the Rasung Daily, the first Los Angeles area Korean language daily newspaper owned by a Korean American, as a sister publication of the Korean Street Journal. It was popular for



*With my wife Lucy
at the office of the Korean Street Journal (1990)*

its reliable reporting, accurate information and variety of topics covered. Through various channels, I received a request from the Korean government to meet. I refused the offer. Because of this, the Korean consulate and

KCIA pressured our advertisers, impacting our advertising revenue. On December 21, 1984 I printed the 137th and last issue of Rasung Daily. I had invested the massive sum of \$500,000 (\$1.5 million in 2018 dollars) on the publication and had accumulated what became insurmountable debts. I discussed the possibility of declaring bankruptcy with an attorney, but ended up not doing so because I could not afford to pay the bankruptcy filing fee.

In the four years that my wife and I devoted to Weekly Ad/the Korean Street Journal and Rasung Daily, we gained the invaluable skills of journalist and experience in the publishing world, but these came at a large sacrifice: we lost all of the assets that we had accumulated while working in real estate, not to mention precious quality time with our children.

My Fight: In the Eye of the Storm of the Korean Democracy Movement

Fresh off the heels of the Kwangju Massacre, I found myself at the center of the democratization movement in the Korean American

community. The Korean Street Journal and Rasung Daily took on the summons of a generation and acted as catalysts to light the fire of democratization in the hearts of Korean People. In January 1985, along with the Young Korean United, the Korean Street Journal began collecting donations for the construction of a commemorative tower of the 5-18 Democratization Movement in Kwangju; after ten weeks of fundraising, over \$25,000 had been accumulated. We collected blankets to send to long term Korean prisoners of conscience. In December 1985, I initiated a campaign in the U.S. for direct presidential elections in Korea, presenting 15,000 signatures to the New Democratic Party in May 1986.

The Korean Street Journal, going beyond the role of mouthpiece of the Korean democratization movement, encouraged leaders in the Korean American community to join the movement. On April 19, 1986, as the president of the Southern California Korean American Journalist Association, I assembled 50 leaders of 30 different Korean American associations in southern California at the “Million Korean American Declaration of Conscience.” I approached each of these personages individually and presented my case discreetly so that the Korean Consulate in Los Angeles would not catch wind of my actions. The Los Angeles Times took a part of my speech and reported that “on the surface, we support the constitution amendment, but in reality we are requesting the end of military dictatorship”. On June 21, 1987, I organized the Peace Rally for a Democratic Constitution. California Lieutenant Governor Leo McCarthy asked to participate in the opening ceremony and give a speech at the event. His involvement increased the event’s visibility. Approximately 7,000 participants came to Ardmore Seoul International Park in the Koreatown neighborhood of Los Angeles with Korean and American flags and banners. There were a dozen television camera crews at the ceremony, which lasted five hours, with footage from the rally appearing on the air for a week afterwards.

In effect, the Korean Street Journal was more than just a domestic Korean American publication. Leaflets from Korea on the democratization movement would be sent to the Korean Street Journal through various channels. After these were reported on by the newspaper, copies of the articles would be sent back to Korea, where they would be secretly passed around, then used for questioning the Korea National Assembly. With the situation rapidly degenerating for the Korean government, the Los Angeles Korean Consulate and the KCIA took various measures to stamp out the newspaper. This eventually attracted the attention of the American press. The San Francisco Chronicle printed a special-edition series on Korea from June 23 to 25, 1986, reporting that “Korean Street Journal, the largest Korean newspaper in the U.S., published 20,000 copies. However, as reported in a hearing session of the Congress regarding the KCIA, the Korean government is putting pressure on advertisers not to put ads in the Korean Street Journal. Because of this, it is unable to print ads of large companies”. The Los Angeles Times, Sacramento Bee, National Guardian and other newspapers also reported on the Korean government’s persecution of the Korean Street Journal. In August 1986, a bullet broke through a window and came flying into our office. A U.S. Congressional aide visited our office to investigate the matter ahead of a related Senate committee hearing, but the Korea government’s 6-29 Declaration for a direct presidential election in November 1987 eliminated the need for such a hearing.

Despite our successes, the newspaper’s and my finances were a chronic problem, exacerbated by the series of court battles we had against the Koreatown Development Association beginning in January 1987. The Association had assembled a group to protest in front of our offices and at Ardmore Seoul International Park, brandishing placards reading “Commie Cho and Korean Street Journal, retreat!” The Association also printed an eight-page newspaper entitled ‘The Koreatown’, which accused me and the Korean Street Journal of being Communist. My courtroom

battles for slander lasted for over two years and cost a fortune. In June 1989, Judge Bonnie L. Martin of the Los Angeles Superior Court ordered that the Koreatown Development Association publish an apology for its false accusations in three local Korean daily newspapers. This ruling was a victory not only for me personally and for the Korean Street Journal, but also for Freedom of the Press.

My Turning Point: My Role as the Mouthpiece of the Korean Democratization Movement is no Longer Needed

On July 7, 1988, Korean president Roh Tae Woo announced that “Koreans in the U.S. may visit North Korea (DPRK)”, also known as the 7-7 Declaration. With the psychological barrier against visiting the DPRK having been removed, within a few years, several thousand Korean Americans visited North Korea in search of their long lost families. I also applied to visit North Korea in time for the North Korea People’s General Election in April 1990. I had to fly to Berlin to obtain my visa from the North Korean embassy located there. I visited the destroyed Berlin Wall at Brandenburg Gate and felt envious of Germany, which had achieved reunification. I also felt immensely sad that it was so difficult to travel to North Korea. Vice Chairman Park Kwangmyung of the North Korean Committee for Peace and Reunification of the Motherland treated me very well during my entire visit to North Korea. I suggested to him that North Korea open a dialogue with the United States. I also visited the Jangchung Cathedral. I participated in morning service and later spoke at length



With North Korea Catholic Association Leaders at the Jangchung Cathedral Pyongyang, DPRK (center, 1990)

with Central Committee Chairman of the Choson Catholic Church, Chang Jaechol, and other leaders of the church. They recounted to me the difficulties of the North Korean Catholic Church, and the impossibility of conducting Catholic rituals without a priest. As a result of my column in the Korean Street Journal “In search of Jangchung Cathedral in Pyongyang” and a campaign called “Let’s send a copy machine to Jangchung Cathedral”, Los Angeles Catholics pooled money to buy a copy machine and were able to send it to the cathedral through the North Korean embassy in Beijing. With the help of Father Kim Seunghoon in Korea, we were also able to send a video on Catholic rituals.

Not satisfied with the brevity of my first visit to North Korea, I visited Pyongyang for a second time in August 1990 to cover the first Pan Korean National Conference. For the duration of the conference, I did my best to record the reality of life in North Korea. Without a guide, I visited the Pyongyang subway and various other places in downtown Pyongyang. At Panmunjom, the border crossing in the DMZ, I broke away from my group so that I could take a picture of them, and inadvertently stepped on the line separating North Korea from South Korea. Suddenly, high tension arose between the guards of the two sides. From behind my back, a Korean soldier in the American army said, “It’s OK. You can come over”.

At this, the North Korean soldiers gave me an angry look. It seemed as if something would happen any second. The dividing line was only about one foot wide and made of concrete. Standing on top of it, I became



At Heaven Lake, on the summit of Baekdu Mountain prior to the Peace Rally from Baekdu to Hanra Mountain (1990)

lost in emotion and stayed there for awhile. I thought for a moment “should I just go over the line”, but decided that such a rash action would be foolish. I went back to the North Korean side. The North Korean security guard, speechless from shock and stress, for a time held onto my arm.

Having seen and felt a great deal, I returned to the U.S. and began a serialized column in both the Korean Street Journal and the Korean Saenuri Sinmun (New World News) in Korea entitled “Is North Korea Changing?” The response of readers was enthusiastic. Most people believed that it was a fairly accurate portrayal of North Korea, but some said that the reporting “was too cautious”. With the introduction of President Song Konho of the Hankyoreh newspaper, I published a book titled ‘Is North Korea Changing?’ at Sammin Publishing Co. in November 1990. Political science professors at various universities in South Korea recommended my book to their students.

After the Roh Tae Woo presidency began in 1988, the Korean press was still not yet completely free, but enjoyed unprecedented freedom compared to the Chun Doo-hwan period. Many newspapers, including Hankyoreh, were formed, and reporters wrote hundreds of articles with attention-grabbing headlines, such as “Blue House secret stories” (the Blue House is the South Korean equivalent of the White House). No one was interested any longer in articles written in a back alley in Los Angeles by three staff editors. The Korean Street Journal disappointed readers looking for sensational news. After winning our slander lawsuit, my wife and I began to seriously consider the future of the newspaper. Despite my desperate efforts to keep it alive, the Korean Street Journal closed down on February 28, 1991, after publishing its 517th issue. Wiping away tears, I said to my wife, Lucy, that “the Korean Street Journal has fulfilled its calling” and tried my best to control my disappointment at its closure. Today, it is the only Korean newspaper that the USC library has in its

archives. The library carries all 517 issues, which are accessible to the public as a reference source. I also donated a set of all 517 issues to the 5.18 Memorial Foundation in Korea, which has worked to archive the written and visual records of the protest against a military junta during the Kwangju massacre. On May 25, 2011, the documents of the Kwangju Uprising were recognized as a 'UNESCO Memory of the World.'

My Exit: Leaving the Scene of the Korean Democratization and Reunification Movements

My interest in the Korean nuclear problem began in 1983 when I published in the Korean Street Journal an abstract of Professor Peter Hayes' publication on the issue. The fact that the U.S. Army stationed in Korea had over 1,000 nuclear weapons came to me as a shock. When I realized that another war on the Korean peninsula would completely destroy the land and its people, I began to actively take part in anti-nuclear and peace movements. In September 1983, Mr. Song Konho, a respected veteran journalist who had been the managing editor of Dong-a Daily and later became president of Hankyoreh Daily in 1988, visited the Korean Street Journal offices. After looking through our archives for an hour or two, Mr. Song said to me, "I would like to give you my sincere apologies and thanks. Because of my preconceptions about weekly periodicals, I did not realize what a wonderful publication this is and for this, I apologize. Thank you so much for doing abroad what we cannot do inside Korea." He then firmly shook my hand and stated that the Korean Street Journal was the only Korean language newspaper he had seen up until that time that seriously covered the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula.

In 1993, when the North Korean nuclear problem threatened to drag the entire peninsula into war, I came to the forefront of the anti-nuclear peace movement. I presented at 13 different seminars. I also published writings about the nuclear problem in several newspapers.

In June 1994, when tension over the nuclear problem in Korea was at its peak, I formed an Ad Hoc Committee for Korean Peninsula Crisis with American human rights activists, including Rev. James Lawson and Rev. David Haley. On June 14th, we held a press conference for the American media at both the Los Angeles and Washington press clubs. That same month, amidst the ominous threat of nuclear war which was at its highest level since the Korean War, Former President Jimmy Carter visited North Korea and met with Kim Il Sung. As a result, an agreement between the U.S. and North Korea was formed, and on October 21, the Agreed Framework between the USA and North Korea was signed in Geneva, eliminating the immediate threat at least for the moment. I also compiled several newspaper articles I had written on the subject and published a book titled "The Nuclear Problem and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula" with Sammin Publishing in June 1994. The book was reviewed by Changjakkwa Bipyong, a reputable literary journal, in the winter 1994 edition and evaluated as the most comprehensive and systematic coverage of the nuclear issue in Korea.

On October 28-29, 1994, the National Association of Korean Americans (NAKA) was formed in New York. Pastor Syngman Rhee, who had served as president of the National Council of Churches USA, was elected as its first president with me as vice president. In October 1996, I was expected to be the next president of NAKA at the Los Angeles general meeting. However, I stepped down from my position as vice president because I wanted to start as an entrepreneur of a new business. I also organized the Korea Reunification Forum in December 1994 and became its vice president. However, insufficient financial backing forced the Forum to cease publishing periodicals after its eleventh issue. I also began hosting an op-ed program on Radio Korea. Beginning with current events, I discussed the future of the nationalism movement as well as the matter of reunification. The radio scripts that I compiled for three and a half years were published in June 1998 as the book titled "The

Road to Reunification is Changing' by Oreum publishing.

After much thought, I decided in December 1997 to quit all my social and political activism, including the Korean Democracy Movement. Thus I concluded my 17 colorful and hard years in the Korean Democracy Movement. I promised my wife that for the next three years I would focus only on our commercial printing business, KS Printing Company, which was a business we created after closing the Korean Street Journal. My wife and I worked very hard, taking almost no vacation for three years. KS Printing Co. specialized in printing periodical flyers for Hispanic grocery markets and I had to visit my clients at their stores in Los Angeles and Orange County almost every day. Because my employees had always weighed heavy on my mind when I ran a deficit operation in the newspaper business, I gave our employees the highest level of benefits that I could afford. Employees who had worked at the company for a set number of years were provided by the company with health insurance. The insurance covered them as well as their families. We also provided our employees with a self-employee retirement program (SERP). Fortunately, our efforts succeeded with sales volume quadrupling in those three years. In March 2002, we sold the printing business on profitable terms.

My three children, who had packed their own school bags because we were not around to help them, had all graduated from law school and are working as lawyers. For this we are infinitely grateful. Jia graduated from UCLA with summa cum laude at 18. After graduating from Yale Law School in 1999, she became an attorney and married Yale Law School alumnus Mike Kim, who is a partner of Kirkland and Ellis, LLC. Tony, who volunteered as a Sunday school teacher while attending UC Irvine, entered George Washington University Law School and became a lawyer in 2001. He is working as a deputy district attorney of Los Angeles County. Andy graduated from UCLA in 1996 and moved to Korea. He

enrolled at the Sogang University Graduate School of International Studies. However, increasingly aware of cultural differences between



Andy, Jia and Tony (back row, from left, 2002)

himself and native Koreans, he returned to the US and enrolled at Loyola Marymount University Law School in 2002, after both of his younger siblings had already become lawyers.

He also became a lawyer in 2005 and is now working in the legal department at Caltrans, California's agency responsible for the state's highway system.

My Struggles: Entering Mainstream American Politics

Everyone was shocked when, after giving up the prime years of my life to the Korean democratization and reunification movements in the 1980s and 1990s, I ran for the Cerritos City Council in March 2003. Nobody, including my own family, predicted that I would jump headfirst into mainstream American politics. I myself did not think that with my imperfect English I would be able to make it.

One day, I was at home watching the city council meeting on cable television, and was surprised to hear one city councilman say "the Korean community is the biggest minority community in Cerritos". I knew that there were many Koreans living in Cerritos, but had no idea that it was the largest minority population. I thought it was embarrassing that there were almost no Koreans who participated in city activities, let alone the city council, and concluded that the attitude of my Korean-American community needed to change. So, when it was announced that Cerritos would be participating in the Pasadena Rose Parade for the first time in January 2002, I worked as a volunteer for three months, decorating the

Cerritos float with flowers. Because I put in so many hours, I became an “expert” on float decoration. I truly enjoyed spending time with my fellow Cerritos residents. In working with everyone from children to senior citizens and men and women of all walks of life, I saw for the first time how multicultural and diverse Cerritos truly was. One day, a native English-speaking city councilmember came to work as a volunteer, but the councilmember did not associate with us and only worked and spoke with a few other fluent English-speaking volunteers in a corner. I found it ironic to witness that even with the non-native, sometimes poor English that many of the volunteers spoke, we were better able to communicate with one another than the native English-speaking councilmember did with us. This made me realize for the first time that I could be a good city councilmember.

Two articles published in the Los Angeles Times in the early 2000s cemented my thoughts. The first article introduced the Chinese American United for Self Empowerment (CAUSE) as follows: “Until the 1980s, minority politics in the U.S. was dominated by the African American community. But beginning in the 1990s, the Hispanic influence grew sharply. In the 2000s, we can see that the entry of Chinese Americans into politics is growing; this is due to the aggressive campaigning of CAUSE”. Another LA Times article stated that “According to the US Census, electoral districts are redistricted every ten years. Based on the 2000 Census, a congressional district was created in the Cerritos area. When the area is redistricted in 2011 according to the results of the 2010 Census, there is a high possibility that a new state assembly district will form in the Cerritos area. This will then most likely be an advantageous district for Asian American politicians.”

I believe that if the Korean community works together, it can elect Korean-American politicians in places like Cerritos and nearby communities such as La Palma, Buena Park and Fullerton that have a high concentration of

Korean-Americans within the population. What the Korean community should learn from its Chinese and Vietnamese counterparts is that an election campaign needs to have three components: money, a strong candidate, and votes. It should also take note that the unwavering support of the community is essential for raising its political strength.

I began discussions with my Korean-American friends to find a suitable candidate for the Cerritos city council election in March 2003. Everyone agreed that the community needed a Korean American candidate, but no one was willing to take the task upon himself. I began to think that if no one else was willing, then I would have to take the plunge myself. I asked my family what they thought, and they immediately objected. My children were aghast, saying “Dad, your English is too poor to be a city councilman”, and “You’ve never even been to City Hall. How did you even come up with this idea?” So I decided to join the campaign of congressional candidate



*At a fundraising event for Linda Sanchez
which I co-sponsored (2002)*

Linda Sanchez. From the beginning in September of 2002, I worked as a volunteer at the Linda Sanchez campaign office every weekend, which I greatly enjoyed. On November 4, 2002 after the general election,

Linda Sanchez, who was successfully elected, gave me her campaign office furniture and the promise of her assistance and support for my own campaign. This served as the beginning of my arduous campaign for the Cerritos city council.

In the March 2003 election, I, who had run solely on the conviction of Korean political empowerment with no prior research or preparation,

had no idea how to campaign. Other than mailing Korean citizens voter registration forms, I could not think of what else to do. Bob Baldwin, a board member of the ABC Unified School District, let me use his home to hold a tea party for approximately 20 people. This small gathering was the extent of my campaign outside the Korean community. I made use of my experience campaigning for Linda Sanchez and did a precinct walk, visiting voters door-to-door. As my campaign gradually lost steam, mainstream society lost interest in me, but the Korean community was greatly excited. Some of my critics took sentences from my book 'Is North Korea Changing?' out of context to paint me as a communist and made absurd allegations, such as "A picture of Kim Il Sung hangs in Cho's house" and "Joseph Cho visited North Korea 40 times". These unfounded claims had serious repercussions for my campaign. I lost my desire to continue my campaign, but I did not give up. However, I still felt extremely deflated when I lost.

In the next election in March 2005, I felt uneasy about running against another Korean American candidate who was also on the ballot, as it could split the Korean vote. But once I announced my plans to run again, groups from various sectors of the community unexpectedly expressed their enthusiastic support. Leaders in the Chinese, Filipino and Indian communities as well as the Hubert H. Humphrey Democratic Club and many elected officials, including Congresswoman Linda Sanchez and Assembly member Judy Chu, signed on to support me. Thus, the campaign was full of energy from the very beginning. As I emerged as a top tier candidate, arrows of condemnation, including renewed accusations that I was a communist, were shot at me. However, this time most of the Korean community did not pay heed to the false claims. Nonetheless, the Korean community divided in two and I lost again, but this time by only 300 votes.

My Success: Achieving the American Dream in my 60's

In 1991, I received a letter from Professor Kim Guchoon of the History Department of Yanbian University in China, saying that he had enjoyed reading my book 'Is North Korea Changing?' After that, we exchanged letters once or twice a year, exchanging opinions about the history of Korea and the political reality of the Korean peninsula. In 2002, I went to China and met him in Yenji, where we had many interesting discussions over the course a week. After being defeated in the 2003 city council election, I received a letter from Professor Kim Sungho of Yanbian University, who informed me that Professor Kim Guchoon had left a will to former President of Yanbian University Park Munil stating that "Mr. Cho should be accepted into the Ph.D. program". The professors of Yanbian University summarized and translated the content of my three books into Mandarin and submitted this to the Jilin Province Department of Education. Thanks to their efforts, my work was recognized as the equivalent of a master's degree and I was admitted to the Yanbian University Ph.D. program in September 2003. Every September and March, I would stay in Yanbian for one month, taking classes each morning and afternoon. I would be assigned a paper, which I would write after returning to the U.S. and then mail back to the university.

After my defeat in the 2005 city council election, I had only the dissertation remaining, having completed the required coursework over the preceding two years. I wished to take a semester's leave, but Professor Kim Sungho dissuaded me, stating that once I went on leave, it would be even more difficult to start again. He suggested that as my book, "The Nuclear Problem and Reunification on the Korean Peninsula" was strong content-wise, I could update it with the current situation and turn the final product into a dissertation. At the time, North Korea's declaration that it possessed nuclear weapons and the launching of the six-party talks made for a tense situation in Korea. I believed it to be my duty to

present a proper perspective in which to view this issue. After intense work for one year, I completed my doctorate dissertation titled “The Nuclear Problem on the Korean Peninsula” and passed the dissertation defense. I converted the academic style dissertation into an editorial style writing for a general audience and re-published it with Hanul publishing under the title “The North Korean Nuclear Threat and the Road to Peace on the Korean Peninsula” in May 2006. In June of that year, I went to Yanbian University with my wife for the graduation ceremony.

In February 2006, Lucy and I founded a non-profit organization which we named the Lucy and Joseph Cho Foundation. The organization’s purpose was to give to promising young students some of the fortune that American society allowed us to make. In September 2006, we held a combined ceremony to give scholarships to sixteen deserving high school and college students and to celebrate me having received my doctorate degree. We held scholarship ceremonies in September of each of the following two years, giving out a total of 49 scholarships.



*With Lucy at Yanbian University,
China (2006)*

Many believed that I would win my second attempt at city council in March 2005. I found it difficult to believe myself, having been in the lead throughout the night until the final vote count. Ruminating the morning after the election in the campaign office, I worried that my wife would not be able to start over again. After an hour or so, my wife showed up and completely surprised me by saying that we had better go around and gather the lawn signs to use for the next

campaign. In this way, we began to prepare for my third campaign as soon as the second one had ended. In March 2007, with no other Korean American candidate on the ballot, my prospects for the election were very strong. I was considered one of the favorites to win the election not only by the Korean American community, but also by mainstream society. Of the various groups that supported me, the official support of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, the labor union with the most political influence in Los Angeles, received the most attention. Secretary and Treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, Maria Elina Durazo, arranged a special news conference for me, publicizing the fact that Joseph Cho was the first Korean American candidate that the labor federation officially supported. The campaign went much more smoothly than the past campaigns. In March 2007, I was elected as a Cerritos city councilmember. My six years of campaigning finally came to fruition.

At over sixty years old, I had run a successful printing business, earned my doctorate degree and was elected as a city councilmember. I had truly achieved the American Dream. As I continued to run for city council and established the Lucy and Joseph Cho Foundation, there were many who believed that I had considerable financial resources at my disposal. However, our reason for creating the foundation was not because of our financial situation, but simply because we wanted to thank God for his blessings. Successfully purchasing a large shopping center, the fact that our three children grew up to be such wonderful people even though we did not spend much time to raise them properly, and receiving a doctorate 40 years after graduating from college - we could not help but be thankful.

Being elected to the Cerritos city council was the beginning of a new life for me. Having immigrated to the U.S. in 1974, I had been living in the

U.S. for over 30 years by the time I took office. With the exception of the less than four years I spent at the Los Angeles County data processing department, I predominantly spoke Korean while living in the U.S. During all of that time, I never had to deliver a speech



Press conference in which Maria Eleina Durazo announces the LA County Federation of Labor official endorsement of my campaign for Cerritos City Council (2007)

in English in front of an audience. I actually began to learn English in earnest through the campaigning process. My campaign manager said to me, “You are probably the first candidate who learned English by campaigning. I have never seen anyone as crazy as you”. After getting elected, I tried to participate in all city activities and attended the events of not only the Korean community but also the Chinese, Filipino, Indian and other communities. I became a full-time councilmember. I had almost no free weekends. It got to the point that my wife complained, “I live with a city councilmember, not a husband.”

To communicate better with people, beginning in March 2008 I published a monthly report in English at the beginning of each month and sent it to the voters and supporters that we got to know during the campaign. With constant additions made over three years, the list soon grew to over 10,000 people. Thus, people I ran into at various city events often told me that they were reading my monthly reports. Every other month I also hosted neighborhood meet and greets for Cerritos residents. Each meet and greet was hosted at a different residential neighborhood park within the city, where Korean style barbeque was served. Grievances and suggestions brought up at the meet and greet events were passed on to the

city manager. The results were summarized into a report and emailed to the citizens. I received many praises for this effort. It was quite common for people to comment that they have never seen an elected official seek out voters in such a manner during non-election years.

I soon came to be appreciated for my efforts as city councilmember. In March 2008, I received an Appreciation Award from the Asian American Drug Abuse Program, and in June, I received the Achievement Award from the Orange County Chapter of the Korean American Coalition. In June 2008, a special election was conducted after a councilmember’s resignation. The labor union AFSCME (American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees), which has a lot of political influence, interviewed the four candidates running in the race and asked them “of the four current council members, who do you think works best?” I was later told that three of the four chose me. I received many compliments from Cerritos residents for my service on the city council. The compliment that sticks in my mind the most was given in March 2013 when a Cerritos resident emailed out that based upon his observation of over forty years, Joseph Cho was the best councilmember that he has seen in the City of Cerritos.

My Inspiration: the Inauguration Ceremony of President Obama

As the only Korean American city councilman in Los Angeles County, and serving in the city with the highest concentration of Koreans in the US, I decided that my calling was to continue being active in politics until the day that future generations of young Korean American politicians rose up on my shoulders. Thus, I began my new life as Korean-American fully integrated into American society, rather than as a Korean immigrant who only interacted with the Korean community.

Entering my late sixties, I debated with myself whether I would be capable

of running for re-election in 2011. The fact that it was impossible to find an Asian American candidate other than myself to run in the 2012 State Assembly election grew increasingly clear. I began worrying about my own political future and whether I should run for the State Assembly. The election of Barack Obama to the U.S. presidency in November 2008 allowed me to regain hope in American politics. I believed that we all needed to take part in such a historical moment, which opened up an era of hope in which anyone regardless of race, sex or creed could succeed. I asked my children whether they would be interested in attending the presidential inauguration and despite their busy careers, they all enthusiastically attended. I saw in the Capitol, filled with 2 million people from all over the country, the reality of American democracy and the strength that allows the U.S. to lead the world. I felt proud, as an American citizen, to be witnessing an incredible moment of historical significance. I felt my perspective broaden. If I were to continue politics at this critical moment,

I felt that I would be able to contribute not only to Cerritos and the Korean community in California, but also to my two homelands, the U.S. and Korea. I was imbued with a new feeling of hope and courage.



At the first inauguration ceremony of President Obama (2009)

My election to the Cerritos city council in 2007 blew a breath of fresh hope into the Korean community's political aspirations. Since my election, more Korean Americans throughout Southern California were elected to local offices. The elected included: four Korean mayors and

six Korean city council members (in both instances, myself included), three Korean school board members and two Korean board members of College Boards of trustees. On March 10, 2010, my fellow city council members elected me to be Mayor of the City of Cerritos and with over 100 Korean and non-Korean supporters present, I was sworn in to the position as the first Korean American Mayor of Cerritos. Compared to that of other ethnic groups, Korean political influence had been lagging far behind. My election as mayor amidst these dismal circumstances was breaking news not only in the Korean community in the U.S. but also in the media in South Korea.

When I became mayor, the US was in the midst of the worst financial crisis since World War II. Therefore, I decided that my most important task as mayor was to reduce spending to keep our deficit as low as possible. The fact that Cerritos could have deficits was unthinkable only a few years prior. However, the global financial crisis that began in 2008 had a severe impact on the City of Cerritos. On top of this, the State of California, which suffered from chronic deficits, decided to take over the redevelopment agency funds of all municipal governments to fill its own budgetary gap. During my tenure as mayor, I did my best to prevent the state government from encroaching on the funds of local governments. I actively collected signatures in cooperation with the League of California Cities to place on the ballot a proposition (which later became known as Proposition 22) to prohibit the state government from taking certain funds away from local government. Proposition 22 won by a 60 to 40 margin in the November 2010 elections. Although the entire nation was undergoing an economic downturn, Cerritos recovered economically much faster than most other cities during my tenure as mayor. Because of Cerritos' quick financial recovery, I had the honor of receiving the 'Most Business Friendly City Award' on behalf of the City of Cerritos at the prestigious Eddy Award ceremony held at the Beverly Hills Hilton.



*I received the Best Business Friendly City Award
on Behalf of City of Cerritos (2010)*

In March 2011, I was successfully re-elected to the Cerritos City Council. The financial problems of Cerritos were not created by city mismanagement. Rather, the problems were largely created by state government deficits. Likewise, the citizens of Cerritos easily sympathized with my efforts over the previous two years to protect municipal and local finances from the hands of the state government. In June 2011, I started to seriously consider running for State Assembly to serve our local community better. But in August 2011, the California Citizens Redistricting Commission shook up the California political maps and changed the fate of many politicians. Redistricting split the base of supporters that I had built up over the years, and as a result, I had to reconsider my political future. My fellow Democrats strongly recommended that I run in the new 65th Assembly District. However, Cerritos is outside the 65th district and I would have had to move in order for me to run in the new district. I also would have had to resign from the Cerritos city council only six months after my reelection, which would have felt like a betrayal of my constituents. Another option that I seriously considered was running for Congress in the 39th Congressional District against Ed Royce. I eventually ruled out this option and endorsed a young promising Chinese American, Jay Chen, who was a board member of the Hacienda La Puente Unified School District. Consequently, I made the decision to run in 2016 for State Senate District 29 after I will have completed my term in 2015 on the Cerritos City Council.

To compete in the State Senate District 29 after leaving the Cerritos City Council, I had to relocate out of Los Angeles County, which has become our family's residence since I moved to the United States in 1974, and move to nearby Orange County. Even though Orange County is right next door (less than 5 miles away), it was not an easy decision for me to leave Cerritos. After lots of deliberations, I decided that it would be better to recommend my good friend, former Irvine Mayor Sukhee Kang to run for for the seat instead of me. This left me without an office to run for, and I accepted my fate that it was time for me to retire from political activity once I would be termed out from the Cerritos City Council in March 2015.

My Calling: Running While Dreaming of Peace in Korea and the rest of the World

As a Korean American, I always thank the American soldiers who sacrificed some 60 years ago for the cause of protecting the freedom and national security of my native country, the Republic of Korea (ROK). I also greatly appreciate the role that the U.S. government and its citizens have played in helping with the reconstruction, economic development, and national security of the ROK over the past 6 decades. However, I cannot endure the fact that the Korean Armistice Agreement only brought a cessation in active fighting in the Korean War. Consequently, the Korean War never officially ended. My country, the United States, has been in a state of war with North Korea for over 60 years. Although North Korea is ruled by a cult of personality, it is still considered by the Korean People to be half of the Korean Nation. Despite the amazing development of South Korea, the other half of the Korean Nation, the Korean peninsula is at risk of a full scale war breaking out at any moment. North Korea has consistently stated that in return for its abandonment of nuclear development, it expects peaceful coexistence with the U.S. The other nations making up the Six Party Talks, namely, Japan, Russia, South

Korea and China, have also shown a desire for a peaceful resolution of the North Korea nuclear issue. The U.S. is therefore in a unique role to initiate a conversion of the 1953 Armistice Agreement of the Korean War into a Peace Agreement, and bring a formal end to the Korean War.

During a week in January, 2013 in which I was in Washington, DC to attend both President Obama's second inauguration ceremony and the US Conference of Mayors meeting, I met with seven Congress members and a Senator's aide and requested their support for peace on the Korean Peninsula. They all agreed that the Korean War must be brought to an end, and that peace must be established on the Korean Peninsula. However, I could not but be stunned by the fact that many politicians not only lacked detailed knowledge of, but also had little interest in, the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Most of them were completely unaware of the fact that the Korean Peninsula was divided by the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR) at the end of World War II and that the United States was the lead party in the fight against North Korea during the Korean War. They were also unaware that the United States is a signatory to the Korean Armistice Agreement which brought cessation to the fighting in the Korean War. They therefore did not appreciate that, as a signatory to the Korean Armistice Agreement, the United States has the responsibility to resolve the nuclear crisis and to establish peace on the Korean Peninsula. They saw the Korean War merely as a conflict between the two Koreas, viewing the role of the United States as limited to just assuring the safety of South Korea, America's ally.

I believe that a peace agreement between the US and North Korea would be in line with the U.S. strategic interests on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. I have strong confidence that with a peace agreement North Korea could become a normal country, which could allow it to improve its people's well-being and become a new partner of the U.S., just like South Korea. This could lead to the development of the economy

of Northeast Asia, and a cooperative security framework. Peace on the Korean Peninsula could spur a 21st Century gold rush, which would stimulate the economy of the U.S. and the rest of the world. It would be especially beneficial to California, which is geographically closer to Asia than most of the rest of the US, and where Asians are most concentrated. In October 2013 I published a book titled "Peace First" with Hanul publishing about my ideas for bringing peace to the Korean Peninsula.

After my retirement from the Cerritos city council in 2015 I moved to Buena Park in nearby Orange County. In 2017, I founded the nonprofit organization KUSPI (Korea US Peace Institute), whose mission is to educate the American and Korean public about the root cause of the conflict in Korea and offer solutions to resolve the conflict. My partner, Al Barlevy, Ph. D. who is serving as the president of the organization, and I have already started in the mission by making presentations to several local organizations.

My resolve to continue with public service even into my 70's was formed largely upon reflection of my father, who passed away in December 2008 at the ripe old age of 93. After attending his funeral, I began to think that I too could live into my 90s. To rid myself of any inkling that I was an old man with limited capabilities, I decided to exercise regularly and build up my strength. I registered as a member of the Easy Runners running club in April 2009. For six weeks, I took classes on running and began to run regularly. With constant



On the Golden Gate Bridge (2010)

training, on March 21, 2010, I was able to complete my first marathon when I successfully completed the Los Angeles Marathon. Like every serious marathon runner, I had a goal of one day qualifying to run the Boston Marathon, the most prestigious of all marathons. On December 2, 2012, I finally achieved my goal and qualified for the Boston Marathon by successfully completing the 30th California International Marathon in Sacramento within the time limit allotted by the rules for qualifying for the Boston Marathon. Race day was cold and soggy, as runners ran through consistent and at times driving rains that pelted the Folsom-to-Sacramento course. However, I tried to grind out the final two miles of the race and finally finished the race in 4 hours 24 minutes 53 seconds, a finish time that qualified me by seven seconds to run in the 2014 Boston Marathon.

Over the last 8 years I have run a total of 68 marathons. The marathons I completed include the Los Angeles Marathon (8 times), the Boston Marathon (3 times), the San Francisco Marathon (twice), as well as the New York, Chicago, and San Diego Marathons. I also successfully completed the Long Beach Enlightened 100 Miles Run in 25 hours and 30 minutes (continuous time). My personal record (PR) for a marathon is 3 hours 50 minutes 49 seconds. I achieved this PR while running the Revel Canyon City Marathon (at the San Gabriel Mountains over Azusa, California) on November 11, 2015.

I am running while dreaming for peace in Korea and for a world in which the dark nuclear clouds hovering over the Korean peninsula would dissipate and 70 million North and South Koreans could embrace each other in friendship along with their 325 million American counterparts. It took me a long time to realize it, but this is my life's calling.

- The End-

Joseph Cho, Ph.D.: Life Long Public Servant

"What a wonderful life story. I am honored to know you and take great inspiration in all you've accomplished. I wish you much continued success."

- Mary Jane McIntosh

"Good and decent people like you who have successfully faced adversities in life deserve to be elected."

- Bobby Canseco

"Very impressive life story! May you continue to have success in any future endeavors. Thank you for all you do for our community."

- Theresa Prumatico

"A very interesting biography. You will surely have my vote again when election time comes around."

- Henrique Sequeira

"Congratulation for excellent dearing and progress."

- Mangaldas Patel

"We can count on you that you will do your best for our community."

- Sultan Ahmed

"Based upon his observation of over forty years, Joseph Cho was the best councilmember that I have seen in the City of Cerritos."

- Jim McMahon

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