

PyeongChang and power of gratitude

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By Jodi Bateman Forney

I have lived in South Korea for the past two-and-a-half years and have grown to love this country and its people. My husband and I have had an overwhelmingly positive experience here, and we are grateful for the many kindnesses that have been shown to us, including the invitation I received from my employer to attend the opening ceremony of the PyeongChang Olympics.

I left Seoul Friday afternoon not knowing quite what to expect. Sadly, politics had tainted my perspective of the event to the point that some of my original enthusiasm about going had diminished; however, I couldn't help but get excited again as we drove past the snow-covered mountains and "PyeongChang 2018" signs.

When we arrived, the little village of PyeongChang was humming with energy and expectation, and as we made our way to a restaurant that was filled with citizens from around the globe, my excitement increased.

Over the next few hours, I had the pleasure of meeting people from Belarus, Australia, France, the U.S., and of course, Korea. I would like to think I was a good ambassador for both my home and host countries and told my husband that I probably could have stayed in PyeongChang for the remainder of the Olympics just to meet new friends.

The ceremony itself was beautifully done. It flowed smoothly, and you could tell that years of work had gone into it. It was full of color and music and ritual, and I was so proud not only for all the athletes but especially for the Koreans, a hard-working people who have persevered and overcome great adversity.

As I watched the high-tech show, one that everyone can agree was outstanding, I thought of how the Koreans had grabbed the opportunity they'd been given and made something of it. But I also thought of others, thousands of others, who helped to provide that opportunity.

Just recently, I was at the War Memorial of Korea to take pictures of the names of U.S. servicemen who had been killed during the 1950-53 Korean War. These names, along with those of fallen servicemen from all the countries who sent forces as part of the U.N. Coalition, are etched in marble in a gallery outside the museum. It is a beautiful, moving place, and it humbles me every time I go there.

Looking around during the opening ceremony, I thought that the stadium, filled to capacity with 35,000 people, would not be large enough to hold the fallen servicemen from America



alone, much less those from the other countries that sent soldiers to fight on behalf of Korea.

When you ask most Korean War veterans how they feel about the war, they say how proud they are of their service and of what South Korea has made of itself. I hope that we, in turn, will not forget their sacrifices and those of the families whose lives were forever changed when their father, husband, son, brother, or uncle did not return from Korea.

I hope that as we enjoy the Olympics and the great privilege of living in such a remarkable country, we will think of these men with enduring gratitude.

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Jodi Bateman Forney poses in front of marble monuments inscribed with the names of servicemen who died during the Korean War during a recent visit to the War Memorial of Korea. Courtesy of Jodi Bateman Forney