

July 4, 2009, morning taxi ride to Fulbright Orientation, Chuncheon National University

기사님 안녕하세요 저는 한국에서 태어났는데 Hello cab driver sir, I was born in Korea but
한살때 국제입양이 되서 was adopted when I was one year old and so
한국말 아주 서툴러서 정말 — my Korean is very clumsy and I am very —

September 12, 2011, afternoon phone call to NeNe Chicken, Fulbright Building, Seoul

저는 외국인이라서 한국말이 서툴러서 I foreigner am so my Korean is clumsy therefore
죄송한데 양념치킨 한마리 주시고 I am sorry but spicy chicken one animal please give
네 한마리 맞아요 그리고 근처는 yes one animal correct, and as for the location
마포구 공덕역 Mapo-gu Gongdeok station
국민건강보험공단 National Health Insurance Building
바로 건너편에 있는 directly across being the
한미교육위원단이란 Korean American Educational
Commission
빌딩이고요. 붙어 있는 아주 시끄럽게 building. Also attached to it a very noisy
밤새 아이 노래를 부르는 playing children's songs all night long
페인트 공장도 있어요. paint factory is.
네 양념치킨 한마리 맞고 Yes, one animal spicy chicken is correct and
혹시 무말고 공기밥 하나 주시겠어요 by chance instead of radish can you please do one rice
감사합니다 네 25분 괜찮아요 thank you, yes, 25 minutes will be fine
다시 서툴러운 한국말이 정말 — and again for my clumsy Korean I am so —

May 2006

Before my second year of college I realized I could not distinguish my first language from the two others spoken by their oppressors. Later I would learn this feeling has a name. From the college computer lab I cancelled plans to study in Costa Rica. Then I made a deposit at the University of Minnesota, 90 minutes south and 30 minutes from my childhood home, to begin learning the symbols I realized I needed to know. That was the first ten thousand. The next was for flights to Korea: first, to learn the way my people hit a drum (the rhythm lives in the spaces between hits, they told me), second, to shift my center of gravity. I have been living here for two years now. That was how I spent twenty thousand dollars, the same amount my parents in America paid for me to leave in the first place, and this is why my Korean is very clumsy, so my stories can be very long and confusing and anyway

I am truly —

Spring 2010

When I finally tested into low advanced I celebrated by taking myself on a trip to Busan. A few days before my train the hair stylist stared at me as I fumbled my way to explain that I wanted my 옆머리 trimmed like a down perm but without the chemicals. The KTX train ticket counter staff stared at me as I explained which train I was supposed to take but missed. The hotel receptionist didn't stare at me because they assumed I was a foreigner. I smiled because for once on my own vacation

I didn't have to say —

Any given day

Your country, our country, grew its economy faster than it grew an alternative to baby boxes, unchecked boxes, moving boxes. Had I stayed I'm convinced I would have studied all the way to SKY, and I would be spending my own part-time 편의점 money to improve my English but instead I've improved my Korean enough to say

our country should be —

I am a 재미교포 and my parents did not teach me Korean and that is why I cannot speak it well and for that

I am not —

I do not owe you my story. But every time I tell it, I get treated better, especially whenever I tell my surgically rehearsed adoption story in 45 seconds.

You cry while driving me to the airport, say you are so sorry on behalf of our country, remind me that I am Korean too but this time, as in most times now when I go back to Korea

I am only —
I brought it up at all.