

# Testimonial Contest - 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize

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An elevator, a late-night subway train car, and a Lotte World school uniform rental shop. These places may sound strange when put together, but they have one thing in common: these are the places where I met my amazing friends, both local and from all around the world, and forged friendships that I hope will last for a lifetime.

When I first arrived at the main gates of Korea University, I was excited, yet extremely nervous. I had applied to attend the Winter Program without knowing anybody else at all; being an introvert at home, I was worried about making new friends, wondering if I would be alone for these three weeks. At the same time, I was also aware that three weeks is a very short period – even if I were to make friends, would I have enough time to bond with them? Would I be able to create meaningful friendships?

Contrary to my worries, the memories I've made so far at Korea University are unlike anything I've experienced before. The students at KU are incredibly open and friendly. Rapidly growing from small sparks to tight-knit bonds, friendships here blossom within a day through chance encounters; personally, I met my current friends in a Lotte World School Uniform rental shop, a dormitory elevator, and on my way down the hill from Anam I-House to the subway station. A simple hello leads to a self-introduction, which then leads to a conversation, which then leads to a friendship. Together, we've gone on adventures that I haven't gone on with friends that I've known my entire life, strengthening our connection. After spending the day at Lotte World together, my friend Meghana remarked, "Did we really only meet this morning? I feel like I've known you my whole life." This shows the depth of the newfound friendships each of us has forged over this short amount of time.

Born and raised in Singapore, I always wanted to open myself up to new experiences and make new friends from all around the world. I was amazed by the diversity and openness of the people I met here at Korea University and found that everyone was enthusiastic about making friends across international borders. A friend group of nine people, with whom I watched the women's volleyball game, came from seven places in total: the United States, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong/China, Singapore, and Australia.

Beyond the walls of Korea University, my friends and I had the good fortune of having many fun, spontaneous interactions with local Korean people. After our trip to Lotte World, we met a group of Korean High School students playing a game in the subway car. After watching and cheering them on, the boys invited one of our friends to join their game, while the girls and the rest of our group recorded their interaction excitedly. The other people in the train car also watched on, interested in what we were doing. The students, aware of the language barrier, were kind enough to explain the rules of the game to my friend in English, something I noticed a lot during our time in Korea. I hope to understand Korean better in the future, in order to repay the kindness and patience that my friends and I have received during our stay here. Even after a long, tiring day, I was able to find excitement and joy in even the most unexpected situations. These experiences were unpredictable and unplanned but ultimately forged lasting memories.

As I reflect on the time I've spent in Korea, I believe that I've had more fun over the last three weeks than I might have over the last three years. Though I was nervous at the beginning, I'm now reluctant to think about the last day of KUIWC when we all have to go our separate ways. Even though we'll all soon return home, I will always treasure the time I spent at Korea University and cherish the irreplaceable memories that I couldn't have created anywhere else.