

Moon-Ja Park's story is one of perseverance, hard work, and overcoming adversity. Her life is to be admired, filled with accomplishments and faith - all supported by a wonderful family. She was able to completely move her life halfway across the world from Korea to Canada. To this day, she continues to educate young minds about women's rights and the battle against racism.

Moon-Ja Park was born on April 22, 1942, in Busan, South Korea to parents Mal-Sook (mother) and Duck Rae (father). She has two older sisters who continue to live in Korea with their children and grandchildren. As a child, Moon-Ja was raised as a Buddhist, which currently stands at 23% of the religious world in South Korea, second to Christianity at 25%. Her daily ritual consisted of waking up at 4:30 am to visit the temple, worshipping in an ultra-quiet environment accompanied only by the gongs of monks.

Academically, Moon-Ja graduated at the top of her class each year. This allowed her to attend the PukYong National University in Busan, South Korea as the only female in the entire university. The Dean met with her before admission and tried to coax her from attending, saying that it was an unprecedented procedure to allow her to attend. Luckily, Moon-Ja did her homework and stated that there were no rules that prevented females from attending. With some apprehension, she was allowed to enroll. It was not an easy journey for her as she faced ridicule, bullying, and abuse from her classmates. However, there was one particular student that came to her defence; Young H. Park.

Young H. Park had just been discharged from the mandatory Korean army service. He was two years older than her, but they shared the same major and had classes and labs together. He was quiet and gentle, and he treated her as an equal. After completing the four-year program, Moon-Ja and Young H. began dating.

Moon-Ja acquired a job at an all-girls private Catholic school and taught Chemistry. Her experience with sexism throughout her university studies would become valuable to her students and would help create a foundation for Moon-Ja's lifelong crusade.

On December 18, 1965, Moon-Ja and Young H. got married. It was fate.

Soon after their marriage, with the efforts of her father-in-law, the newlyweds were encouraged to cross the Pacific Ocean and continue studies in Canada. Moon-Ja was apprehensive since she still had her dream to complete her Ph.D. and become a professor at her alma mater. Nonetheless, in 1966, she supported and followed her groom to Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Their first year was incredibly difficult. Not only was language a barrier, but the culture and the environment were also foreign. Without guidance, they sought support from each other and persevered together. Moon-Ja was employed at the University of Manitoba as a Research Assistant in soil chemistry in the Faculty of Agriculture while Young H. continued to study, completing his master's course within two years. She also volunteered at local homeless kitchens to give back to her community.

In a blink, 45 years had passed. They retired and returned to South Korea where they stayed happily for seven years. In South Korea, she taught English at an elementary school and completed her TESOL Diploma, graduating at the top of her class and class valedictorian.

They returned to Canada in 2016.

Moon-Ja finds balance with her passion for the arts. She enjoys the performing arts, such as opera, symphony, and classical ballet, so she has season tickets. Additionally, she finds peace and joy in writing poetry and essays, meditation and reading.

Moon-Ja and Young H. have two daughters: Janet (53) and Jane (46). Her daughters are proud of their immigrant upbringing and often voice support against racism and sexism, just like their mother. Her legacy also lies in four amazing grandchildren.

One of the strongest pillars in Moon-Ja's life is her faith. Even though she was raised in the Buddhist faith, she was encouraged to convert her beliefs to Christianity upon marrying Young Hyo. Today, she uses her knowledge of both religions to navigate through life. In 1972, she and Young Hyo founded the first Korean Christian Church in Winnipeg. Today, she has a substantial history with the United Church of Canada with decades of volunteer experience. Throughout her travels to India and Africa, she continues to learn, teach, and be a pioneer over and over again. In addition, she attended the Women's Gathering Conference with the National Gathering Conference with the United Church of Canada as the only Asian female in attendance.

Even in recent years, she feels the strife of being a visible minority as a female, and she is discriminated against even in religious backgrounds. As the National Chair and CEO of the Korean United Church Association in 1995, white women leaders and male ministers were not afraid to show their abhorrence, and they coined her the "black sheep." However, standing up for herself was hardly a new exercise, so she stood tall and persevered just as she had time and time again.