

Good morning. My name is Ohyeun Lee. I am the president of Korean United Methodist Women Network of NY Conference. It is my privilege and honor to share my story with you. I just received my green card 43 days ago. 1772 more days until I can get my citizenship if nothing major happens! Yes, I'm a fresh, new permanent resident but I'm not new to America. I have been here for 17 years. My husband and I came to America for his studies 17 years ago and I came with our 6 month old son.

My husband wanted to study 5-6 years in America and return to Korea to teach at Seminary. I liked that plan too!! As you know, life doesn't go as we plan. He applied to school for a PhD program and we moved to Chicago from Dallas, TX with my 4 year and 1 year old sons. He got a scholarship from school and work as a part time student pastor at a Korean Church and I had to work too. But because I had a J-2 Visa, I wasn't allowed to work. Luckily, I found a part time cashier job at the mall, she paid me with cash. I earned about \$600 per month. The apartment rent was about \$750. – We lived at an empty church parsonage for about 2 years. Instead of paying parsonage rent I cleaned church 4 days a week.

My husband's studies were stuck somewhere, without any sign of ending, for 8 years. My mother in Korea had diabetes for a long time and was getting sicker and sicker. She had to receive dialysis every six hours but I couldn't go back to see her. My J-2 Visa was expired so we had to get new Visas but there was no guarantee to get a visa for my husband to come back to finish his studies. When I called mother she asked me when I could come to see her. One day she told me it was no use. She waited for me for 8 years.

Then I got a call from my sister in Korea that my father's cancer had come back and he only had 6 months left.

I couldn't wait any longer. We prepared letters from school, and documents to visit Korea. Early October morning. I got a call from my sister that my mother passed away. We flew back to Korea that night to attend the funeral service. I couldn't find my father. He was there but he lost so much weight that I couldn't recognize him.

After a week, we went to the American Embassy to get a new Visa but we were not approved because they wanted to know if we had public health care for my second son's birth. We had to bring receipts for medical bills from 4 years ago. If we received any public aid like medic-aid, we had to pay back the government. Otherwise, we couldn't come back to State. After lots of prayers, and several calling the Methodist Hospital at Dallas, TX, we finally had a copy of the medical bills paid by Golden Cross which is a social care program from the Methodist Hospital. Golden Cross – doesn't it sound like an insurance company? The interviewer asked us if it was an insurance company. We said yes and we got new visas that day. It took 2 months.

My husband's studies were almost over and he got a new job in Long Island. We moved to NY right before 9/11 happened. We still had our F- 2 Visas but couldn't change our drivers' licenses because his school was in Chicago, not in NY. We applied for R-Visa which took about a year.

In order to apply for a green card, we paid \$7,000 for paper work and fees and a lawyer. It took another 8 years from the R-Visa to a Green Card. We paid Tax every year but we didn't get Tax Returns. I had an opportunity to go on mission trips but I couldn't go. You don't want to leave the country during processing. If you wanted to leave, you needed

permission from the USCIS. Your paperwork would leave processing which meant longer waiting time, and nobody would know when it was picked up again.

The most joy I had after I got my Green card were to know I had the freedom to go wherever I wanted, whenever I wanted, when I needed to. And my son could go to college without fear.

Did you know on the college application that there is a blank spot where you need to fill in the exact date when you got the permanent resident permission? He grew up in America since he was 6 months old and now he is 17, but he was a foreigner until last month. I know there are so many kids who don't even dare dreaming about going to college. Even if they graduated from college, they wouldn't be able to find a legal job. The only reason is that their parents don't have the right documents. They can't afford that much money nor have they stayed long years in legal status.

I hope the day comes in which all the immigrants have freedom to live without fear and a rights to have a job in this country.

Thank you.