

## A Country Boy in the International Patent Arena

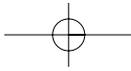


I was born at 446 Imsan-ri, Sangchon-myun, Youngdong-gun, Chungbuk, and I grew up there. With town names like Sangchon and Imsan, I don't even have to tell you that this is deep in the country. The upper village in the oldest section of the town, hilly mountainous area surrounded by thick wooded forest I spent my early years in this deep, country town. Although we were not starving, we could have always used more.

My father, who had once enjoyed success as a businessman in forestry and mining industries, passed away when I was four. Because his passing came too early for me, I, as the youngest son, don't have much memory of him, much less a memory of a father-son bond. My mother thus had to weather the storm in raising three little boys and one girl. My oldest brother, 18 years old at the time, also had to grow up quickly as the head of the family and endure the worldly difficulties awaiting him.

As soon as he graduated from high school, my oldest brother started working for the local post office after passing the civil entrance examination. Without a father, my oldest brother juggled, and struggled, with his small wages to cover the tuitions of his siblings. In December, 1997, my oldest brother officially retired as the Head of the Telephone Department of Korea Telecom.

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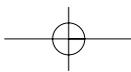


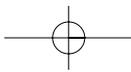
At his resignation ceremony, I was on the verge of tears, and I did not know what to say or what to do. I, who had benefited greatly from my oldest brother's sacrifices, was torn by the fact that I was unable to repay him for all his sacrifices which he generously and unselfishly bestowed upon me. Suddenly becoming the head of the household with three little brothers and sister, my oldest brother suffered through unbearable challenges as a young man. Thanks to his thrifty tendencies, I still live with the same principles of thrift and savings. I still wear the winter coat given to me as a wedding gift 19 years ago. I still drive 1989 Sonata, in its 11th year. The coat and the car were new when I first had them, and they are still as new, putting the word used to shame. The fact that I still wear my sneakers, which I bought while on honeymoon 19 years ago, is also a testament to the thrifty lifestyle practiced by my oldest brother.

In telling stories about my deceased father, my mother and oldest brother have often described him as a highly creative and innovative inventor. They talked about how my father would go out and catch sparrows and shrimps, etc. with his own tools and inventions, so as to provide the family with specialty food. I could not but feel that he was a charming and wonderful man from these stories. Among his inventions was a trap to catch sparrows. Another was a small basket designed to catch prawns quite easily. I'm sure that they were wonderful inventions.

Who knows how many more wonderful and innovative inventions my father would have created with his sparkling creativity had he still lived? He would have loved the idea of instructing his youngest son, a patent attorney, to file patent applications for his inventions. My heart aches whenever I think of such possibilities. He now lies comfortably in his gravesite located in the mountain in front of his hometown. However, his spirit continues to visit his youngest son every now and then to encourage and inspire new ideas.

Even though he has passed away, my father still lives in my heart to enrich me as a patent attorney. I try to carry the torch of his inspiration and creativity by continuing to offer my own





unique views and ideas to my own clients even after their applications mature to registration. At times, I develop a brand name for the client, or I recommend ways to improve an invention upon finding certain deficiencies. Not that this leads to increase in income but I simply enjoy work requiring creativity and innovation perhaps like my father.

Each time I try to remember my fading childhood memory of my father's images, I can't help but discover a sick, bedridden child that was me. I missed practically the entire first year of elementary school, as I spent most of the time in the hospital. Although my mother had almost given up on her youngest son entering the second grade, I was able to move on to the second grade, thanks to my oldest brother's efforts.

While in the second grade, I took a test for the first time in my life. My teacher handed out the graded tests, with mine marked heavily in red ink. My score was 15. I thought it was a great score. Proudly, I ran home with my test, running into my granduncle in a small alley. What a chance for me to flaunt my test score, I thought.

“Grandpa, I got 15!”

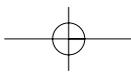
I screamed with excitement, shoving my test paper before him.

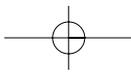
“Yeah You did very well.”

Upon seeing the bright smile on his grandchild's face, my granduncle reluctantly nodded and smiled. Further emboldened by my granduncle's acknowledgement, I ran to my mother. Instead of congratulating me by patting me on my head, tears formed around my mother's eyes when she saw the graded test. I realized at that time that something was wrong.

From that day on, I developed a fear for tests, which condition worsened as time passed. Whenever I had a test paper in front of my eyes, with its strong ink odor, a tremendous fear spilled

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over me. The white spaces on the test weighed heavily on me. My breathing got heavier, and I became stricken with agonizing pain. When a test was handed out, I would just scream and blame it on stomach pain.

“Teacher, my stomach hurts!”

“Let's just finish the test.”

“It hurts. I feel like I'm dying.”

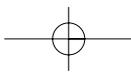
At last, the teacher would send me home. He knew, however. He felt pity for his sick, bedridden pupil and simply went along with the charade.

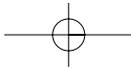
The lies continued, and the alleged pain got worse. When this excuse got too old, I had no choice but to start studying. Maybe two years thereafter, the youngest son with a widowed mother received the highest award in school for scholastic achievement. My mother again wept silently. I wonder about the emotions going through my mother watching me receive a score of 100, certainly a big improvement from 15.

“Father's pants, long pants!”

Other children would often mock me this way upon seeing me. Even in those days, no schoolchildren wore hanbok [traditional Korean costume] in school. However, I proudly wore and played in hanbok shirt and pants which were handmade by my mother. Looking back, the hanbok made by my mother was designed with a unique style and flavor often found in clothing designed by well-known designers and they contained the necessary elements to be registered as a design patent. Embedded in the mocking words of those children were envy and admiration for the style displayed, I think.

From being the last in class, I became the first. Still, a country boy is a country boy. The creek outside the entrance to our hometown was never a dull place to be, even for an entire day. If we got tired of shooting arrows made from a mulberry tree branch, we would





simply sit our tired rear ends on the edge of the creek. We then clapped our hands loudly, triggering a perfect and orderly dancing by the school of minnows in the clear waters of the creek. There was also a chance that we would catch a carp as big as my hand and mudfish as long as my thumb by kicking off our rubber shoes and jumping into the creek.

As the country kid, who used to be the last in class, became older, he began to set sights on a bigger world outside. Studying had become fun. My mother again wiped away her tears silently when her youngest son, after scoring 15 in his first test, graduated as the top student from his high school. When the country boy from the deep mountains decided to dedicate his career to the uncertain and unknown patent industry after obtaining a college degree after four years of full scholarship, his mother had certain misgivings and worried for her youngest son.

However, this once last-place country boy had now become an international country boy. He was now trekking throughout the world to attend international seminars and to promote his legal services in IPR. The cities to which he traveled included Luxembourg, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Phoenix, Nashville, Orlando, Chicago, LA, New York, Paris, London, Berlin, Berne, Rome, Budapest, Madrid, Cannes, Alicante, Zurich, Basel, Lisbon and San Antonio.

I always say to people that the profession that allows the last-place guy to change the world is the IPR attorney. I think that my ability to stomp through the world as a patent attorney in the international IPR arena resulted from the mental toughness unique to last-place country boys. Perhaps my difficult childhood in deep country planted a lasting seed for flexibility and creativity in this pitiful mind of mine.

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