

## *Onni Durst, Tokyo, Japan, 1959*



In 1959 I met Mr. Sang Ik Choi in Tokyo, Japan. I was working in the Korean Embassy there. I received the “holy power” when I was praying to find out if the Divine Principle were true or not. I quit my job and came to the church, which was just one room, but I didn’t have any doubt. I became a pioneer missionary in Shimonoseki. In 1965 a Japanese brother and I were selected to become missionaries to America through an exchange program. I was chosen because I had many spiritual children.

I worked in San Francisco for four years as a coffee girl in the Clift Hotel and made money cooking crepes at Ghirardelli Square in order to support the church. In 1968 I contracted tuberculosis, and a kind doctor treated me for free for 18 months. I went to Korea to see Father. I came back with a mission from him to sell air rifles, not to kill people but for sport-shooting, and we set up a shop in Oakland, where I became a pioneer missionary in 1969.

In 1970 my spiritual child, Kristina Morrison [later Seher], whom I met at the church’s Boonville rural retreat, joined me in Oakland. I had an important dream in which True Father said Heavenly Father would bless our work together and showed me a clear picture of the future, so I had confidence to work hard. In the dream I received the holy power of light. I brought Kristina with me to receive this. We pledged each morning at 5 a.m. and concluded each day with midnight prayer. We prayed for each person we met by name. For one person, Jerry Capelli, we prayed for three years. Later, suddenly, he joined.

Each day I set up a witnessing table at the University of California

Berkeley campus, while Kristina supported our “Oakland Center,” just a one-bedroom apartment, by working. Every Wednesday we had an evening program. I made trinities, and every night we went visiting people we had met. After returning home, we met each night to talk about the day, and I explained how Heavenly Father was working, about heavenly manner, and how to attend True Parents. After we had grown our Oakland family to six people, we expanded our evening programs to every night and moved to a bigger house. Every weekend I instructed our members how to conduct weekend workshops, even though they were spiritually very young. Everyone studied Divine Principle, shared, and grew together, alongside our non-member guests. They were moved by our sincerity and God’s love. When we study and deeply understand the Principle, God’s love automatically sprouts out, and we can genuinely love people. The Principle has power.

In February 1972, True Parents visited San Francisco, made a Holy Ground in Oakland, and blessed our Oakland Center, which at that time had 12 members. By September 1972, we had expanded to 44 members and opened a second center. I witnessed to Poppy Richie, and she joined me at my table each day on the Berkeley campus. Dr. Mose Durst, a professor of literature, joined and began giving lectures every night and during weekend workshops. In December 1974, True Parents conducted a single Blessing ceremony for Dr. Durst and me. Our whole family visited the Holy Ground every Sunday morning after pledge. After midnight prayer each God’s Day, we visited the Holy Grounds in San Francisco and Oakland, praying that God’s Kingdom could be established in the Bay Area, America, and the whole world.

We created a professional center for doctors, professors, and lawyers, many of whom were joining, as well as several businesses (International Exchange Maintenance, Ideal Garage, and Aladdin restaurant.) I got inspired to sell flowers as a foundation for our material support, and Kristina quit her job in March 1973 to lead the first flower team. In July, Alan Seher joined, and he managed up to eight

flower teams. This was the first flower-selling fundraising project of our church in America. Fundraising members rotated regularly to the witnessing team.

Many brothers and sisters moved to the Hearst Avenue Center near the Berkeley campus in 1973 to help with witnessing. Matthew Morrison and Sheri Sager Reuter took the Elephant Bus to the campus each day, offering donuts, coffee, and Divine Principle lectures. We began to have our weekend workshops at the Boonville retreat. As we grew in number, we implemented a seven-day workshop there. The workshops, led by Noah Ross and Jennifer Morrison Hager, enabled our family to expand rapidly. I asked Beth Rubenstein Morrison and Joshua Cotter to lead an introductory workshop at the sheep barn in Boonville, so that guests could study the Principle after each evening program (not just during the weekend). Sheri headed up an “Actionizer” program for guests who had completed 21 days in Boonville, where they studied for a half day and helped with church missions for the other half day, in preparation for a full-time mission.

In 1975 I was given responsibility for the San Francisco church community as well, and some members moved to the Washington Street Center, witnessing each day at Fisherman’s Wharf and Powell & Market Streets. Deprogrammers often watched our members coming out of the house each day to stalk particular members. Once I followed the deprogrammers to “Freedom Ranch” near Tucson, Arizona to bring back some of my brothers and sisters. I was arrested there and spent a night in jail with Rebecca and Kristina. Evening programs were conducted at each center, with guests going to “the land” on the bus. We bought a large center on Bush Street in San Francisco.

By the late 1970s we had more than 300 members. Each weekend we had 30 to 50 new guests, many of whom stayed for seven days. Each month True Father asked me to send 30-35 members to other national teams. One month he asked us to send 200 people to join the

Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP). It was so important to me to do what True Father asked.



Between 1970 and 1980, the Oakland Family recruited at least 5,000 new members. In April 1980, during the Parents' Day celebration, True Father called to ask Dr. Durst to become the national president of the Unification Church. We took a team of 80 people to New York to supplement the witnessing effort there. By the end of one year, 350 people had joined in the New York City Church Center.

During the 1980s True Father invited elder Korean leaders from the 36-couple marriage Blessing to lead the church work in the United States, and he emphasized work with ministers. I returned to the Bay Area. When True Mother founded the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) in America, she asked me to be the West Coast Chairwoman. Dr. Durst and I founded The Sunshine School, now called The Principled Academy, for second- and third-generation Unificationists in 1988. I continue to fast and pray daily for the successful establishment of *Cheon Il Guk*.