

Interpreting for True Parents in in South and Central America during the 1990s

Interview of Alejandro de Souza
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Alejandro de Souza True Parents' Spanish and Portuguese interpreter in South and Central America for five years during the 1990s. During this time, he traveled with them day in, day out, attending them from morning to evening -- sometimes with no other staff members present. He helped them in many aspects of their providential work. Alejandro is originally from Argentina and lived in Korea for more than seven years, during which time he focused on mastering Korean.

How did it all begin?

While Father was still in Danbury [1984-5], I heard of the possibility that he might go to South America. When I came to Korea to study Father had been telling the main Korean leaders and elder brothers, "You have to study Spanish." While I was at university in Korea, some elder families called me to help them study Spanish because Father wanted them to. It was more than ten years later that Father actually went to South America. Everyone had already given up their Spanish study by then. Nobody imagined Father would really go to South America one day.

I graduated from college in Korea and went back to South America at the end of 1991. The continental leader of South America, Kim Hyung-tae, saw Father often, and Father always told him, "I have to come to South America." So he was sure that, one day, Father would come to South America. Rev. Kim always thought about which places were best to take Father to in South America. He knew the way Father moves around the world and develops the ocean or river providence, we started looking for a place for Father to begin that providence. And we found it.

I had previous experience of meeting True Mother when she had done a tour in South America, so we had had some chances to talk. But still then we couldn't imagine that Father would be around South America for so long.

Father finally arrived there, and I heard that the main concern would be the language problem. How could Father develop the providence in South America without an interpreter? The continental leader told Father not to worry.

So they brought me to Father. We sat at a table. Father asked me some questions to see if I was able to understand what he was talking about. I replied to all his questions.

Were you nervous to sit in front of Father?

I wasn't nervous to be in True Parents' presence. From the time I joined, I had felt very close to them. Whenever I faced any difficulty or temptation, just thinking of True Parents helped me overcome. I don't know why; I always feel Father's heart. I was nervous because I thought I may not be able to fulfill my duties. He needed me for interpreting and I wasn't sure I could do a good job. Even though I was confident -- at that time I was much better than I am now at the Korean language -- I had had the experience of sitting in the Cheongpa-dong (Headquarters) Church and not being able to understand many things Father said. I was afraid I might not understand most of what he was saying.



Alejandro and his wife Setsumi (they are from the 6,500 couples) with True Parents during their first visit to Jardim, Brazil

Please say what it was like to work for Father directly.

We had a first gathering with all the members, more than three thousand members, in São Paulo, Brazil. This was in 1994. I went to the restroom on the fifth floor of the Brazilian headquarters; I opened the window and shouted, "Heung-jin nim! Heung-jin nim! Help me!" Desperately!

That evening we had the gathering and Father started speaking. I was able to understand because when I was in Korea I used Tongil Segye magazine to learn Korean. I read Father's recent speeches, but I couldn't understand most of them at first reading. So I used to make conditions, such as to read one sentence or one paragraph forty times. I am not a model member. I am not a good person with a nice character, either. But Father's words were the most precious thing to me -- though I may not live up to it! [Alejandro laughs] I understood most of the providential content Father spoke about in his speeches.

So Father started talking to the members. He spoke for four hours in the hot weather. We had a huge fan at the back but it was not enough.

When Father started explaining something, I had already studied it in his speeches; it was easy for me to just flow naturally with the interpreting. That helped me, because the Korean leaders thought, "Oh, he's very good." Maybe they thought I was better than I actually was. But Father was happy to see the response of the Brazilian members. When he made a joke, they laughed. Or when he was serious, he would see members crying and he would think it was going well.

I had the feeling when I saw Father at the Cheongpa-dong Church that he sometimes had finished all he had to say but wanted to share some time with the members and take some time for jokes...saying things intentionally to get the applause of the audience! Of course, in Korea people naturally know the right time to clap. But how could Brazilians sense that he is expecting applause? So I had to tell the members, "Let's give a round of applause to Father!" Later I discovered that some people thought that I could not really understand what Father was saying and that I was asking the members to applaud so that Father would think I was doing a good job!

The members gathered again for some hours the next morning. It was so hot, I sweated so much that even my leather belt was completely wet through. I was half Father's age, but sometimes after two or three hours interpreting, I felt I was going to faint. So I had to pray a lot.

Father told me then that, from then on, whenever he came to any place in South America I had to be there beforehand and wait for him and help him get around, assisting him and interpreting.

Father had not yet been to Jardim, and the leaders were going to take him there the next day. That night they had a banquet in Sao Paulo for prominent guests. But they asked me to leave beforehand and wait for Father in Jardim. They would bring Father there the next day. For the banquet, a Korean sister living in Brazil would interpret for Father.

So what happened? Father had been very clear. I had to stay by him, interpret for him and assist him. But that night, I had already left for Jardim by bus. Father asked, Where's Alejandro? He was told I had gone to Jardim. He was angry. For twenty years I had tried to do things just to give joy to God and True Parents....

The next day when he arrived in Jardim, and he saw me, he started to scold me so strongly! I was so sad, because I had never expected not to give joy to True Parents.

Father's assistants came and asked me, "Why did you come without permission? Father wanted you to interpret at the banquet."

I answered, "I am a regular member. If the leaders ask me to go, I go; if they tell me to stay, I stay. I know they didn't want to spend the airfare. It's not that I decided to come by myself...."

Since that time I just had to follow Father's direction while Father was there.

That was the first day in Jardim. It was not the New Hope Farm. It was the home of a friend of the movement who had invited True Parents to stay there. At that time, we used the chance to show Father the New Hope Farm that was for sale, so that he could decide later whether to buy it. That was the beginning.



Alejandro de Souza was a bridge between True Parents and those who spoke Spanish and Portuguese. Here, he translates Father's Korean into Spanish in Uruguay.

You were with Father from very early on in the Latin American providence?

Father went just with his assistants, such as Mr. Ki-byung Yoon and Wonju McDevitt, no one else. No one knew why Father was there and what he was doing, and there were no security personnel.

There was the continental leader, the Brazilian leaders and all the members who came to assist Father with the fishing. But the main leaders from Korea and America didn't know what Father was up to.

It was interesting. Father got on a boat, and he caught a lot of fish. One big Dorado jumped out of the water and landed in the boat in front of Father. Actually, if you talk to the natives, they say that sometimes that happens, but to Father that was a very important sign. I have seen Father so happy there. Father, and Mother also.

It seems they liked South America.

I saw them so happy in so many humble places. Once we went to survey the Amazon River. The only small hotel we found to stay in was so dirty and old and hot. When I looked at the air conditioner, there was all this dirt stuck to it. When we showed True Parents their room, that was the first thing I saw. But Father never worried. He was so happy there. We felt ashamed and sorry. But you will not hear Father

complain about such things -- never.

The first time Father traveled by private plane was in South America. For years, his party had traveled in regular commercial aircraft. The interesting thing is that people knew he was Rev. Moon. He was going around without any security personnel. We were a little concerned about that. But whenever he got on the plane, all the people knew he was Rev. Moon. If we had seats at the back of the plane, for example, someone in the front would stand up and say, "Oh, Rev. Moon, please take my seat here in the front!" Always kind, never an unkind word; they were respectful.

That was very interesting.