

Father's Life in His Own Words – Part 6

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If you go to a rural area, you will find large green frogs. Children in my locality sometimes caught the measles and became skinny, being unable to eat because of a high fever. I would catch several of those frogs and.... The legs of those frogs are very fat. You peel the skin off, wrap it in a pumpkin leaf and cook it. If you wrap it with three or four leaves and cook it, not more than two leaves will burn. It's almost as if you had steamed it. You can't imagine how tender the meat is. It is delicious. You do not know how good it feels to catch a frog and eat it when you're really hungry! There are so many things you can eat. If you live alone, you need to prepare food.

Chongju is my hometown. If I walked about four kilometers from my village, I could see the Yellow Sea. If I climbed up a high mountain, I could see everything. In between, there were ponds and brooks. The fish in that area changed every season. If you want to learn about the sea, during a vacation period, go out to the sea every day as though you were going to work each morning. I went to tidal lagoons near the sea that were smelly with mud and did many things -- from catching eels in sacks to searching for crabs inside their holes.

I was a champion at catching things like eels. When someone said he wanted to eat steamed eel, I could prepare it in thirty minutes or an hour!

I was a fast runner. I would run the whole way, and within about fifteen minutes I might catch five eels.

Farm life as it was then

In those days, we had to feed our cow, which I really disliked doing; so, I used to tie the cow up in a field on the other side of my village. After several hours, the cow would moo because I, the person who was supposed to feed it, had not come back. A cow does not attack its master even if he doesn't come out to feed it. Even if I went very late, the cow welcomed me happily. Having witnessed that behavior, I felt that is how I should behave when carrying out God's providence.

You should go and see a slaughterhouse. When I was still young, I visited a slaughterhouse many times. It's very interesting. There was a slaughterhouse about four kilometers from my village. Once when I heard a rumor that someone was going to take a cow for butchering, I went to the slaughterhouse and waited there from morning. A butcher came with an iron hammer this big. As soon as the cow came in, he killed it in an instant. When I looked at the cow, it was already dead. The cow was sacrificed. It was so sad.

There was also a dog I always loved. You can't imagine how clever this dog was. He knew when I was coming home from school. He was very smart. He was better than a person! Thirty minutes before I came home, he would come out and wait for me. Sometimes, when I came home late, he understood that beforehand and waited until late. He always followed me and ran in circles around me. Looking at the dog, I felt, "Wow! What's this love? Do I love anyone that much?"

I was interested in seeing a sow deliver her piglets, so I went to watch. When the sow pushed once, a

piglet came sliding out easily and after another push, another came. [Laughter] It's true! You don't know how interested I was in this. I've also seen cats having kittens and dogs having puppies. It's because I love them all.

We kept bees, too. Honey is indeed delicious! The honey of bees that feed on the flower of the acacia tree is so good. Bees sit on acacia flowers, stick their heads into the flowers and suck out the nectar. They support their body and legs like this. When a bee is sucking the nectar out, if you were to pull the hind end of the bee with tweezers, the hind end would come off, but the bee would keep on sucking! Do you realize how terrible that is? Anyone who pulls on the hind end of a bee until it separates from the rest of the body is terrible, but a bee that enjoys the taste of nectar and does not stop sucking is more fearsome. [Laughter] I told the bee, "I learned from you. I should be like that, too." [Laughter]

Around a farm, there is nothing I'm not good at. I'm good at tilling paddy fields; I'm good at plowing; I'm good at rice planting, and I'm also good at weeding the fields. The most difficult place to weed is a millet field. Usually the field is weeded three times. When it is weeded the third time, the big weeds are taken out. After millet fields, the most difficult to weed are cotton fields. I know very well how I should weed in order to make good peas, good rice or good corn. When I see sweet potatoes that have been dug up, I know whether they were grown in mud, or not, simply by looking at them. It is not good to grow sweet potatoes in mud. Sweet potatoes grown in a mixture of two-thirds sand and one-third mud are very sweet.

I'm also very good at rice planting. Usually rice is planted in rows here, right? [Yes.] Farms in places like Pyong-an Province, North Korea were very developed, more so than in South Korea. This is because the Christian civilization arrived there first.

I eat anything easily, even uncooked cucumbers. I have trained myself to eat uncooked corn and potatoes. I'm a person who has even trained himself to eat uncooked peas. Uncooked peas are actually delicious.

When I was young, while playing around at my mother's family's house, there was a vine growing along the ground. When I asked what it was, they told me that it was from a sweet potato. I asked, "What's a sweet potato?" I had never heard of it. "How do you eat it?" They told me you dig it out of the ground and steam it. After hearing that, I tried a steamed sweet potato for the first time. Oh, what a taste that sweet potato had! How tasty it was! I said I would eat them all by myself, and I took the entire basket of sweet potatoes and ate them. From the next year after that, as soon as sweet potato season came, I often said to my mother, "Mom, I'll be back soon," and I walked 8 kilometers to eat sweet potatoes....

I always wore socks and other clothes I had knitted myself. When it became cold, I even knitted hats in a flash. I taught my older sisters how to knit. I made Korean socks for my mother. My mother said, "I thought you were just trying to make them as a joke. How did you get them into the shape of a sock? They fit just right."



A suffering environment

When winter came, I brought food to birds and dug wells for them. I worked sincerely to dig out spring water. I said to the birds, "Birds! You should come here and drink this water." They actually responded, came and drank it. They ate what I brought for them and did not fly away even when they saw me come and go. They naturally came to like people.

Another time, I dug a small muddy pool. I left some fish in the pool, but the next morning when I came to look, they were all dead. I thought, "Why did you die? I did my best to keep you alive." I did not understand why the fish had died. I'm a person with a lot of feeling. Even about fish I thought, "Oh, I'm sure your mothers will cry." I cried looking at those fish. I told them, "I will cry for you," and I cried all by myself.

When I was young, what my father hated most was the hunting of dogs. Nevertheless, some neighbors caught the dog of ours that I loved the most. When I came home from school, they had caught my dog and were hanging it upside down. Although it was almost dead, my dog looked at me and still looked so happy to see me. I hugged the hung dog and burst into tears. When I think of this, I feel people cannot be trusted, but dogs can.

Maybe it was because of my nature, but after seeing a freezing beggar pass by, I couldn't eat or sleep that night. My personality was like that. I asked my mother and father to take that beggar into our room and to feed him well. Don't you think God loved me because of this characteristic?

When I heard a rumor that someone in the neighborhood was hungry, I couldn't sleep at night. How could I help that person? I asked my mother about it. My mother and my father asked me, "Are you going to feed all the people in our village?" I took rice out of our rice box anyway and gave it to the hungry person without my parents' approval.

In March, when spring comes, village people prepare for a feast. Can poor people afford to eat rice cakes? They have nothing. I took meat and rice to make rice cakes and took them to those people.

When I learned of the difficult situation of the people in the village, I brought food to the poor people or sometimes to women who had given birth but who could not eat because they had no rice or seaweed.