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That Pregnant Girl in Korea

When I finally confirmed my pregnancy in the third week of February 2002, it never once crossed my mind to cancel our trip. We'd won the FIFA lottery and had Team Specific Tickets (TST) for the United States' first round. Literally a lottery drawing, in which one can request tickets that are Team or Stadium specific, a choice between following a team or basing in one city and watching whoever plays in that stadium. We always select TST for the US, but the only time we've been selected by FIFA (the earliest round of ticketing) was in Korea. The soccer gods smiled upon us as if to say, "We will not let them make any excuses about not going to the World Cup." In my mind, it was just a pregnancy, and I would "only" be there for weeks 20, 21, and 22; just past halfway. It seemed perfectly reasonable to Doug and I, but I'd have a funded college account if I had five bucks for every wide-eyed stare reaction we got after mentioning our travel plans. I found a red sleeveless maternity shirt and a backpack I could wear low on my hips. Ready to rock out pregnant Korea style.

The 2002 World Cup predated American Outlaws, Facebook, Twitter, and a thousand ways soccer fans connect with each other today. Sam's Army existed, but there was no way for Sam's Army members to connect directly with each other back then. They had a website with information they wanted you to have but no way to connect with other soccer fans in your town or fans traveling to Korea. BigSoccer.com was at the height of its relevancy and served as the main communication

point for fans. In 2002, on BigSoccer's travel thread, someone posted a link to a Yahoo group "Yanks In Korea," a private group for people traveling to Korea to watch the USMNT. People discussed hotels, bars for pre-game drinking, transportation, and more. We had locals that were helping us sort through Korean culture, cutting edge crowd sourced information. We used it to meet up with other Americans in Korea and to help us sort out housing.

The hotels in Korea were of two general classes: business and "love hotels." The business class hotels were way out of our price range and pretty far out of the crowd we were hanging with. Let's face it, how much fun can you have worrying about your \$150-\$300 a night hotel room? So, love hotels for us! What's a love hotel? Well, in Korea, they have several generations of families living together in one house. So, if you, as husband and wife, wanted a little private time, to say ... balance the checkbook, you could rent a love hotel room and work out your ... checkbook calculations. This doesn't really explain why you would drive into parking lots hidden behind strips of plastic to have others immediately cover your license plate. I guess it's a big secret in Korea when a happily married couple just needs a little quiet time for checkbook balancing. Strangely, married couples looking for a little private time also needed an extensive porn collection, fluorescent undersea murals under black light, and round beds with mirrors on the ceiling. And they say Americans are repressed!

Most love hotels had "Western" floors which looked like your basic average motel, assuming you could pretend the porn collection in the lobby didn't exist and disregard the strange parking situation. Otherwise, it seemed legit. As we traveled and changed hotels, we'd check in every once in a while before a Western room was ready and be put in a bowchickawowwow room, or I'd be looking for a quiet place to order pizza and I would wander onto a floor straight out of a porno. You could peek behind the curtain of what must be a very interesting world of Korean sexuality. Only one night were we put in a Korean style room from which I requested to be moved. It felt like it had not been thoroughly cleaned in months and so over the top with forced sensuality I told my husband our unborn child could not sleep there. I would imagine those sort of situations only got more awkward with

the groups of single guys traveling together, but the rest of the time the 24/7 staff, kind and efficient, with translation services, made the love hotels a great place to stay.

A third option for accommodations was referred to as “Home Stay.” We home stayed when we were in a city for three days or more. A Home Stay Korea website, part of the Korean Federations’ coping mechanism to deal with their very limited number of hotel rooms, listed Korean citizens willing to host travelers. They posted their parameters (nationality, number of guests, etc) and their rates for a room plus breakfast. The fees typically converted to about \$8-15 per night for both of us, which was less expensive than the love hotels at \$30 per night. Homestaying allowed us to meet locals we thought would add to the experience of traveling on the other side of the world. Our homestays ended up being the highlights of our trip. In fact, we have incorporated them into every World Cup since.

Once again, we were leaving for the World Cup in a state of transition. We had the “Engaged World Cup” in 1994, the “Married, No Kids World Cup” in 1998, and as we boarded the plane for the 14-hour flight to Japan followed by the hour jump to Korea, we were quite clearly embarking on the “Pregnant World Cup.” At four months along, I definitely showed and had outgrown even my stretchiest regular clothes but was not yet comfortable in my maternity wear. Our baby’s kicks weren’t strong enough for Doug to feel yet but I had felt the baby move for the first time while assistant refereeing an April amateur game in Des Moines. Pretty fit, having refereed Dallas Cup, high school, and amateur soccer games right up until we left; however, nothing could have prepared me for a 14-hour flight at 20 weeks pregnant. Walking and fluids were the key to not blowing up like a balloon during the flight, and fortunately I got the bulkhead seat and could easily stretch and walk almost whenever I wanted. I was exhausted when we landed but no more than non-pregnant travelers. Even through the extreme fatigue, I felt exhilarated to be in South Korea for the first time in my life. Seeing Korean written everywhere induced momentary panic we wouldn’t be able to read anything that wasn’t ours for the next three weeks. What were we doing here, thinking we could navigate this country ... pregnant no less? I remember thinking I didn’t have to get through the next three

weeks in my weary state; I just had to collect my luggage and find my way to Homestay #1. We called our host and found our way to meet Phillip Cho in the middle of Seoul by way of the city bus; a feat I can't believe we pulled off so jetlagged and disoriented. Somehow we made it without GPS or a cell phone. We survived on handwritten notes taken from a payphone conversation in the middle of the night in Korea.

The next morning things looked brighter. Our host, a Chinese Christian Reverend living in Seoul with his mother, in custom of caring for parents by living with them in their old age, spoke English relatively well. His mother spoke none but clearly expressed her excitement over my pregnancy. She would smile at me and nod with an ancient, all knowing smile. Only looking back I understood that she looked at me as the next in a neverending line of mothers and children, seeing me as a prospective member of a sorority I hadn't known existed yet. She seemed to be trying to telepathically communicate her "Wisdom of Mothers" to me and I only got the message in retrospect. She did one really cool thing one day towards the end of our stay. She took me over to the couch and sat me down with a calendar, pantomiming that she wanted to know my due date. I pointed to October 21. She frowned and shook her head a vehement no. She placed her hands on my belly and then waved them over the calendar and then my belly. She went back and forth until she landed on October 16th, looking very pleased with the number. Later, when Western medicine decided I should be induced several days before the 16th and intruded on our sacred little moment of prediction, it upset me for years. There are very few decisions I would do over, but I do think I would tell them to stick their Pitocin elsewhere until October 17th.

Day One in Korea was a gorgeous sunny day. Phillip made us a decent American breakfast, but it paled in comparison to the traditional Korean food he prepared, at our request, for the rest of our stay. Koreans eat fish and vegetables at every meal and very little grains or rice. My three weeks there were quite possibly the healthiest of my life. After breakfast, we decided to explore the city on our own for the day. Getting out in the sun is supposed to help your body adjust to the new time zone, though it would be some time before the realization we were finally in Korea settled into our existence.

We took the opportunity to check out one of the famous sites in Korea, the Demilitarized Zone, or DMZ. It's the no-man's land zone between North and South Korea and visiting it was serious business. We had packed business-casual clothing specifically for this tour as we'd read in the guide books that women had to be dressed in skirts and men had to wear long pants that were not jeans. These were two countries still at war with each other, and the closer we got to the DMZ, the more real that seemed to us. As we went through the tour, our guide told us about attacks that had taken place in the DMZ as people had occasionally tried to defect from one side to the other. We finally arrived at the border and were inspected on the bus by our border tour guide. She stopped at our row and then went to have a discussion with one of the other guides. When she returned, she told me that my knee-length khaki skirt was not appropriate, and I was going to have to change into something else from their collection of clothes. I pointed out that their own directions stated skirts needed to be worn but did not state a requirement for calf or floor length. She said they needed to present a professional appearance for the people on the north side that may be taking photographs. At this point, I almost lost it ... wearing a skirt I'd regularly worn to work. There was no way I expected Koreans to have a skirt that would fit a 5'8" tall, pregnant American woman. When I told the tour guide this, she finally backed off and let me continue the tour dressed as I had come.

The DMZ tour was thrilling, especially to see the seriousness both sides had about maintaining the sanctity of the boundary. There was a concrete valley that marked the North/South border with row buildings built spanning the border in order to have meetings between the two countries where neither country would have to cross the border to meet. There were armed guards all around, but once in the building, we were allowed to cross to the North side of the conference table to take a photo of what was technically North Korea, just so long as we did not try to exit the guarded door to the north side. We found the culture of both sides riveting and recommended to everyone we met that they tour the DMZ while visiting Korea.

Seoul is both modern and ancient at the same time, with gleaming skyscrapers interspersed with ancient buildings. There were city gates,

built in the late 1300s, that stood in stark contrast to the tech-entrenched modernity that surrounded them. The people were friendly and we found plenty to explore, sightsee, and shop until the evening when we were to meet up with Americans for the night-before-party at Nashville Bar. After shopping for World Cup official souvenirs, we had a meal of delicious Korean street food and headed to the bar.

It was a huge relief to get to the bar and see so many American soccer fans and hear fluent English spoken for the first time all day. My pleasure was short lived as people had drink after drink and I was the one sober pregnant girl. My jet lag was still catching up with me, and the more people drank, the more alienated I felt amongst my own people. We called it a night earlier than we ever had before and found our way back to Phillip's apartment. As we walked under streetlights, I thought about the trip and the pregnancy, a once in a lifetime experience multiplied by another once in a lifetime experience. In Asia for the first time ever at the first Asian World Cup and carrying my first child, I made the decision as we rounded the corner into the courtyard facing the apartment, that I would not allow myself to let the trip ruin my pregnancy or the pregnancy ruin our trip. I would figure out a way to be the best pregnant girl at the World Cup there would ever be, and no matter how the games played out, I would appreciate my good fortune.

The next day we got up and had breakfast with Phillip; this time a traditional Korean meal with fish, noodles, and vegetables. It was tasty and filling and prepared us for the task at hand: supporting our team through what was supposed to be our toughest opponent, Portugal. They were number four in FIFA rankings and had the current FIFA player of the year, Luis Figo. Doug, Phillip and I talked about the game and discussed possible outcomes that would have both Korea and the USMNT escape the group. It was nearly impossible to imagine an outcome which would allow us to advance while not having a hand in sending the host out in the first round for the first time ever. We tried not to think about how our trip would look as we got closer to the likely faceoff between us and our host in group play since first things first, we had to take it to Portugal.

The "Yanks in Korea" group had planned to meet around noon in a bar district near the stadium shuttle bus stop. We took the subway

to the district in Suwon, a suburb of Seoul, and when we surfaced, we were looking out over a busy roundabout lined in businesses shouting things to us in Korean. I had to stop for a moment and take it all in: here we were, in Korea, going to the USMNT's opening game. It was breathtaking and overwhelming in emotion and unfamiliarity. I had been in foreign countries before; but in European languages, you can figure out what most places are by reading the foreign words and extrapolating. There was no faking your way through Korea. Even after three weeks, the only sign I could find on the street was for the PC Bangh, or internet café, and that was only because the PC was written in Roman characters. Determined not to panic, we headed across the street in search of our fellow Yanks.

We found a group of about 15-20 people at the designated bar, but the bar wasn't supposed to open for at least an hour which meant we'd be cutting it close getting to the shuttle buses. Our nicely-formed plan fell apart, and people were hanging around in the pedestrian area trying to sort out plan B. I didn't really care to stay at a bar and was much more in favor of getting to the stadium. We knew from France that the fan zones around the stadium were places where you could easily spend a couple hours hanging out. Not wanting to go alone, I walked up to a tall guy in a tie-dye goalkeeper jersey and his friend and suggested heading to the shuttle buses. Goalkeeper jersey and his friend were Jimmy LaRoue and Andy Gustafson from the Washington, D.C. metro. They agreed and we headed to the stadium together and look for fan-zone activities. If you've read Andy's book, "23 Days in Korea," then you already know the fan-zones were non-existent. Andy spent the rest of the afternoon reminding me that we had just walked away from all the food and drink outside the stadium, as if my pregnancy didn't remind me of hunger and thirst enough. We came across some fans who'd been drinking a while and they tossed us a few extra beers. Even I took a few swigs believing dehydration was worse than a few gulps of second trimester beer.

Along the shuttle ride and walk to the stadium, we got to meet Andy Mead, a journalist documenting the World Cup. It was cool to meet so many people that were spreading the joy of soccer to the masses, and so nice for my tired, pregnant brain for them all to be named Andy. As we walked up the hill to the stadium, we met a few more American

fans. One who stuck with us was Kaela Porter, a woman traveling solo from New York. A little further into it, we met Monty Rodriguez who became affectionately known as “Korean Citizen” as we teased him mercilessly for getting his passport stolen. There was Sean Kennedy and Brock Kwiatkowski, whose last names now make up the official name of our band of soccer travelers. Now we had a little family of supporters to enjoy the atmosphere with us. Little did we know, a dozen years later we’d still all be traveling together.

When we got to the stadium, Jimmy and Andy wanted to find Chuck, an American who’d been living in Korea as an English teacher. This venture ended up a pivotal decision. Chuck, who was helpful with local information in the beginning, was also loud, overbearing, and socially awkward to the point of being mildly aggravating to annoying depending on the day and our relative fatigue with him and/or the trip. For the first few times I interacted with him, I tried to see past his more irritating qualities, but soon it became clear, he wasn’t going to settle down and get used to us. He was just going to be annoying. He would brag about being a millionaire in South Korean Wan, which was exceptional only until you realize that was less than \$1000. He would complain about his experiences in Korean culture, but we soon realized his frustration was self-inflicted. It only took about a week for us to learn more Korean than he had in a year. As we racked up fabulous experiences in Korea, we began to develop that the hypothesis that Chuck’s frustration with Korea and Koreans had more to do with him than his surroundings.

Chuck was hard to miss that day, standing at well over six feet tall in a bright red Ohio State shirt. He had his usual stream of complaints. However, now that we were outside the entrance to the stadium, nothing could bring me down. There were women dressed up in traditional Korean hanboks, acrobats entertaining the soccer fans, and then the soccer fans themselves, entertainment in their own right. A computer error had left hundreds, if not a few thousand tickets, left unsold for most games in Korea. In an effort to fill the stadium, many tickets were given away to Korean school children. They came to the stadium excited and full of wonder and were not shy about walking up to us and practicing their English, a hand extended with charming and adorable

greetings. “Hello, my name is _____, what’s your name?” Sprinkle in some international media, and the party was definitely warming up. We spent some time walking around the outside of the stadium, chatting it up with the foreign press and making outrageous projections of a 3-1 or greater score.

“To Portugal?” The journalist said in disbelief.

“No, to the USA! We’re going to get 3 points today.” We replied. The result was memorable, and our wild-eyed boastful projections were not far off. Even BEFORE the game, 3-1 to the USMNT was an outlandish prediction that bordered on insane delusion. The American team, a bunch of kids, against one of the powerhouses of Europe. An impossible dream we might escape with a tie, but when we were off camera, the discussion was more focused on hoping our goal differential wouldn’t be wrecked by this game. Looking back, I’m amused by the split personalities we were all developing: our private hand-wringing distress at our impending doom and the on-camera bravado of singing songs and gleefully making projections of the college kids from America pummeling the Portuguese Goliath.

We left the reporters shaking their heads at us crazy Americans and continued our trek to the stadium. We came upon what has to be one of the most fascinating things I have ever seen at all my World Cup matches: a few hundred people dressed in identical baseball caps and vests, half in blue and the other half in red. As we approached, we saw that the blue people all had American flags and their uniform read “Suwon Supporters for USA.” I’d assume the other half of the people were for Portugal, but I’ll never know for sure. We were so excited about the Suwon Supporters for USA group that we mobbed them and sang them our supporters’ songs, thrilling the media people and Suwon Supporters alike. They had paid supporters to make the World Cup a success, both amusing and awesome. We had stayed with them in the courtyard until we were ready to go into the stadium. When we left, they gave us vests and caps. I still have the patches, which remain one of my favorite souvenirs of all time. We went into the stadium and found our seats. We were split from Kaela, Jimmy, and Andy, but we agreed to all meet after the game.

What I’m about to describe to is the greatest game I’ve ever been to

of any sport and of any team. It was so great because there was nothing expected of us. We went from being a bunch of young players maybe going to make it out or maybe not, to the story of the World Cup in 90 minutes. Everything changed, and in an hour and a half, our group had been turned upside down.

If you're a sports fan, maybe you've gone to a big championship game and you can relate. Upon entering the stadium it takes a few minutes of pinching yourself that you're even there, in that stadium, and in this case halfway around the world. Pure nirvana, I was so happy to be there with my husband, expecting our daughter, and having met such cool people right off the bat (can we change that phrase to "right off the boot" once soccer overtakes baseball?) It was euphoric to be in the stadium, maybe 20 rows up behind the right goal post; it was surreal just to be in the stadium after waiting four years for the World Cup cycle to reset. Here we were, finally kicking off against the giant, Portugal. And then it happened.

Three minutes into the match Ernie Stewart takes a corner kick right in front of our section it arcs into the box, pings off a few players, and John O'Brien buries it in the back of the net. The stadium erupts in a way I'd never experienced before or ever since, as if the electricity of 37,000 people simultaneously shocked lights up the air so it crackles with a collective "now we got ourselves a ball game." This is what I assume the unaffiliated fan thought. I think the feelings of our section were summed up by my husband who grabbed me by both shoulders and screamed. "Oh my G-d! This is going to be the longest 87 minutes of my life!"

I will tell you of the moments that I can remember how my husband looked at me: when he first saw me on our wedding day, when he first held our children, and when we closed on our dream house. But nothing is as clear to me as that moment in the stadium when we went up 1-0 against one of the best teams in the world. No amount of pinching ourselves made it seem real. We just kept jumping around trying to believe the scoreboard.

Things were just starting to settle into believability: Could we hold a 1-0 lead until the end? That's when things really started to get crazy. In the 29th minute, Landon Donovan made a cross that deflected off the

Portuguese player, Costa, and then off their keeper's glove and into the net! Impossible! Now we were up 2-0 on Portugal? It defied all logic, and yet just seven minutes later, Tony Sanneh launched a cross onto the diving header of Brian McBride and we were up 3-0. By now the American section was completely ridiculous as we hugged, high fived, and joyfully mauled each other in pure glee. We were all pretty sure we had died and gone to heaven or would sometime in the remaining 54 minutes of the game. We were insanely and blissfully happy, and we probably would have hurt ourselves in the celebration had we not been summarily returned to Earth moments later.

In the 39th minute, Portugal had a clinically good corner kick delivered to the net with such authority; a sobering reminder we were far from victorious in this game. No one would remember us for having lost to Portugal 4-3 if we didn't walk away with the win, and the three point lead would be totally meaningless. I remember going into the halftime break thinking now we would see who had the better coach. It was all too possible that António Oliveira would take his busted up team into the locker room and inspire them or humiliate them into thinking that getting beaten by US Soccer was unacceptable. In refereeing, we say every game is really two games: the first half and the second half. What was Portugal really capable of? Were we really talented enough to beat them on this day? Was that dream really possible?

We were just starting to believe it to be true when Jeff Agoos makes what has to be the worst attempt at clearing a ball in the history of clearances. I'm not even sure what he tried to do, but it looked like a shot into the Portuguese net. This game we, the routinely disappointed Americans, could believe. Yes, the story line of a three-goal American lead with three points for a win against Portugal in our hand, or even one point for a tie, but they crumbled under the pressure. Twenty minutes, plus added time ... plenty of time for another mistake to end our short-lived dreams of triumph. It was agony, imagining how many ways there were for us to be knocked back to a tie or the total humiliation of a loss. But the minutes clicked off as time crept at a barely perceptible rate towards the final whistle, brutally dragging us closer and closer to what we thought was a certain failure of a mission that had only seemed possible for the past 84.....85.....86.....87 minutes.

Then the final whistle did come, and we had done it! We had gotten three goals, and held it for three points against Portugal, the team we thought was our toughest opponent. The rollercoaster game had been exhausting, but you couldn't help but be swept up in the celebration first in the stadium and then spilling out into the grounds outside the stadium. No one wanted to leave. We reunited with Andy, Jimmy, and Kaela, and Andy, who continually shouted at me that I had to name my baby "Suwon" in honor of the victory. We had already chosen her name, but I did spend several nights awake trying to think of how to rearrange our plans to include Suwon in her full name.

USMNT winning the perfect game was incredible, but the emotional fatigue of the game started to catch up with all of us. We looked for the shuttle buses while talking to the foreign media along the way. There was no way to really express how I felt about the game at my level of pregnancy exhaustion for the night, but we had fun getting mobbed by the occasional camera crew. Following Chuck, who swore he knew where the buses were lined up, we walked around the stadium for what seemed like an hour only to find out the bus lines were still so long I thought I would sink to the ground and start crying right there. That whole "creating life" thing is draining enough without the emotional blowback of turning the soccer world upside down. Determined to not show the weakness of my "delicate state" nor let it ruin my night, I asked Doug to hold my place in line so I could go sit on a bench near the bus line. Jimmy came with me to keep me company which was very sweet but a little problematic. Sitting with company was nice, but what I really needed was to put my feet up to get the swelling to go down. I turned to Jimmy and delivered the quote that I think cemented our friendship forever. "I know we just met and all, but I HAVE to put my feet up, so if that's going to freak you out, you need to get up now."

Jimmy just laughed and told me to go ahead. From that moment forever, he was to be known as "Uncle Jimmy" in our house. As if the game itself hadn't been enough of a bonding experience, here was someone willing to bypass all social construct and let me get 45 minutes of relief while the rest of the crew waited for the buses on our behalf.

When we got back to downtown Suwon, on the way to the train station, we found a Pizza Hut. It looked like it might be the best option

for food that would still be open late. Generally, I try to avoid American chains while overseas. What's the point of flying for hours just to eat at a McDonald's just like the one down the street back home (no, calling it a "Royale" does not make it different). But late at night, a hungry pregnant girl's got to eat at what's still open. We went in and sat down and looked at the menu. Instead of the American toppings we're familiar with, there were all sorts of Korean toppings including Bulgogi Pizza. Bulgogi is a type of Korean barbeque I have come to love, and it is not bad at all on a late night pizza. It seemed a fitting end to a fantastic day.

The next day, Korean Memorial Day, our host Phillip Cho had the day off from work. As a war veteran, he said it would be an honor to show us around Seoul for the day. After another delicious Korean breakfast at the apartment, he took us to the Changdeokgung Palace, a stunningly beautiful ancient royal village built in 1405. Incredible. Built 600 years ago and still standing. Phillip told us little tidbits about the architecture and Korean history as we did the English-language walking tour.

After we'd gotten our fill of ancient architecture and culture, we walked out the gates and back into the modern city. We went out for lunch to a Korean café for barbeque. They grilled the beef at our table, and Phillip showed us how to properly eat it: take a lettuce leaf, place some grilled beef in the leaf, smear in some tangy red pepper sauce, wrap and eat. The combination of the cool lettuce with the spicy beef tasted amazing. We enjoyed getting to know our host a bit better on our last full day staying with him in Seoul. We spent the rest of the day walking around Seoul, seeing the sights, and chatting with Phillip. In the evening, he took us to one of his favorite places for another incredible Korean meal. It was one of our best soccer-free days of the trip.

On June 7th, we left on our way to Daegu for the June 10th USMNT vs. South Korea game. The trains required a stop in Jeonju; a perfect excuse to see another city and catch another World Cup match of Spain vs. Paraguay. We arrived in the morning and found a hotel through the tourist information booth. Tourist information was extremely helpful for last-minute travel planners like ourselves, but we did have the occasional awkward exchange with the young Korean women working the booth. At this stop, we asked for something to drink and they thought we

meant alcohol. I told them no, just water or tea, since I was pregnant and pointed to my belly. The guide looked surprised and said “Oh! I just thought you were fat!” Ah yes, that lovely reputation that Americans abroad have for being a nation of beer-guzzling fat people. Sigh.

Finding a hotel room was far from the end of our adventures. We were about to discover the secret world of Korean addresses. Armed with our hotel information, we found a cab and gave him the address scrawled in Korean, but here’s the thing you need to know about Korean addresses (explained to us later in our trip). Koreans do not write addresses like we do: in this city, go to this street, this house number. We were later told the Korean address system is more like: you know that neighborhood over by Bob’s place? It’s that street with the big trees at the house next to Mark’s. Our poor cab driver stopped at least four or five times to ask for directions and finally found the hotel after about 20 minutes of driving around. He felt awful for not being able to find it and refused to take payment. It hardly seemed fair as an address just isn’t as clear in Korea.

After all that, the hotel we’d been sent to was a dive without air conditioning (critical for pregnancy comfort). We walked around the corner to a nicer hotel that was the splurge of the trip at about 70,000 won, or about \$60. The guy running it had the translation service on speed dial speaker phone which was a huge plus, and using it, delivered one of the best food stories of the trip.

We wanted to eat bulgogi, the Korean barbecue rumored to be at its best in Jeonju. We asked the hotel front desk clerk, via the speed-dialed translator, to direct us to a good place to get bulgogi. He replied back, also via translator, confirming we wanted a place for dinner. No, we said to the translation person on the phone, we want specifically bulgogi. The translation girl then quizzes us to make sure we know what that is, and once we confirm, she says to hand the phone back to the clerk. A long, disconcerting conversation in Korean of which we understood nothing ensued, but once he hung up the phone he came out from behind the desk and led us outside and down the alley way to the street. He then proceeded to hail a cab and had a long conversation with the cab driver that offered very little reassurance other than we did hear the word bulgogi a couple times back and forth. With a growing sense

this game of telephone had decreasing chances of getting us to lunch at every turn, we got into the cab and went with it. The cabbie turned and looked at us and said “Bulgogi?” and we nodded ... this could work out after all. He drove us to a very nice looking restaurant which would have been enough, but then the cab driver got out of his cab and brought us into the restaurant and told the owner what we wanted. The owner spoke English and confirmed we wanted to order bulgogi for two, and miraculously, we had pulled off an international accomplishment.

The meal was nothing short of amazing. The beef, marinated and then cooked table side, by far the best meal we’d had all trip, but the best part of this traditional meal were the side dishes. We were seated at one end of a table big enough for four to six people. In small saucer-like dishes, they set out about 40 little side dishes of various vegetables, kimchi, fish, and other delectable treats. Some were so good, we couldn’t help but eat it all, which we soon learned one should never do in Korea. As soon as we emptied one of the little plates, the staff would fill it and bring it back. Thus, the phrase it inspired “You can’t beat the kitchen, do not try.”

After the meal, the owner of the place came over and offered us coffee, special coffee. I explained I couldn’t drink coffee because of my pregnancy. Then he said it was like an after dinner drink which I thought would be liquor but he said no. We could not understand, so he brought us the drinks on the house as an explanation. It was the most delicious drink I’ve ever had. We later discovered it to be spiced persimmon juice drink. It was heavenly after our huge meal and we were thoroughly satisfied with our hard won find of a restaurant. We got up to leave and the owner walked over with car keys. He said it was so nice that we came to eat at his place and offered to drive us himself back to our hotel. We’d seen some neat little shops and a festival on our way, so we thanked him but said we’d walk. He practically insisted on driving us until we told him we’d taken an interest in the festival and wanted to stop on the way home. We gave him one of our Iowa Soccer Association pins and headed out to shop and sightsee our way back to the hotel.

On the way, we stopped in a bedding store to see if they had cool things for our new nursery-to-be. They didn’t have anything that worked, but we found little baby pillows. One that was yellow with little

sheep ... just like our nursery plan. As we talked, the owner came over to talk to us, or I should say pantomime, that this little pillow was not for grownups. He pointed to the pillow and said "Child," so I pointed to my belly and said "Yes, *ageel*!" (The Korean word for baby). This made him very excited ... he asked where we lived, and when the baby would come (most of this with hand signals). Then we asked how much for the pillow. He suddenly looked very frustrated shaking his head no, then said "I gift to you!" He absolutely refused to give us a price so we left him with another Iowa Soccer pin and our thanks for the little pillow that ended up the basis of our first baby room.

As we sat next to German fans from Hannover at the Spain vs. Paraguay game later that day, they talked about how they were taking notes and planning how they could possibly match this when they host in 2006. We shared the story of our afternoon, and they just shook their heads. We agreed that while Germany would certainly be great hosts, you can't out-nice the Koreans.

While we enjoyed our chat with the Germans, Jimmy was stuck sitting with Chuck who reportedly talked his ear off the whole game. Jimmy's part Spanish and was really excited about the game, but by the end of it, he looked like he might lose his mind if he didn't get a break from Chuck's verbal onslaught soon. We all headed back to the hotel together looking along the way for a place where we could eat and watch the England vs. Argentina game. We had endured the long search for buses and a longer fruitless search for a restaurant before finally giving up and enlisting the help of a translator from the nearby train station in the ordering of pizza. The pizza ordering, yet another adventure in culinary Korea. In my search for a quiet place to order pizza, the translator and I went up a level to the hallway of the next floor's rooms. When we stepped out into the hall, there was a dazzling, glowing, black-lit underwater scene in garish neon colors on both the walls and the ceiling. When I stepped into the hall, black and glowing walls enveloped me, and a day-glow fish with ocean scenery was trippy and overwhelming. So completely over the top, I had to call the others up to come look as well. I could only imagine, if the hallway was this ornate, what must the individual rooms look like on this floor. I never did get to find that one out, but the hallway was unforgettable.

On the morning of June 8th, we got up and walked around Jeonju for a while, taking in the exhibits at the Dynamic Korea exhibit. There were cultural displays and a place where you could buy World Cup themed (knock-off) Monopoly, a required purchase for our game room. We then started the long trek to Daegu which involved not only a train change but a station change in Daejeon. While there, we stopped at the tourist information and asked for a place for a fast meal. The translator not only found us a place, but helped us place our order, then entertained us with stories about his kids and family, and shared our excitement about our pending parenthood.

We made our train and continued on to Daegu, the home of the next USMNT match against Korea. This would be the most intense game of the US schedule, because it is the chance for both teams to get six points, a guaranteed advancement. As if that wasn't enough intensity, there was a huge rivalry developing from the Koreans toward the US. The Americans, outnumbered, were trying to lay low, but there was really no hiding foreign in Korea, particularly as a 5'8" pregnant, white woman. It seemed the US would be satisfied with a tie or a win, but the Koreans would only accept a win against the United States, a country they held responsible for their speed skaters' elimination from the Olympics. The "Apollo Ohno incident" where the South Korean was DQ'd after an altercation with Ohno. To make matters worse, Ohno subsequently got the gold medal. As the game approached, we heard more and more intense Korean spoken, and while we may have only been able to specifically understand a few words of the story, we knew this World Cup match represented vengeance for the speed skating incident.

Fortunately, the group we'd met at the first game kept in touch via the Yanks in Korea Yahoo group, so we knew we'd be able to meet before the game and have a good-sized group for strength in numbers. However, first we needed to find and get settled in our homestay house. We were met at the train station by the father of our scheduled host and the family chauffeur. The father quickly informed us his son had been called to the US on business, and he would honor his son's commitment to us, with displeasure. He told us directly he thought Americans were stupid and annoying and complained we probably did

not even understand Celsius. I'm not accustomed to such a stream of negativity, but I swear I only attempted a little self-deprecating humor. "Well, I don't know much about Celsius, but I know 34 degrees is REALLY hot!"

My attempt at lightening the mood only backfired. I only knew the Fahrenheit conversion of 34 degrees, but what I didn't know is in the front seat on the dashboard, the AC was set on the nose at 34 degrees. At least when I'm an obnoxious American, it's inadvertent.

We met our host's family, who were all lovely, and began to understand the root of the father's attitude. There were three generations living in the beautiful suburban home, and the son, our absentee host, had two little boys who were very modern in contrast to their grandfather's more traditional ways and ideals. The boys' room was an "English Only" room, aggravating their grandfather to no end. We were the embodiment of our host's desire for his sons to learn English in preparation for some day working in America, much to the chagrin of the eldest generation of the house. As he got to know us, he became more and more kind and friendly, and our stay that started out quite rocky eventually ended beautifully.

We had a day to explore Daegu before game day and, by coincidence, met the guys who sat in front of us on the plane to Korea. They remembered us and inquired about the pregnancy and if I was feeling better now that I had more than a tiny bulkhead to move around within. We joined them for their trek up a mountain-like hill to the Korean War Memorial. One of the guys, a history buff, could explain most of the exhibits to us, a handy skill to have in a country with very few English translations. We usually have a general sense of things such as what place serves food and what hotels look like but beyond that, we are at the mercy of the World Cup tourist maps and the translators provided by FIFA and the Korean Tourism Board.

Even armed with maps and a phrase book, we would still get lost, because our cab driver wouldn't understand the English map and our pronunciation was often not enough to communicate our destination. One night in Daegu, our cab driver, who was half blind and of questionable intelligence, couldn't find our homestay house from the address we had given him. We circled closer and closer until finally Doug figured

out where we were and then had to convince the driver to follow our directions. The cab driver got so flustered these *waygooks* (foreigners) knew where they wanted to go, he actually stopped at a police station (to report us for the suspicious behavior of knowing where we were). Doug had to go in with him so the officer and Doug could convince the driver to go where we wanted. It was comical to watch the cab driver, the Korean police officer, and Doug hash out an understanding of what would happen. The gift of Korean addresses and the madcap adventures they inspire were a continuing theme throughout the trip.

We decided to try our hand at exploring the Daegu street market on foot. We headed into the heart of the city, thrilled to find an authentic Korean shopping experience that seemed like a place that very few tourists see. There were animals slaughtered and hanging in windows or waiting in wheelbarrows to be purchased, cooked, and consumed. Market stalls were everywhere we looked with spices, carvings, dresses, blankets, and so much more. We found a blanket to match the pillow given to us for the baby, and the seller was able to pantomime an explanation that the character on the blanket was a popular cartoon character. It was a puppy dog, not a lamb, as we had originally thought, although it remains a sheep to us. We also achieved the goal of finding a hangbok for our daughter-to-be. It was a beautiful red, gold and cream outfit complete with skirt, jacket, and crown. We were told it was for a baby, but ended up being huge on her at her naming ceremony, overrunning her tiny toes by several inches and requiring a more fitted top. It was perfect for her baby naming and still worked as a Halloween costume when she was two years old.

That night, we went out for a traditional Korean meal with our homestay host complete with floor seating, tableside barbeque, and the amazing little plates of food as far as we could see. We must have had 40 little dishes on the table that night; almost all of them a delicious, flavorful, and healthy treat. Once again, we could not beat the kitchen as every time we finished a plate they would bring five more out. My pregnant belly was happy and full of healthy food, and the after-dinner drink of cherry blossom fruit wine would have been the perfect finish to the meal, if I'd been willing to drink more than a sip of it.

After dinner, we attended the night-before party of Sam's Army

soccer fans now gathering in Daegu. We went to a Blues bar to meet with the American fans for drinks, camaraderie, and singing. Having spent the past several days as isolated Americans amongst frenzied Koreans, who broadcast their cheers on every morning, midday and evening news program, we were really looking forward to spending time with fellow US supporters. Our group took the bar over singing and chanting through the night. Koreans would walk in, take a look, and walk out somewhat baffled at the passion of our group. Americans from the coast were surprised when our Iowa friends, Lee Tesdell, and his sons Ramsey and Omar, showed up at the bar. Suddenly, there were five people representing the state of Iowa ... impressing Sammers from New York, D.C., and New England. Americans from all over the US were finally figuring out how to be soccer fans, and we'd never again have to go seek out the Brazilians to party at a World Cup.

Game day arrived and somehow we managed to be calm enough in the morning to visit an orphanage director who our next door neighbor in Des Moines was friends with in the early 90s. Our connection with our host had become strong enough he let us take his car and driver to the facility. The children were beautiful and sad, and it broke my heart to leave them there despite already having a baby on the way. We talked to the director and had a lovely time walking around the gardens before heading to meet with the Americans. It was probably more emotionally draining than we needed on a game day, but it was the only time we had been able to work out to meet with her and deliver regards from our US neighbor.

We made our way to lunch at TGI Fridays, not our first choice for dining, but the rallying point for the Americans' trek to the stadium. I was a little tired from the morning so it was nice to grab a table and some food. I started to perk up about the time we were heading to the stadium and I was determined not to end up in a cab with downer Chuck after having worked so hard to get my spirits up for the game. Big Dog, a huge guy from New York who was fast becoming one of my favorite supporters, got into a cab with us successfully averting Chuck. Just as we were about to leave, I saw poor Jimmy LaRoue getting stuck with Chuck again, and I couldn't abandon my hero from the Portugal game. I called out to Jimmy to join us which unfortunately left Chuck

to fend for himself, but when it comes down to the guy who misled for me hours of looking for shuttle buses vs. the guy that let me put my tired feet up, there's absolutely no question what's going down. All's fair in pregnancy and World Cup soccer.

Incredibly, we found the Tesdell family from Iowa upon arrival at the stadium. They walked around the outside of the stadium with us until we came upon the photo op of day: former US Soccer coach, Steve Sampson. We'd been joking about Steve Sampson being the anti-hero of the US team and how he'd ruined the 1998 World Cup team. Then, as we were laughing, he materialized out of the crowd. We greeted him and talked about the current and previous team. After taking a few photos with him, we said goodbye and headed for our seats laughing in disbelief at meeting him.

Along the way, I decided it was best to find a rest room before the stadium got too packed and the lines were even longer. I got in line behind a group of women all wearing USMNT jerseys with player names on them, a rare sight at the time. As we waited, I realized each woman looked like the player named on her jersey. I worked up my nerve and asked what the story was and found out they were a group of national team mothers and sisters. There I was, in line with the moms and families of Reyna, Hejduk, Beasley, and more. I started to gush about what a pleasure it was to meet them, the mothers of my heroes, particularly while pregnant with my firstborn. Beasley's mom said "Well, if you're pregnant, you should definitely cut in front of us." Now I was really losing it ... I was cutting in front of women who'd raised the coolest men in the world. I asked Hejduk's mom for the secret of raising a soccer star (especially one with the fantastic personality of her son). In a manner of awesomeness you'd expect from a Hejduk, she said you just give your kids the space to find their own way and they turn out as they should. It felt like a rite of passage into motherhood, receiving the wisdom of USMNT moms and bonding in the ladies room line.

We continued the walk up into the stadium through thick concrete tunnels that insulated us from the stadium noise. As we walked out onto the terrace between the two stadium decks, the Koreans let out one of their "Tae Ha Mingo" cheers with an intensity and coordination I had not witnessed before. It was as if their voices were so perfectly in sync it

created one sound wave compounded by 60,000 voices. The sound hit me with such physical force it seemed to push me back into the walkway. As it did, I felt the baby in my belly do a startled full roll, registering her own shock at the intensity of the moment. It was a bonding moment for me, one I relive every time my daughter sees something amazing at a soccer game and looks up at me in wide-eyed amazement. It was the beginning of our supporter relationship, still four months before her birth.

We got settled into the section, sitting at the bottom of the stadium flag. The flag on this trip was the 20' x 30' US flag, nicknamed the "Baby Ass Flag," as the smaller counterpart of the 30' x 60' "Big Ass Flag." Somewhere along the way, I became obsessed with needing to sit under or within reach of whatever stadium flag was with us at each game. We seemed to play better when I had a good time and the best time in the supporters section is under the flag with the craziest of crazy fans. The stadium flag was like my security blanket and I needed to have it with me at all times during games.

A hostile environment, the stadium was filled with the strongest opponent's showing I'd seen. The sportsmanlike Korean hospitality began to deteriorate a couple hours before the game as things became increasingly uncomfortable for American fans. Not with violence so much, but with rudeness, behavior so un-Korean we wondered what life in Korea would be like if we beat them. We had to work to cheer above the Korean crowd as they booed Coach Arena and were loud and clinically coordinated the whole game. They had a beautiful tifo display at the start of the match, an enormous Korean flag that covered the entire end zone. However, even a flag hundreds of feet wide was more impressive than the intense sound the Koreans were able to generate throughout the match.

The game was chock full of action on both ends, full of aggressive fouls and many, many scoring opportunities. Our keeper, Brad Friedel made saves that even the most passionate supporter wouldn't expect of him. He was absolutely on fire saving virtually everything that came his way including a penalty kick and a shot that he seemed to save from within his own net as if he had some sort of force field set up. His heroics were legendary and earned him "Man of the Match" honors.

It was Clint Mathis of “Show Us Your Clint” chant fame who would be the offensive hero of the game for the Americans. In the 24th minute, he scored a beautiful goal my husband describes in play by plays form as “Right foot, left foot ... clinical.” Mathis received a pass from midfield which he dropped to the ground with his right then smashes into the corner of the net left-footed. It was a beautiful shot. We went nuts, enjoying being up a goal, while experiencing the sinking feeling of winning on the road: “How are we going to get out of this stadium safely after this game?” We didn’t have to worry about escape plans for our win as Korea came back to tie it up in the 78th minute. They celebrated by running to the corner flag and pretended to speed skate, in reference to the speed skating incident in the 2002 Winter Olympics. American Apollo Ohno, South Korean Ahn Hyun-Soo, and a Chinese skater got tangled up in a speed skating race. Ahn was disqualified and most South Koreans (and some others) disagreed with the ruling. What the skating incident had to do with soccer was less clear, but it’s hard to think nice things about the team that just dropped you from three points to one, despite concerns for your own safety. In the end, the defensive battle ended in a one-all tie. We were lucky to escape with a tie as it would make our lives much more pleasant during the rest of our stay.

Things were difficult enough with the tie. There was a strong US Military presence in Daegu, and Americans were not well received before the game. The tension only rose after the game. We saw a video later on of shoving matches between American and Korean fans, and we personally had a very difficult time getting out of the stadium zone. Our experiences after the game, and that of our fellow supporters, made any US racial bias event I have witnessed pale by comparison, and I do need to set the record straight. In Andy Gustafson’s “23 Days in Korea,” he writes about this game, he accuses me of being a cab stealer which is completely untrue and as incorrect as his spelling of my name. Here is the real story.

We had been turned down by at least a dozen cabs who did not want to take American fares. I was frustrated, exhausted, and feeling very pregnant. I went and talked to a nearby police officer. I told him we’d been waiting forever for a cab and no one wanted to stop for a bunch of Americans. Indicating my pregnancy and fatigue, I begged him to

help. I slipped him some money and asked if he'd be able to help us score a cab. He accepted my bribe and hailed the next taxi for us, a cab Andy somehow deluded himself into thinking was his. Not my fault I was better at manipulating public officials, Gustafson! (Despite our difference of opinion, Andy and I are friends to this day, although we will probably debate the proper ownership of that cab for the rest of our lives). Even with the bribe, we weren't out of the woods. The taxi driver was very upset that he'd been tricked into picking up Americans, and while we were shielded from the precise list of complaints he had about us by the language barrier, I think it's safe to say he was not a fan. He tried to drive off when he realized what the police officer was doing, but the cop wouldn't let him. We sat quietly for the ride with the two other Americans with us and endured the diatribe en route to the American-friendly bar for the post-game meet-up of US fans.

Really more of a US-tolerant bar ... we had to pay for dinner when we ordered because they didn't trust Americans. We ate but never really felt welcome as we talked with other American fans and compared experiences from around the stadium. On our way home, we decided to stop in a shop looking for some small souvenir from the day. From the moment we stepped in until we left, we were followed and watched with intensity. They leaned in every time we reached to touch something, making it clear we were untrustworthy Americans and not welcome. The experience lasted only a few minutes, but it was so unnerving and awful that it renewed my sympathy for what American minorities must go through. It was horrifying to think we experienced something that happens to Americans, by Americans, every day based on the color of their skin or their perceived ethnicity. I felt enormous relief to make it back to our homestay, baby kicking in my belly, calmed after the shock of stadium noise, and home safe and sound from the adventures of the day.

Americans didn't fare much better in the Korean press in the days that followed. Korean and international press coverage of the game was definitely slanted towards Korea and away from the Americans. It seemed the world is a little annoyed with us for beating Portugal and not leaving space for the host to advance as if it were just the nerve of these upstart Americans coming in and wrecking everyone's plan

for a nice orderly World Cup. Strangely, no one was complaining that Portugal played so disappointingly that the Americans got not only one but three points from them nor that Portugal must beat Korea to keep them out. No, it was all our fault, and by now, we were prepared to take on the role of upset. We refused to care what the world or our hosts thought. We wanted to advance by any means necessary and anyone who wanted to escape the group would have to go through us as well as Korea, Portugal, and I suppose the sleeper Poland, although little was said about them before our fateful match against them.

I realized one of the things people with unhealthy obsessions will do is point out they are not the only ones with said unhealthy obsession. Those cohorts were supposed to make the “crazy” decisions we make seem less crazy. In Korea, we were not the only young family traveling. The Flannigans were a family from Chicago traveling with their one-month old baby girl. It was great to have another family on the road with us and to catch a glimpse of where we’d be living in a few short months. At the time, I thought it was crazy and daring to take a one-month old to Korea (who knew you could even get a passport that fast!) Now that we’re experienced parents, I get it, and I’m grateful for the lessons in parenting they taught us. The babies just become part of the organism of the family, and why wouldn’t they come with you to soccer matches? We joked with the Flannigans that someday our girls would be sitting together in the supporters’ section, cheering on the Nats together. The Flannigans don’t go to as many games as they used to but our prediction played out when the girls got to play together at a USMNT game in Chicago several years later. The girls had a very limited grasp of their connection, but it was fun for us as parents to see the Korea babies finally reunited.

The following day we said goodbye to our hosts and left for Suwon, home of our memorable first game against Portugal, for a homestay with Mrs. Young and her nieces, Rosa and Louise. They met us at the train station and were very excited to meet us. Mrs. Young was active in the hosting committee for foreigners and was very proud to be our host. She had us sign our names on the board at the tourism station and presented us with gifts from City Hall. We returned to her house for a lunch she had prepared for us and tried not to upset her too much with the news

that we intended to go to the Senegal vs. Uruguay game at 3:30 PM. She was a little frustrated that we wanted to go watch soccer so soon after our arrival, but let us go.

We walked up and bought tickets from the ticket booth ... something we have not been able to do at any World Cup since! We traded some US Soccer swag for a Senegal handkerchief and then went to our seats in the middle of a sea of Irishmen in the scorching sun. Senegal went up 1-0 on a terrible penalty kick call in the 20th minute and then made it 2-0 in the 26th minute. The Irish surrounding us were fun with their songs and jeers, but the sun was exhausting, and at halftime we moved next to a Korean family in the shade. They shared their Korean vegetable rolls called Kimbap with us. The rolls were delicious and got us through the second half which ended 3-3 with an equally bad penalty call to even the score. There were no fewer than a dozen yellow cards in the match so the game wasn't dull for a moment, and we thoroughly enjoyed it. We dashed out of the stadium in time to catch the first bus back to the house and enjoyed a traditional Korean dinner with our host. The girls were seated at the table with us, and the two Aunties were traditionally seated on the floor.

We spent the 12th sightseeing and visiting the Insadong art market in Seoul. After weeks of perfect weather in Korea, we stepped out of the subway into pouring rain. Our first stop was a news stand to grab umbrellas which I thought might be something interesting. Perhaps Koreans had some new cool way of collapsing umbrellas into impossibly small spaces. The joke was on me when I discovered that the umbrellas in Korea were exactly the same as in the US. In fact, precisely the same as umbrellas at UCLA: we had traveled halfway around the world to find a logo umbrella for UCLA. With that purchased, we were able to continue on to lunch at a street café that served *mandu gui* (fried chicken dumplings) and *bulgogi*. It was delicious and fortified us for the day of shopping.

We went through the art market shopping for gifts and mementos. There were wood carvings, jade, celadon green ceramics, and more. We found gifts for our families and our housesitter as we ducked in and out of souvenir shops and art stalls in the market as the rain poured down. We wanted to find something for our family, and when we

found a small inlaid bentwood tray, we decided to try to build our own havdalah set. Havdalah is the Jewish service for ending Shabbat, or the Sabbath. We had a great time going from booth to booth searching for the perfect ceramics for a wine cup, candle holder, and spice box that all coordinated with each other. We found all of those pieces and continued our tradition of buying a World Cup necklace. This time the necklace was a silver ellipsoid with pointed ends encasing a blue crystal (it only later occurred to me I'd bought an American football-shaped necklace on a World Cup trip).

The subway back to Suwon took too long to leave much time for pre-dinner sightseeing in Suwon. and our lack of commitment to Suwon sights was starting to aggravate Mrs. Young, but she did have the most amazing dinner reserved for us. Her niece, Louise, told us we were going to have “dog” for dinner which set off a bit of panic until we realized we had just misheard “duck.” We breathed a sigh of relief and set out for the restaurant for a dinner that needed to be ordered at least a day in advance. When we arrived, we were seated on the floor around a low table in a beautifully austere, sunlit room. Without a doubt, one of the best meals of my entire life. The duck was slow cooked all day, stuffed with a rich, purple rice and seasoned with a blend of 12 different spices. It was so flavorful and layered with so many tastes in every bite, I could have eaten it forever. A decade later, I still treasure the matchbook from the restaurant in desperate hope we will one day return to Korea and I can repeat the duck with purple rice meal.

After dinner, we walked around old Suwon and the Hwaseong fortress gates. We walked along the city walls and enjoyed the ancient Korean architecture as Mrs. Young finally seemed pleased that we were getting to enjoy her beautiful city. It really was one of those perfect days from the art market to that incredible dinner to walking along ancient walls as the sun set. I really could not imagine a more perfect day at the World Cup, of course ending with us watching the evening games back at the house.

The 13th was another game day in Suwon, but we dedicated ourselves to being good guests for the morning, now that we understood how much time Mrs. Young wanted to dedicate to our visit, and joined her and the girls for further touring of the old city gates and fortress. We

also trekked out to the most wonderful art museum set among gardens and ponds just outside the city. The Ho Am Art Museum galleries were beautiful, peaceful galleries of Korean and Buddhist art. There were exhibits of celadon and white porcelain, rooms of ancient Korean paintings and calligraphy, and Buddhist relics from past centuries, combining into a total experience of Korean culture and serenity.

The surrounding Hee Won Korean Gardens were stunning, each section of the garden an exquisite outdoor collection of plant life and sculpture combined to create spaces that were simultaneously elevating and enveloping. The gardens were designed in 1997 to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Ho-Am Art and were designed following the natural contours of each garden site, incorporating naturally-occurring elements into the final design. Their website described this as “borrowed landscape,” but the effect was more a garden perfectly at peace in its own corner of the world. The boundary between developed and natural blurred to create an atmosphere that was the perfect respite from the color and sound riot of the World Cup.

We couldn't stay in Korean Zen for the whole day, however, as we had plans to watch the afternoon game, Brazil vs. Costa Rica at Suwon Stadium. We were dropped off at the stadium, close to game time, and were looking forward to watching the matchup between a CONCACAF team and one of the best teams in the world. Costa Rica could advance on a loss if they didn't let the goal differential get out of control. Better than needing a win, but still a tough job against Brazil. The atmosphere at the stadium was electric, and we were happy to be back among Brazilian fans, reminiscing about celebrating with them four years prior at Sacre Coeur. They were out in force, the under-dressed and over-the-top Brazilian women and other assorted passionate Brazilian fans, as well as a smaller contingent from Costa Rica. The reserved Korean crowd did not know what to do with Brazilian women in bikinis. The stadium was crazy with passionate soccer fans.

Once the game started, it did not take long for Costa Rica to get into goal differential trouble. Ronaldo put Brazil up 2-0 by the 13th minute, meaning if Turkey beat their opponent by more than a goal, they would be tied with Costa Rica for points at four points apiece (three for a win, one for a tie) pushing them to a tie-breaker situation. In the

World Cup that tie would be broken by goal differential (the difference between a team's "goals for" and "goals against" numbers). It's enough to make your head swim late in a tournament and the reason final games in the round robin stage are often played simultaneously so teams can't throw a game and keep another team out on minute by minute goal differential changes. Not having web-enabled phones at this World Cup meant we were waiting for stadium updates on the other match score

Brazil scored once more in the 38th minute before Costa Rica finally sprang to life and answered in the 39th minute and then again in the 56th minute. It looked like they might actually stage a comeback and hold out for at least advancement, if not victory. But then, even though they looked like they had fallen asleep for a while and might allow our CONCACAF friends through, Brazil lowered the boom and dropped goals in the 62nd and 64th minutes by Rivaldo and Junior and nailed the coffin shut on Costa Rica's advancement. Dreams of Costa Rica advancing were nice for the six minutes it looked possible. But that's how Brazil plays. You can't ever count them out. As I wrote in my journal, "Brazil can turn on goals like they are turning on the faucet."

We met our hosts in Suwon for a final dinner of *Kalbi*, a local specialty of grilled beef that they cook at your table. It was a delicious meal, although bittersweet for us as we prepared to leave Mrs. Young and her nieces. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with the Young family, but we were excited for US vs. Poland the next day in Daejeon, I remember her fondly every time I try to iron. Once when I borrowed her iron to smooth out my shirt, she looked at my work, shook her head and took it to correct my lackluster efforts. I also think of her as I strive to have as much pride showing people around Des Moines as she had showing us Suwon. The tournament marched on, so we packed our bags one last time and headed out for the final adventure of our trip.

There were very few times I questioned the wisdom of going to a World Cup at five months pregnant. As the anticipation climbed as we approached our final game, the image of a peaceful pregnant serenity faded in my rearview. I wrote in my journal, "It's 2:22 PM on game day (8:30 PM kickoff) and my heart is already racing! This is the BIG DAY! We are all waiting to see if the dream can happen, the US and Korea, like high school seniors waiting for a fat envelope, telling them

they get to move on to the next round. It feels like an entire country is holding its breath!”

I’m sure all that breath holding and heart racing wasn’t the best thing I could have been doing for the baby, but I suppose at least in Korea I was eating a better diet than I would have back in the states watching games in the middle of the night. Overall health wise, it was probably a wash.

The Korean press had done almost a perfect 180 flip from focusing on the US as the spoilers to turning the focus (finally!) to Portugal. Emphasis turned to how beatable they were and that Korea’s chances were good for a tie sending them through. The conventional wisdom among US fans was to win and let the Koreans worry about themselves. Back in the US even my mom was learning about soccer as the tournament progressed and announced she wanted to name her new Jeep after US Goalkeeper Brad Friedel. It may not seem like much, but I took it as a hat tip from my mom that she was at least getting caught up in World Cup fever the only way she knew how.

We were pretty confident the worst of our World Cup was over and Poland should be beatable enough to push us through. We walked around humming the tunes to the Sam’s Army chants of the trip, such as the following.

To the tune “She’ll Be Coming ‘Round the Mountain When She Comes”

Agoos has more goals than Figo,
Agoos has more goals than Figo
Agoos has more goals
Agoos has more goals
Agoos has more goals than Figo!

Agoos, of course was the own-goal scorer from the Portugal match. Figo was Portugal’s star player.

And to the tune of Old McDonald:

Bruce Arena had a team, e i e i o
and on that team he had a Wolf, e i e i o
with a goal goal here and a goal goal there
Here a goal there a goal, everywhere a goal goal
Bruce Arena had a team e i e i o

And finally:

Poland! You're attacked from the East
Poland! You're attacked from the West
Poland! You are Europe's doorstep
Even Mongols took you!

In replacement for our CONCACAF "Estados Unidos" cheer, we learned to chant "United States" in Polish for our final game, although not well enough I remember that barrage of consonants yet today.

We planned to meet with other Sam's Army people at a place called NASA Bar but once again had trouble finding the precise location for it based on our address and map (shakes fist at Korean address system). We flagged down a couple of Koreans who were kind enough to stop what they were doing and lead us to the bar themselves when we couldn't understand their spoken directions. We were so thankful for the help we gave them one of our soccer pins which they tried to refuse, but we eventually convinced them to accept. We'd been in the bar for about 15 minutes when we were surprised to see them return holding a Korean bamboo fan. It was far nicer than the token pin we had given them. Once again, we asked ourselves if we would ever learn that you cannot out-nice the Koreans. You really can't even offer a small token of appreciation without getting into a match of niceness one-upmanship.

The atmosphere at NASA Bar verged on celebratory. We were almost guaranteed passage to the next round. We were all in high spirits, singing and partying with people we'd just met not even two weeks prior who already felt like life-long friends. It had been a great trip so far. We were all thoroughly bonded, and we were so confident in our assumed victory. We sang non-stop for an hour on the bus and then an hour and a half before the game. We were pumped up and ready to receive our World Cup spoils for beating Portugal and tying Korea.

The game started and it was almost immediate disaster. We watched in horror as goalkeeper, Brad Friedel, and a defender had a breakdown in communication, got confused, and let a Polish player score on a loose ball to the left post in the 3rd minute. Dear G-d, this must be what it was like for Portugal in our game: having all the wind sucked out of our sails from practically the first whistle. Things seemed to almost immediately improve when Donovan scored, only to have our hopes

dashed again as his goal was called back because of a foul that was clearly shoulder to shoulder tackle. Donovan just out muscled the other player. Then Poland scored again making it 2-0 in only the 5th minute. THE FIFTH EFFING MINUTE. Pushing us to near panic, we were inspired to sing even louder. I turned to Doug and asked “How could this be happening? This is not how it’s supposed to end.”

The American supporters section sat huddled in the corner end of the field. Our emotional state resembled a straight-jacketed, muttering inconsolable locked in a fetal position and banging her head against the wall. With the desperation and anxiety level soaring and about a half hour into the match, the Korean fans across the corner from us started going nuts. They were pantomiming to us, holding up one finger, but we couldn’t figure out why they were so excited. We desperately tried to comprehend their message but could only take general solace that if Korea was doing well that was a good thing for us. If their opponent Portugal suffered, the more likely was our advancement. At halftime, we learned the one finger had been for a Portuguese player who had been shown the red card and sent off in the first half. Refereeing research taught me the strong statistics for a team with one red card rallying to victory, I wasn’t comforted by the ejection. At least the score was still tied and perhaps Portugal would be worn down in frustration.

The second half started and there was no relief to be found on our field. The Polish team was in full defense mode and was shamelessly time wasting at every opportunity. I didn’t have a sense we had what it took to win the day, and I only became more convinced as I watched our players get increasingly anxious as it came close to the end of the game. You could see it sink in: we would not advance. We had beaten Portugal and tied Korea, only to go down in shame against our group’s sleeper, Poland, and whimper out of the World Cup. Just as I was about to slip into a full-on hallowed out depression, there was a surge of excitement from the Korean supporters section. They were jumping up and down shaking two fingers ecstatically. It took endless moments to confirm from the Irish behind our section that Portugal had just had a second player ejected from the match. A glimmer of hope: Portugal was frustrated.

As we watched the Koreans revel in their good luck, Poland buried

another goal into our net, and we began to believe our only hope would come from the hands of our Korean hosts. In my mind, I re-imagined Princess Leia in an endless holographic loop of “Help us Korea, you’re our only hope.” Moments later, in the jumbled pandemonium of stadium confusion and misinformation, the Koreans started to celebrate in a way we had not seen yet. As Friedel stopped a penalty kick to keep the score from becoming ridiculous, we thought: Could it be? Had they finally scored on Portugal? We watched, desperately trying to sort out what was happening that would make the Koreans get so excited. Then confirmation came mercifully: Korea had scored and was beating Portugal 1-0. The stands became a riot of joy and celebration. The Koreans finally had a score they could gesture back and forth with us in mutual celebration. The Koreans, who had been pro-Poland, began cheering for the USA. There was one American fan who had an international-enabled phone and decided to throw all fear of expense to the wind. He called the US to get updates on the Korea game for us. Incredible, the 90-minute emotional roller coaster, intense and tumultuous, was not done yet.

Pregnancy shows no mercy for football schedules, so of course, when Donovan finally scored one for the US new mom, Ellen Flannigan, and I were both in the bathroom. Yes, the babies knew when the goal would come and made sure we would miss it. In the flurry of last-minute goals in both matches, we were left on pins and needles scrounging for any information on our fate for the second round. It became clear in injury time, watching all the players stop playing in our game, that the Korean game had finished and our result didn’t matter. The ref had signaled four minutes of added time but called it after only two had passed when everyone stopped playing.

It was one of the few times I had been in a soccer stadium at the end of a match where everyone was joyful. The Koreans were elated that they had beaten Portugal to send both themselves and the Americans through. Poland was happy to be redeemed from a three-loss World Cup. The Americans were breathing a sigh of relief, thankful for having escaped the round any way we could. We chanted “*Kamsa hamnida, Coreia*,” (Korean for “Thank you, Korea”) in the stadium and all night long. Polish and Koreans began trading jerseys with the US in the

stands, just like the commercial at that time. Our friend, Andy, traded USMNT stuff for Polish swag with some fans from Poland and took a bunch of pictures with fans from around the world.

We stayed at the stadium cheering, dancing and singing until 11:30 or so, then sang on the bus on the way to the shuttle drop, then headed to the bar. As we were leaving the stadium, one of the Korean volunteers asked to trade her Korean volunteer jersey for my knock-off Donovan jersey. I immediately agreed. A \$10 fake US jersey I'd bought in Seoul in exchange for a sweet blue polo only available to official volunteers, something no one else in the states would have was a great trade for me. She seemed excited to have a USMNT jersey, replica or not.

Koreans were going bezerk cheering for both the US and Korea. Mass celebrations raged in the streets downtown. People were hanging out of cars, urban surfing on vehicles, waving flags, singing, dancing, and even burning things every once in a while. There wasn't an unhappy person around, although it was a little unnerving watching the ordinarily reserved Koreans rioting en masse in the streets. When the rioting started, we stuck together and made our way to the bar. There were rumors of the Korean fans flipping a bus over in the celebration, which we never did confirm. It was a wild time late into the night. We basked in the game afterglow for a while and then headed to the PC Bang to email friends back home about our experiences. Even when we left the internet café at 3 AM, the Korean celebration was still going strong but my pregnant body was more than ready to crash. Even in second-trimester elation, it had been a long and exhausting day. We walked back to our hotel, watching hundreds of Koreans dance in the streets.

Back at our room for the night, Doug and I had to have a serious discussion. Our planned departure flight was during the next USMNT. We had to decide if we were staying or going. When we emailed home to our friends, I said, "I guess we'll see how we feel in the (late) morning!" By the time we made it back to our room, reality had set in: we could extend a day and make the next game but we acknowledged that once we stayed on, we would be emotionally committed to staying until the end. We were set to play Mexico next and we were pretty confident if the right team showed up, we would beat them. Then we would have another four days until the next round. After all my bravery of

the previous weeks, I had to admit I was absolutely exhausted from traveling, and while I wasn't worried about having the energy to get to the 17th, I had serious concerns about staying beyond that round. We decided then and there that unless things looked dramatically different in the morning, we would return to the states on the day the US played Mexico in the second round of the World Cup.

We spent our last couple days in Korea relaxing and sightseeing and picking up the last few souvenirs for our house-sitter, family and friends. I had thoroughly enjoyed the trip, but I had hit the wall and was ready to go home. My sleep deprivation from the night of our final game resulted in a deficit that took weeks to repair. In our final "love hotel," by far the sketchiest of the trip, I would wake up in the middle of the night thinking something was crawling on my leg, and then find myself unable to drift back off to sleep. When we returned to the US, it was impossible to change from Korean time, because with games still going on, I had zero motivation to nix my jet lag. I would wake up and watch games for the rest of the tournament. That was probably the hardest part of traveling to the World Cup pregnant: the lack of sleeping pill solutions for my formidable jet lag.

We did manage to sneak in one final match before leaving: Spain and Ireland in the Round of 16 match. It was played in Suwon, close enough to Seoul we could catch the game even though it was the day before we were leaving. We spent the morning and afternoon shopping in Itaewon, the discount center of Seoul. Most of our friends had already shopped there several times and raved about the bargains they'd found, but this was the first chance we had to experience it ourselves. We did some serious bargaining and negotiating on a new soccer bag for Doug and enough souvenirs and baby goodies to almost fill it. Our final day in Korea was going quite well as we headed off to the Spain vs. Ireland match.

We got tickets in the middle of a section of Irish and began enjoying the atmosphere and joined in the Irish cheering and singing. The Irish joy was short lived as Spain scored in the 8th minute and proceeded to go into a defensive shell. The referee missed penalty after penalty for the Irish until he finally called one in the 90th minute. Ireland scored, tying the game, only to face more defensive ugliness from Spain who defended

the game into overtime period and forced penalty kicks. By this time the whole stadium was behind Ireland who'd so clearly gotten the short end of the refereeing for the night. To no avail, the Irish were sent home on kicks. After getting our fill of Irish-accented complaints, we headed for the hotel to finish our packing to return home the next day.