



Our Immigrant Stories – Yeon Me Kim

By Michael Scott, Legal Intern

For many, going through the U.S. immigration process is stressful, dehumanizing, and demoralizing. Having an attorney who is not only tenacious, but has firsthand knowledge of the immigrant experience, can make a world of difference. At Grossman Young & Hammond, many of our attorneys, paralegals, and staff are immigrants themselves. They have experienced the immigration process as legal practitioners and as applicants for immigration benefits.

A South Korean immigrant herself, Senior Attorney Yeon Me Kim helps foreign nationals through many of the same immigration processes she experienced directly. Yeon Me has held many different types of visas including B-1/B-2, F-1, F-2, J-1, and H-1B, and has been through the employment based green card process. This issue of “Our Immigrant Stories” details Yeon Me’s experiences both as an immigrant and as an attorney.

Yeon Me first came to the U.S. on a J-1 visa in high school as part of a student exchange program. Yeon Me enjoyed her experience so much that she applied for another student exchange program, coming to the U.S. on a J-1 during her junior year of college. It was also during her college years that Yeon Me’s interest in human rights law was awakened. She saw the terrible human rights violations happening in North Korea and wanted to be a part of the solution. Yeon Me went on to get her master’s degree in international cooperation, writing her thesis about how to possibly indict Kim Jong Il and put him before the International Criminal Court.

After graduating college and visiting the United State on a B-2 tourist visa, Yeon Me decided to dive headfirst into human rights law at American University Washington College of Law, securing an F-1 visa for her time in law school.

Yeon Me initially came to American University to pursue human rights law and participated in the school’s International Human Rights Clinic. During her time at the clinic, however, she was introduced to the immigration aspects of human rights, asylum, and refugee issues. Yeon Me was fascinated by the intricacies and complexities of immigration law and knew she had found her path. After graduating law school, Yeon Me completed her fellowship with Asia Pacific American Legal Resource Center helping



underprivileged Asian American population with their immigration needs pursuant to F-1 OPT authorization. During this time, Yeon Me met her husband who was a Seminarian studying under F-1 student status. After their fellowship, Yeon Me and her husband went back to Korean to get married, and Yeon Me returned to the U.S. on an F-2 visa.

Sometime after Yeon Me returned to the U.S., she was hired by an immigration law firm. The firm filed an H-1B visa for her, and eventually sponsored her for a green card, which she was thrilled to receive after a lengthy wait.

Yeon Me's experience with the immigration system both before and after becoming an attorney affords her unique insights that serve the businesses needs of the organizations she represents and the emotional needs of the individuals she assists. Although she had more resources than many, Yeon Me's immigrant experience was not without challenges. Not only did she have to wait a very long time to receive her green card but adjusting to the U.S. lifestyle was difficult. "I think I still have that cultural incompetency because it's so different," she says. "But there are some Korean communities here that I can relate to, that ease the transition, and having that comfort of my community here helped a lot."

Yeon Me loves being an immigration attorney, especially at Grossman Young. The most rewarding part of her job, she says, is rejoicing with clients after a success. "Companies need this highly skilled talent. Businesses want to retain foreign nationals who perfectly meet their needs, and helping them do so is very rewarding," says Yeon Me. "It's really important for our economy, for the growth of these companies, and for the lives and careers of the immigrants involved."

Yeon Me's best advice for anyone trying to immigrate to the United States is to find the right counsel. Many clients come to Yeon Me after getting the wrong legal advice or attempting to navigate the immigration process themselves. It is also very important to fully understand your eligibility for the desired visa. Finally, "there is always opportunity to build your profile, education, or work experience to become eligible for certain types of visas," Yeon Me says. "So, don't give up!"