

Patient story from a collection written by Gail Terry Grimes for a San Jose, Ca, hospital. The collection was given as a thank-you gift to hospital board members and donors.

KO-AM YOON

The Reverend Ko-Am Yoon has never said a word to Ok Jang, but his eyes have spoken volumes to her. He is patriarch of the Buddhist Church of Korea. She is a critical care nurse at our Medical Center. His suffering brought them together.

In the spring of his 90th year, the Reverend Yoon came to America to officiate at the dedication of a new church in San Jose—but then a truck broadsided the car in which he was traveling, and the elderly priest fell against the windshield. An ambulance rushed him to our Trauma Center.

Within minutes, the bleeding in his brain had triggered seizures in his body, and paralyzed his right side. Within hours he could not move at all. Only time would tell if he would ever do so again. His Buddhist followers felt strongly that the Reverend Yoon should be returned to his homeland. Ok Jang was assigned to the case.

“He could not express himself,” she says, “but by hearing his own language from me, especially since he couldn’t say any words of English, I think it helped a lot.”

Ms. Jang had not been home to Korea in ten years. Now she would return in the company of a great spiritual leader. One of our physicians and another nurse would go too.

There was no time to waste. Our medical staff, social workers, pharmacists and administrators made all the necessary arrangements for equipment and medication. Within four hours the travelers were on their way.

The trip was a hard one, with long delays, first at the heliport in San Jose, then at the jetport in Hayward, and finally in Los Angeles as physicians and pilots and airline officials worked out the inevitable details. It took all night, but rather than leave their patient to strangers in a Los Angeles hospital, the San Jose team set up a kind of private ICU in two adjoining hotel rooms. Ms. Jang stayed by her patient's side, taking his vital signs every hour, feeding him hot soup, and talking to him quietly in Korean.

“On and off he was conscious,” she says, “but he couldn’t focus his eyes. Possibly he could hear me, but he couldn’t respond.” The next morning they flew to Korea.

Instead of the expected 24 hours, the trip had taken four days. Our doctor and the two nurses donated the extra time, and ultimately paid for part of the transportation out of their own pockets. Even after their responsibility was over, they kept returning to their patient's bedside to make sure he was receiving the kind of care they wanted for him. Duly satisfied, the physician and other nurse flew home.

Ms. Jang stayed on a couple of more days, reporting to the Korean doctors and teaching the Reverend's family how to care for him. Only then did she take time to visit her

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brother, whom she had not seen in 15 years, and to pay her respects at the graves of her father and grandfather.

Long after she returned to her duties at San Jose Medical Center, she continued to telephone the Buddhist priest in San Francisco every day for news of her patient's condition. She feels honored and humble to have been chosen as one of the Reverend Yoon's nurses, and she will never forget the look in his eyes when she told him, "You're in your country now. You're in Korea, and I want you to rest completely here."

"He looked right at me," she says. "Everyone was surprised, because he hadn't been able to make eye contact with anyone until then."

Now, months later, our team calls Korea regularly to check on the Reverend Yoon. One day they learned that he was sitting up in a wheelchair, reaching out his hand to his new nurse, and looking directly at her with clear, smiling eyes.

