

Elisha Stam Judson grew up in Cramahe Township. In September, she began a one-year teaching assignment in Korea with her husband Alan. She has offered to recount some of their experiences and those of their 14-month-old son Elijah.

By Elisha Stam Judson

As a country girl growing up in Cramahe Township, travelling meant going to Belleville Mall to buy shoes.

Despite this, I have always wanted to really travel, to be enriched by people of another society.

In September, my husband Alan and I packed up our 14-month-old son Elijah, and our lives. We stored our belongings and left Canada to experience South Korea. Our job is to teach English to children, but we spend most of our time learning about Korea.

Ahn-YONG haSEHYo, a formal hello to you in Korean. I am in Jeonju, a four-hour train ride southwest of the capital, Seoul. We landed in Korea Sept. 5 and already feel connected to the routine and flow of Korean culture.

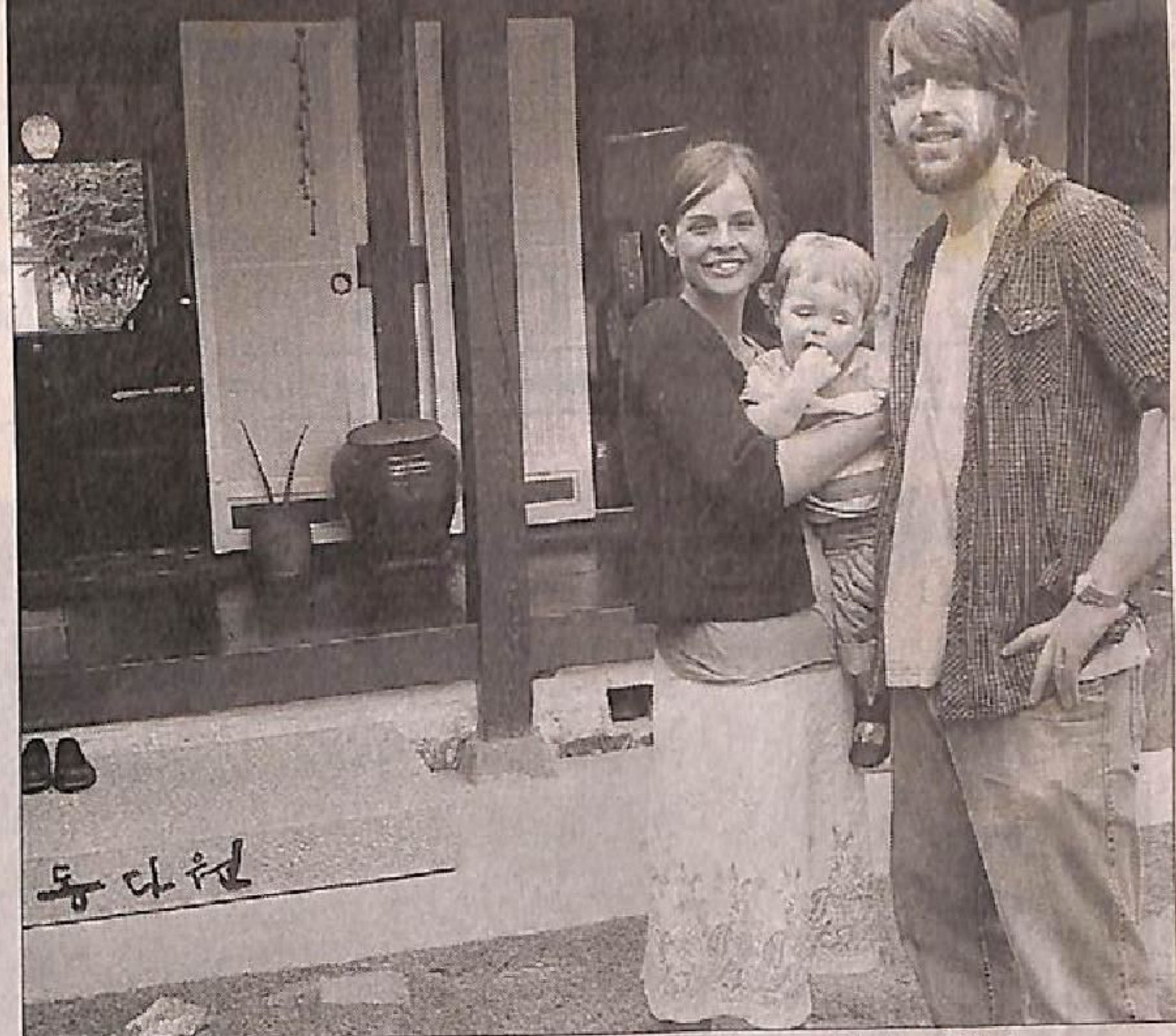
Preparing for a one-year stay in a distant land, I didn't imagine the transition would be so easy. We are a bit homesick, but life is not as different and "other-worldly" as I thought. Certain things appear strange on the surface but, underneath, Korean people have a lot in common with the average Canadian.

Koreans are louder. People seem less reserved; they are boisterous, rowdy and they stay up late (even on weekdays). Like most North Americans, they love to drink and it is common to see chummy businessman staggering home in the wee hours of the morning.

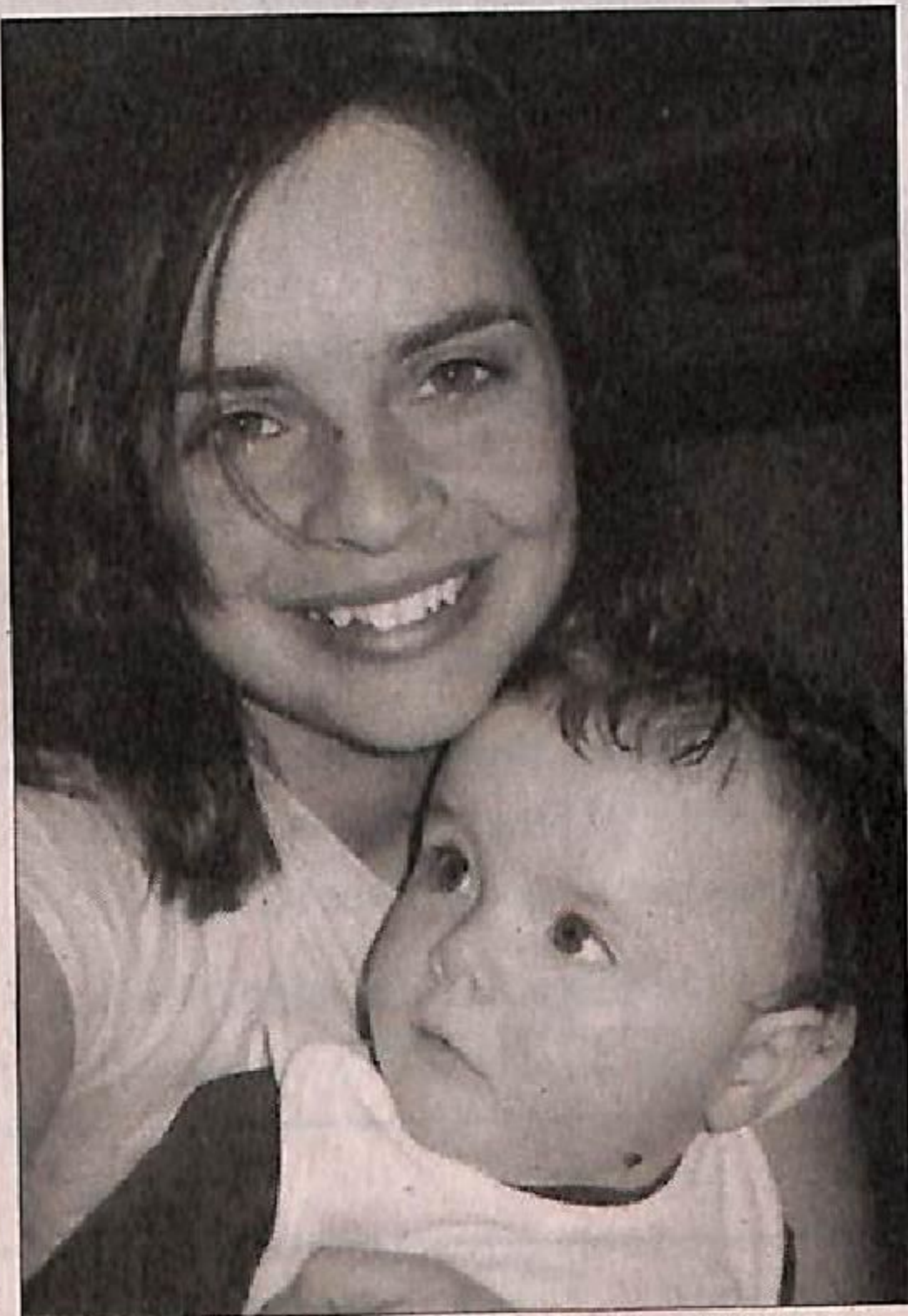
In a traditional Korean restaurant, people sit cross-legged on the floor around a short table. The style is very intimate and familiar; everyone shares the same dish and they lean over each other to eat the various side dishes. Children run around the restaurant playing, their shouts



Crossing the cultural barriers? Elijah shakes hands with a Korean *chingu* (friend).



Korea is home for now for Elisha, Alan and baby Elijah.



Elisha Stam Judson and baby Elijah are getting accustomed to life in Korea.

barely audible amongst the laughter and cheer of the adults. Eating is a celebrated, social event.

There is a noticeable camaraderie among friends. My 14-month-old son and I discovered something in a nearby park that made me laugh out loud. In the corner stood a rough "fort" consisting of a platform, sheltered by a tarpaulin roof. Made entirely

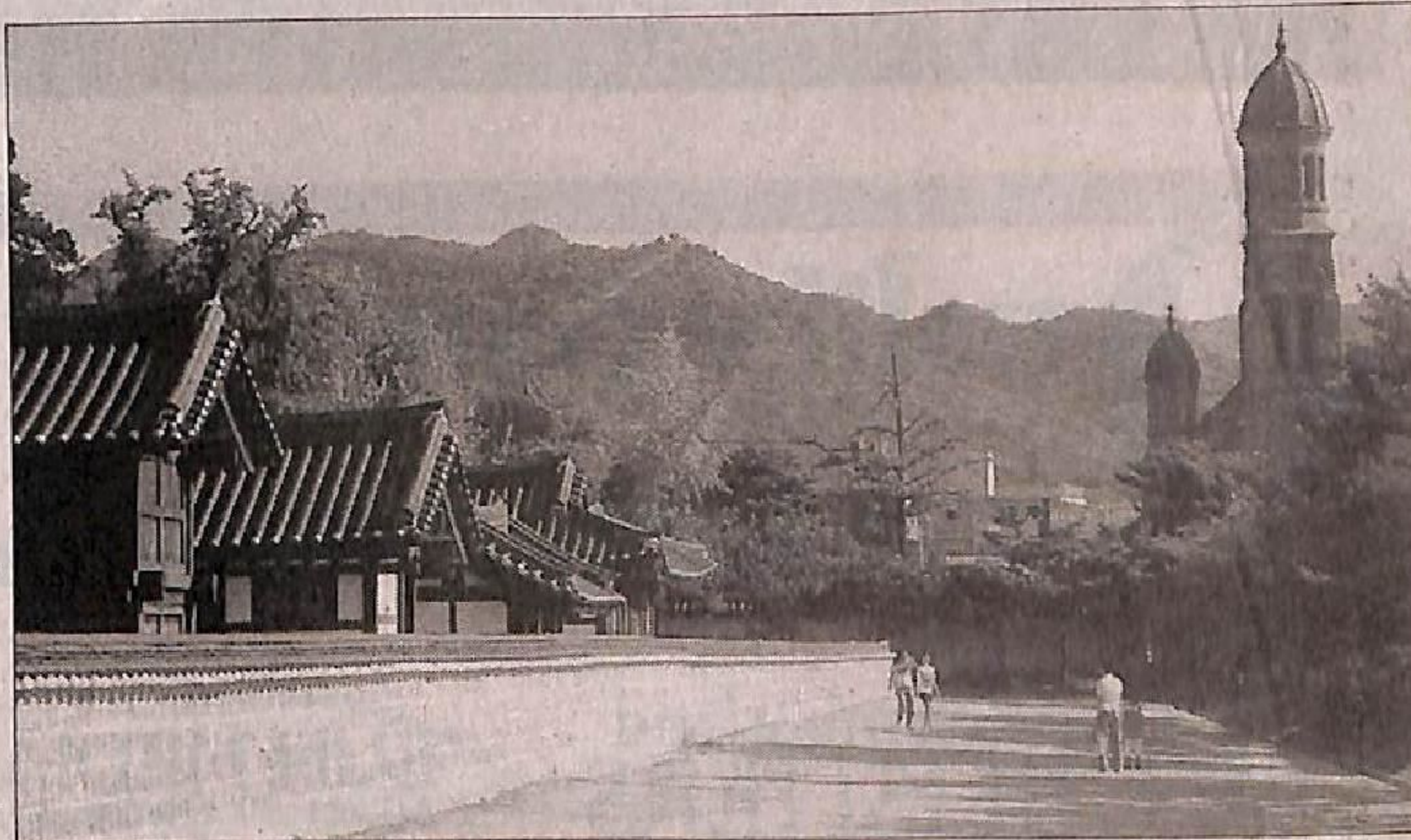
of branches and cast-off 2X4s, the fort featured an electric light. In the corner, an old fridge proudly stood.

Who were the kings of this castle?

Around a worn table sat eight elderly and middle-aged men. They were playing a card game and shouting at each other with the passion of men who were losing money (or pride). I pictured them gingerly placing each board, finding an extension cord long enough to reach a nearby house (across the road no-less), hauling the heavy fridge, and finding chairs to furnish their hideaway.

I wondered if they were hiding from their wives, or just enjoying the outdoors. I was impressed that they cared to spend such time together rather than sitting at home in front of their TVs.

Recently Korea celebrated Chosuk, the equivalent of Thanksgiving. The holiday is spent at grandparents' homes, eating special Chosuk foods. The stores and restaurants were closed all day Sunday. It was peaceful for a city normally bustling to be quiet and still. It brought to mind Christmas day in



In the background beautiful mountains surround the traditional part of the city of Jeonju.

Canada — except here it was 30C. I think that Koreans love to spend time with their families.

My son has curly brown hair, bright eyes and an endearing smile. In Korea, this warrants celebrity status. Nearly 10 times a day we are stopped on the street to "beautiful baby, cute baby...". They squeeze his cheeks, pinch his chubby thighs and make him laugh. Being the proud mother that I am, I don't mind the attention, but I am worried he will develop a complex.

However, the children his age do not notice he is different. Fourteen-month-olds worldwide love to go down the slide in the

park.

I think there is great wisdom in this realization, although our cultures are different, the similarities greatly outweigh the differences.

Which leads me into my original thought, are Koreans really that much different than the average Canadian?

We all love to eat, drink and have fun with those we love. I thought our first two weeks in Korea would be harder than they were.

I imagined feeling lonely and disillusioned; instead, I feel connected already to this warm culture.

Teaching in South Korea is a

welcome education

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