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Role Model

(1) When I was in fourth grade, my family and I immigrated to the United States, to a small town in New Jersey named Ridgefield. Nobody in my family knew how to speak English very well. My father had a difficult time finding a job and my mother grew more and more nostalgic of home. I was terrified to go to school, and I avoided conversing with my fellow classmates. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to leave the comfortable life in South Korea just for my education. But when everything seemed to be out of place, we met Pastor Hong. Pastor Hong was a neighbor who lived a few blocks away from my house. As a Korean-American, he understood our difficulties of assimilating into a new culture and accepting American society as our own. He helped my family and me through numerous complications and established himself as our mentor. But most importantly, his admirable character and kindness solidified Pastor Hong as one of the most influential persons in my life.

(2) Having grown up in a rural region of South Korea, Ridgefield's suburban neighborhood did not seem so pleasant at first; however, Pastor Hong helped me to become familiar with the new city and to learn more about American culture. On Thanksgiving Day, which was shortly after I came to the United States, Pastor Hong invited my family to celebrate the holiday at his house. Even outside the house, I already smelled the wonderful food that was prepared. When my family and I settled ourselves at the dining table, Pastor Hong spoke the prayer and we began to eat. Pastor then started to explain, "Thanksgiving is when family gather

together and give thanks to God for the year's harvest." After he finished I remarked, "Are we family then?" "We are" he replied. He appeared so genuine when he said those words that for a second I believed that we were actually blood related. After hearing more about turkeys and other Thanksgiving details, Pastor Hong asked if anyone wanted to take a walk, and I was the only one to volunteer. As we walked around the small town, he told me about places, people, and etc. He talked about the local pizza shop, Sarges, which apparently had terrible service, the elementary school where his daughter was attending, the church he ministered, and the cross guard, Sally, who was so kind to everyone. When we made our way back to his house, I returned with more than just some general information about the town; I finally felt at home in Ridgefield and more profoundly, I viewed the days ahead more optimistically. In times of need, Pastor Hong was always there for my family; he served almost like a fatherly figure by guiding us through our first days in the United States.

(3) One of the characteristics that elicited great respect from Pastor Hong was his brilliance in talents. One Friday evening, I remembered that Pastor Hong led praise night at his church and decided to attend the meeting. Pastor Hong was at the front stage wearing a guitar. When the service started, I was blown out of my mind. His voice was amazing. But more amazing was his ability to play the guitar. His hands moved fast but intricately and strum the strings to make a beautiful harmony that accorded with his voice. When he began to sing "How Great Is Our God", I became speechless. After the singing was over, he gave a short sermon. As a frequent churchgoer, I have had many sermons but none like what I heard from Pastor Hong. In one of his analogy, Pastor Hong described a group of people who lived in a place where they could see the mountaintop only for a few weeks in a year because the clouds were obscuring it rest of the time. So when the clouds were covering the mountaintop, people were asked if the

mountaintop was still there, and the people responded that it certainly did. Pastor Hong then explained that we, the Christians, should be like those people because “Even though God cannot be seen like the mountaintop covered by clouds, we know that He exists because we have witnessed him.” In his sermons, Pastor Hong articulates the points that he wants to make and inserts powerful analogies to help the listener understand the Bible better. His brilliant talents in singing, speaking, and playing the guitar made me admire him and want to be more like him.

(4) Adding to his intellectual features, Pastor Hong was also benevolent in a way that he reassured and inspired people to do better even though it had no particular benefit to him. For instance, one day when Pastor Hong and I were walking together, we spotted a man lying on a bench. The man was wearing ragged clothes and his face was covered with a beard. I figured that he was probably homeless. As we were about to walk past him, the pastor stopped. Then, Pastor Hong started to shake the guy, and he woke up bewildered. “Are you okay?” was the first thing that the pastor asked him. The homeless man seemed rather indifferent and tried to go back to sleep. But Pastor Hong was persistent. When Pastor Hong finally got his attention, they began to talk. They started talking about trivial things. But as the homeless man started to open up to Pastor Hong more, he started telling him his rather complicated life story and how he ended up here. I thought there was not much credit to what the homeless man was saying, but Pastor Hong was very attentive. Afterwards, Pastor Hong encouraged the homeless man, telling him that if he starts working hard again, he could do much better. He spoke so eloquently that the homeless man showed tears! At the end, the homeless man seemed inspired; I witnessed his eyes turn brighter and his focus become sharper. The homeless man promised us that he would do well and begin afresh. I never found out what happened to him, but the incident taught me of how one’s altruism like that of Pastor Hong’s could possibly transform another.

(5) One would never guess that even someone like Pastor Hong had his own troubles and obstacles. One summer day, my family and the Pastor Hong's family went to a swimming pool together. When I saw Pastor Hong in his swim trunk, I was shocked because his right leg was almost crippled! The right leg looked so fragile and thin compared to the left leg, which was almost twice the size. It then occurred to me that Pastor Hong always wore long pants. When I approached him, he was absolutely casual and briefly explained that he got into a car accident many years ago. As we went into the water, all my attention was focused at Pastor Hong. As Pastor Hong was swimming, I noticed his scrawny leg trying to kick in the water. The splash between his left and right leg discretely varied and he struggled to swim in a straight line. Soon, everyone at the pool stopped what they were doing and watched Pastor Hong. When he made it from the shallow end to the deeper end of the pool, we were all consumed by awe. Despite of his disadvantage, he had made it across the pool. Sometimes I wonder, "If I had such a burden, would I be able to reach the other side?" This incident made me realize that as tenacious as Pastor Hong was, he did not let his obstacles hinder him from what he wanted to achieve.

(6) As a pastor and a leader of a church, Pastor Hong is creative and influential. One time, for the church retreat, we went to a place called Christian Academy. Unlike the forecast that said that the weather would be sunny, the rain poured down like there was no tomorrow. Because of this great amount of rain, the activities that were scheduled could not have been carried out. So for the first few hours, the church decided to wait awhile to see if the rain would stop. However, the rain didn't show any signs of ceasing. Everything felt so unorganized and the atmosphere grew gloomy. At that time Pastor Hong came up with an idea. He suggested that we should proceed through the activities outside despite the rain. At first people responded negatively, declaring that people will get sick, causing more troubles. However, Pastor Hong

used his personal charm and leadership to convince many people. He moved about the room nonchalantly, and humorously saying that maybe God sent the rain for a reason. So when everybody went out to engage in various activities such as soccer and dodgeball, they turned completely wet. But this rather had a positive effect! Everybody had so much fun in the rain and experienced bonding of strong community within the members of the church. In the end, I learned how one's leadership and influence could change what could be distressing into something delightful.

(7) The times that I have spent with Pastor Hong are very precious to me. He taught me many valuable lessons and influenced me to become who I am today. I still remember how for the first few months my family wasn't able to cope with American society. Pastor Hong helped us without asking for anything in return like when he inspired the homeless man to do better. His intelligence goes beyond expectations with almost every subject and his musical talent is almost as superb as those of professionals. The crippled right leg might seem like a considerable burden to many people but to Pastor Hong, it's only a small blemish. Also, his creativity and influence allow him to guide people in an effective way. Having so much time with Pastor Hong, now I want to incorporate his qualities of benevolence, kindness, intelligence, tenacity, and leadership into my own life. If I see a homeless man lying down on the street, I will help him up. If I face an obstacle in my life, I will push through and be strong. I will also grow up to be a person who others look up and who could influence them to make smart choices. Most importantly, I will always remember Pastor Hong, for he is the perfect reminder of what kind of man I want to be.