

CAF

Center for Ambitious Failure

KAISTian Story _ Winning essays from the CAF contest

How a New Perspective Can Open Our Eyes

DDD (KAIST School of Business and Technology Management)

My path so far has brought out my weaknesses time and time again. Nevertheless, I struggled to stay strong and steady throughout my journey, despite the many personal hardships.

My inner drive, which motivated me to stay focused on my goals, was out having a picnic, so I strived to maintain a steady bearing as I patiently waited for it to return.

If I lost sight of my path and motivation, everything would end in failure, but as long as I remembered that I had a place where I belonged – a place where I can shine and unlock my full potential – then I hadn't failed yet: I'm just on a brief picnic.

Sure, maybe I had a late start compared to others, or maybe I took a long detour on my career path, but instead of feeling down and depressed at the obstacles ahead of me, I recalled what my child told me: "gone on a picnic."

A screw was missing on a hinge of our living room cabinet, which made it unnatural trying to open and close the cabinet door due to its rattling. The screw had seemed a bit loose for a couple of days, so I tightened it with the hope that it would stay on the hinge. However, with the hinge still creaking, I felt a sudden rush of frustration taking over me as I yelled, "why is nothing in this house in working order!" My little child who was sitting down and watching me as I worked shared their two cents.

"Maybe the screw went on a picnic."

I had my second child ten years ago as I was finishing my master's degree. I also raised my first child while I was studying. At the time, I was looking forward to graduating and jumping into the workforce. After I had climbed the mountain that was my graduation thesis, I wanted to begin working at a research institute or a company as a working mom. However, I could not go around to attend job interviews while I was pregnant, and so I ended up spending five years as a housewife looking after my children without being able to progress my career. While parenting definitely comes with its joys, it can often mean that you become isolated from others. I could not eat what I wanted or sleep whenever I wanted, and each day went by doing chore after chore. I could feel the gap between myself and the rest of society widening by the day, and I felt depressed thinking that I had failed in my career pursuits.

But my child's words made me realize something: every screw has a place where it belongs. My child had faith that the screw would return to its place on the hinge once it returned from its picnic. I thought to myself that maybe I could look at my life in a similar manner: instead of viewing myself as a failure when it comes to my career, perhaps I was just on a small picnic in life just like this screw. From that point onward, I began preparing myself for work. I did some research to find out what I would need if I wanted to get a job, and I quickly learned that I needed to start by earning a good TOEIC grade. Once I tucked my children into bed every night, I took out my TOEIC workbooks to solve some sample questions. On the day before my TOEIC exam, I remember my child had a fever of nearly 40 degrees, and so I stayed up all night taking care of my child before going to take my exam. In addition to TOEIC grades, I worked on writing a good cover letter for my job application. After receiving countless messages notifying me that I had failed to make the cut in the document or interview stages, I finally received an offer from a research institute. While working there, I was even able to publish some SCI- and KCI-grade research papers based on ideas that I had. My daily routine included waking up my children, bustling to get ready for work, taking care of work tasks at the institute, and finding spare time to focus on my own individual research. Now, I am in the midst of taking on a new challenge since I left my job at the research institute to pursue a Ph.D. – after ten long years, I was finally back at school.

My path so far has brought out my weaknesses time and time again. Nevertheless, I struggled to stay strong and steady throughout my journey, despite the many personal hardships. My inner drive, which motivated me to stay focused on my goals, was out having a picnic, so I strived to maintain a steady bearing as I patiently waited for it to return. If I lost sight of my path and motivation, everything would end in failure, but as long as I remembered that I had a place where I belonged – a place where I can shine and unlock my full potential – then I hadn't failed yet: I'm just on a brief picnic. Sure, maybe I had a late start compared to others, or maybe I took a long detour on my career path, but instead of feeling down and depressed at the obstacles ahead of me, I recalled what my child told me: "gone on a picnic."

About a century ago in the United Kingdom, women who demanded voting rights were sent to prison.

* In many developing countries, those who are credited as the founding fathers today were deemed as terrorists 50~60 years ago. In the case of Korea, despite being oppressed by Japan for 35 years – during which Koreans were forced to learn the Japanese language and Imperial Japanese ideologies while the nation was being exploited – Korea has miraculously developed into an advanced economy that exports some of the world's most cutting-edge technologies. Look no further than how Samsung's Galaxy smartphones give even Apple's iPhone a run for its money. Barack Obama grew up with his mother after his parents divorced and has described how he went through some troubled teenage years, which even involved the use of drugs. But despite these struggles and the many challenges he faced living in a society riddled with racial discrimination, Barack Obama made history by becoming the first African-American to serve as the President of the United States. What seems impossible now can become a reality if we endure, overcome, and keep on fighting.

During the 3rd century BC, a Japanese monk who was deeply moved by Tao Te Ching (an ancient Chinese text) decided to translate the text into Japanese. It took him a decade to gather the funds necessary to translate, print, and publish the text. However, a plague had spread throughout Japan during this period, and so the monk spent the funds he gathered to help the people of Japan in this desperate time of need. Afterwards, he spent another decade regathering the funds. This time, an earthquake struck the country, and so the monk yet again donated the money to help others. After saving money for yet another decade, the monk finally managed to publish a translated version of Tao Te Ching. It took him a whopping 30 years to complete his 10-year project, but the Japanese people praised the monk and credited him for publishing Tao Te Ching not once, but three times.

* On February 6th, 1918, the British parliament passed the Representation of the People Act, which granted voting rights to all men 21 years and older and women 30 years and older who met certain criteria.

After raising four children, Wan-suh Park made her debut as a writer by submitting her first work - "The Naked Tree" - to a novel writing contest at the age of 40. While her work did win her an award at the contest, the judges predicted that Park would become an author that would soon disappear into obscurity after her first work. Park became worried about her future as a writer due to these opinions about her prospects, made even worse by the fact that she received no calls for additional publications. Nevertheless, Park endeavored onward to keep writing, regardless of whether anyone gave her recognition or not. Perhaps she thought of this period in her career as failure. But as she continued to write work after work, testing and broadening her creativity, she became more mature and steadfast just like the works she produced. In 2011, Park was awarded a Geumgwan Order of Cultural Merit from the president in recognition of her accomplishments in the cultural field.

Wife to a tenant farmer, housekeeper for wealthy farming families, and housewife of a rural family. These are titles that originally described Grandma Moses, who lived most of her life as an ordinary American woman raising 10 children. However, once she reached the age of 72, Moses could not continue sewing due to arthritis, and so she instead took up painting. Moses would then become a renowned artist for her bright and warm depictions of the American countryside, historical events, and cultural traditions. Many Americans fell in love with her works, a third of which were painted after Moses reached 100 years old. She started painting after suffering the losses of her husband and five of her ten children. Having lost so many loved ones, these were likely some of the darkest and most difficult times of her life. She may have believed that she had failed in life during these moments. However, instead of drowning in her struggles, Grandma Moses found new hope and joy in painting.

These are my heroes. Their amazing stories helped me find the courage to stay strong during my "picnic." With every light, there is a shadow. No one can shine without having gone through a period of darkness first, as what we perceive as 'brightness' is an illusion created by 'shadow.' We are able to stand here today thanks to our failures - in fact, both 'failure' and 'the present' are like living organisms that constantly change and move. Because of this, I think it is important to stay vigilant throughout life.