

Dosan Surf

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1. Please introduce yourself.

Ever since I came to America at age fifteen, I spent most of my life telling people about Korea, her pains and triumphs.

Korean presence in America dates back to late 1800s, and there are many stories to write about, and I have covered some of these stories in my books.

I also enjoy translating Korean literature into English, and I want to share with you the rich heritage Koreans have brought to America.

2. What activities are you engaged with Dosan family?

Whenever I am in Korea, I visit Dosan Park in Sinsadong in Seoul, where Dosan Ahn Chang-Ho and his wife, Lee Hye-ryon (also known as Mrs. Helen Ahn), are interred together side by side. I bow and think about them and the family they left behind. All of their five children have gone on to the other side, and I think they are together in heaven somewhere.

I have never met Dosan or his wife, Helen. I know them through Susan Ahn Cuddy, their first daughter born in Los Angeles, California, in 1915. I was honored to write her biography and learned so much through her. She was utterly open and honest about herself and the life around her. She shared her views and feelings with me, good or bad, and I

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was blown away by her candor. I had never seen a person like her.

She was very interested in people and wanted to know everything about me. Her curiosity was truly genuine, without judgment, and it felt natural to share things that I normally keep to myself. Sometimes, I wondered who was interviewing whom.

3. What was the story of Dosan family while interviewing Susan?

During my interviews with her, Susan talked a great deal about her father and mother. Their lives were defined by their pursuit of freedom and independence for the Korean people. Back in 1902, Dosan and Helen were on a ship to America. As the ship neared Hawaii, Dosan saw the islands and likened himself to an island in the middle of the vast ocean as he felt the open air, sunshine, and endless water. Thus, he gave himself a pen name, Dosan, meaning "island mountain."

Dosan is a metaphor for boundless freedom bestowed onto humankind by God and nature. Dosan saw how the Japanese empire stripped away liberty from the Korean people, and he gave his life to restore freedom for them.

4. What motivated Dosan family to start surfing?

It is impossible to know and appreciate the value of freedom until we have lost it. Through Dosan's work, we know freedom doesn't happen just because we want it. Freedom is something that we must work for and fight for, not take for granted.

It is up to us individuals to never lose sight of freedom, and everyone has a unique way to keep it close to our hearts. For instance, Philip (Flip) Ahn Cuddy, Susan's son, found a way to feel his freedom on the shore of the Pacific Ocean. His grandmother Helen took Flip to the rocky beach Point Fermin in San Pedro, south of Los Angeles. While Helen gathered abalones and crabs, six-year-old Flip played on the beach free as a bird, feeling the open air, the sun, sand, and water.

How fitting that Helen—who had stood with Dosan on the ship approaching the Hawaiian Islands—would be the one to introduce the vast ocean to her grandson. The sea inspired him with a sense of freedom the same way it had moved his grandfather Dosan. He felt free playing on the beach.

Then came Waikiki Beach. Flip went on a vacation with his parents when he was twelve years old, his first trip to Hawaii. His father, Frank, had been stationed in Hawaii as an intelligence officer for the US Navy during World War II, and the trip was a homecoming for him. He most likely wanted to take Susan around Oahu and revisit his old stomping grounds, just the two of them. Susan approached a beach boy and asked him to look after Flip for a day and teach him surfing. As the saying goes, Flip took to surfing like a duck to water, and the rest is history.

Surfing took him all over the world. He celebrated freedom that came with fresh air and water spraying on his face. For Flip, freedom was the common value wherever he went, regardless of language and cultural differences. As history would have it, he was the first to surf the waves in Korea in May 1991. No doubt, he was thinking about his grandfather as he celebrated the smell of freedom unique to Jeju Island.