

The Price of the American Dream

A Korean Family Stays in the U.S. for Their Son's Education

Taehwi Byun

BEFORE YOU READ: In your opinion, what is “the American Dream”?

My first impression of New York was “cold.” We arrived in January, a very cold month. All the people we met seemed to be cold, too, and unfriendly. Life in New York was difficult and lonely.

We came to the U.S. because of my husband's work. He is an aviation mechanic. We arrived just when the Covid-19 pandemic started. I thought,

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“Should we go back to Korea?”

But we stayed, and we survived. Now my 11-year-old son loves the U.S. He wants to stay here more than me or my husband.

My husband and I wondered

what we should do. We asked, “Is it right to move for our child's sake?” We like the schools here. We do not like the overheated and competitive education that our child would get in Korea. Eventually, we decided to stay. My husband got the aviation maintenance license that he needs to keep working here. I am trying to learn English. And my son is studying Korean. I don't want him to forget his first language. I want him to be able to speak to me in Korean.

For so many immigrants, their “American dream” is the success of their children. The same is true for my family. But there is a cost. During the time I spend raising my child here, I can't see my parents getting older. That is the hardest part of life for an immigrant. I want the American dream, but the price is not being able to take care of my old parents, and sometimes feeling lonely.



AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what is “the American Dream” and what “price” has she paid for it?
2. Read the article on p. 31 by Carolina Salas. Compare and contrast the stories by these two moms. What is the same and what is different?

Taehwi Byun is a student in the ESOL class at the City College of New York/CUNY in Great Neck, NY. She is a housewife and mother. When she learns enough English, she wants to find a job or volunteer work at the local library. She wants a new name for herself, beyond housewife and mother.