

## Celebration of Youth

### J JoongAng Ilbo

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— **JANG Sung Kyu** A recent article stated that the number of young people aged 19 to 29 who reported “experiencing depression lasting for at least two weeks in one year” rose from 9.3 percent in 2012 to 14.9 percent in 2015. That number is apparently greater than the one for people in their fifties, which was the largest percentage in the past. This shows how difficult things are for young people these days. Today, we are going to hear people talking frankly about how they overcame prejudice and limitations to carve out a life for themselves as youths.

— **WON Heeryong** I was born in Jungmun, Jeju Island, and lived somewhere where we did not even have electric lighting until I was in my third year of middle school. By the time I was in my second year of elementary school, my parents had tried selling rubber shoes and pesticides, and running a bookstore. They had ended up going under, and we had to load everything up into a handcart and move in the dead of night. Farming back then was so difficult that I thought about ways to get away from it, and I opted for studying. Since we had a bookstore, there were a lot of books at home. I developed more of an interest in studying, and that interest turned into an

obsession. I was so obsessed that as the years went on, I ended up ranked first nationwide. But I had a friend who did not like studying and started digging holes for orange trees. He enjoyed farming and he is now ten times richer than I am. Being a genius does not mean you are good at studies. Even in my case, I was more of a workhorse than a genius. And even being a genius means you are just a genius at one thing, not everything. People talk about the “10,000 hour rule.” They say that if you want to master a particular field, you need 10,000 hours of repeated effort and self-development before you can get there. You can definitely become a success if you put in those 10,000 hours and hold on to that obsessive concentration and attention to detail.

— **JUNG So Young** I became a swimmer in my third year of elementary school. I was the head swimmer in middle school, and I won a medal at a national championship. Then I ended up in a slump, and at my coach’s suggestion I switched to fin swimming. A coach from Russia was brought in only six months prior to the national championships, but I still ended with the third place finish. I got over my slump through exercise. But I did not have a teacher, and

there was a situation with the association where they ended up not doing fin swimming anymore. All through high school, I had done nothing but sports, and after giving that up, I kind of lost my way. I gained so much weight that I became shy about meeting people. I never went outside, and I became depressed. My mother immediately said to me that I should be a haenyeo, woman diver. At my mother’s suggestion—really, it was sort of forced on me—I put on my wetsuit and I got started. I did not collect a single shell my first day. On the second day, I found seven. A few days later, I saw an actual abalone, and I dove eight times just to check if it was indeed an abalone. The moment I knew it was, I felt like I had won the lottery, like my heart was going to burst. When you are a haenyeo, you are often putting your life on the line. One time, I collected eight turban shells from the sea floor in a single dive, and I forgot to count my breaths. Feeling my heart not pound was scarier than not being able to breathe. That was when I really sensed that you should not be too ambitious, that you should just do as much as you can. I have been doing it for seven years as of this year, and I still have a long way to go. But if I could go back and do it over again, I would still be a haenyeo. The other haenyeo may be able to relate—there is an addictive quality, where whenever you take a break from it for a while you find your way back to the sea. I may have been born my mother’s daughter, but now I am a daughter of the sea, and I plan to keep on being a haenyeo for as long as I can. I hope other people will give us more recognition.

— **JANG Jane** Around my fifth year of elementary school, I made up my mind that I was going to be a singer. I grew up in a strict household where I did not get a lot of praise. One day I went to a singing room with one of my female relatives and she told me that I sang well. I was so happy to hear it that I started dreaming of becoming a singer. My parents were against this decision, because I did not have a God-given gift for it. It is really important to listen to other people’s advice but in the end the choice is always yours alone. So I really believed in myself. I

tried to judge things objectively, and I came up with a very specific plan. I actually was not even planning on going to high school, but my parents got so angry that I ended up going before I finally talked them into letting me drop out. The school I was attending was not a right environment for me to pursue my dream. Then I thought that I could not become a singer. I went up to Seoul at the age of 18, and I ended up stuck just practicing constantly. People around me said that my voice is too strange to be a singer and an acoustic guitar is not popular so it would never work out well. However, I trusted myself and something amazing happened. At a TV Show named *Superstar K* who heard me playing the guitar, and they loved it. Follow your heart, even if you have to endure some tough days. It is important to take advice from people around you but you will have a happier youth if you listen more to your guts, your own heart. You may have some trials along the way, but they are not trials that you are ever going to regret.

— **YOON Dae Hyun** To be happy, you have to know your own heart. My friends are not all actors, but they live like actors. The movie my friends are shooting is called “my life.” So when is it that film actors get to watch their own films? At the previews. You cannot watch your movie when you are filming it. You have to take the time to look at your life from a viewer’s perspective, rather than that of the lead actor’s. That way, you can see what kind of things you like, and you can live a happy life doing the things you like. You can figure out what you like by reading books, watching movies, listening to good music, and hearing advice and stories from people who have already lived their lives. I hope all of you will experience a wide range of culture, natural environment, and good stories, so that you can discover a precious dream that is all your own.

#### Keywords

youth, “10,000 hour rule,” conviction, heart