

Si-Won Revisited

BY JOHN GEMMILL

August 3, 1991, began in Seoul for the Canadian contingent to the 17th World Scout Jamboree in Korea as another day of pre-jamboree training. Early in the afternoon, Dwayne Smith, a Scout from Vancouver, suffered a broken ankle and was taken to a local hospital for treatment. While there, two very small children arrived for emergency surgery. From that day on, Si-Won's future was linked to Scouts Canada.

Si-Won, two years and a few months old, and Jin-Ha, about four years old, were playing in the family garden that afternoon. Their play was interrupted when an automobile crashed through a fence into the garden, striking the two small sisters and causing horrific injuries. Jin-Ah suffered very serious injuries to her legs, but Si-Won lost both of her legs close to her hips in the accident.

Dwayne Smith watched the emergency treatment and decided that Scouts Canada should undertake assistance for the injured children. He spoke with the Canadian contingent and with the approval of the children's parents, the National Office of Scouts Canada and Major-General Herb Pitts, Contingent Leader, Project Si-Won/Jin-Ha was born. Later, on the World Jamboree site, the story of the injured children and the involvement of Scouts Canada became of great interest to the other contingents, which also began fund raising on their behalf.

Approximately \$20,000 was raised on the Jamboree site, and later in Canada, with the funds being held by the National Office in trust for the children to be used for their treatment and future needs. Jin-Ah recovered (although she has residual permanent disabilities affecting her walking). The recovery of Si-Won, and her future, lay in the hands of Scouts Canada.

The Quebec Council arranged for Si-Won and her mother to travel to the Shriner's Hospital in Montreal for free medical treatments, and fittings of new prostheses as she grew. Quebec Council co-ordinated support with the hospital and the Korean community in Montreal for home stay support for the family's many visits to Montreal.

As a young child, Shi-Won lived in Seoul, and went to elementary school alone, with her mother assisting on rainy days. Her teachers and friends supported her, even to carrying her on their backs at school picnics. At the end of grade five, her family moved to another city, where she developed new friends, and took a greater part in the school activities, although with difficulty from her disabilities. After grade six, she chose home schooling as walking became more painful. She worked alone at home on the national qualifying examinations for middle school, and high school graduation, which she passed in one year. By age 15, she qualified for college or university, two to three years earlier than most girls who remained in school. Si-Won said, "This is quite an achievement in our country, especially for a girl who has tremendous difficulties in walking around. The whole family was exhilarated."

Si-Won's success continued as she attended the University of Melbourne for a year to improve her English language proficiency skills. At present, she is attending college in Korea leading to her



Photo: Maggie Shaddick

While at the World Scout Conference, Si-Won shares a laugh with John Neysmith, John Gemmill, and Chief Commissioner Glenn Armstrong.

professional qualification as an interpreter, and a valuable future career.

As Si-Won is now fully grown, it has been possible to have her fitted with the newest, and best German-made prostheses for her disability, which should last for many years. The remaining funds in the project were applied on their purchase, and the project was closed.

Si-Won said, "Of course, I had gone through innumerable difficulties in life, but I still believe I had more happy moments. I thank Scouts Canada deep in my heart for giving me a new life in the form of prosthesis, to rehabilitate myself, and encourage me to live a normal life."

Kim Kyu-Young, past Secretary-General of the Korea Scout Association, and past Regional Director of the Asia-Pacific Region, was the principal liaison between Scouts Canada and the family. He arranged for Si-Won and her mother to come to the 2008 World Scout Conference at Jeju Island, Korea, as guests of the Korea Scout Association.

It was a highly emotional time, as well as a distinct honour and privilege for John Neysmith and myself (as the only members of the Scouts Canada, 17th World Scout Jamboree Contingent present at the World Scout Conference), to meet and talk with Si-Won and her mother again after so many years. Si-Won is a delightful young woman who has succeeded magnificently against nearly overwhelming obstacles, and today looks forward confidently to an active, professional, and fully independent future.

Si-Won has truly done her best. X

— John A. Gemmill, Deputy Contingent Leader, Scouts Canada
17th World Scout Jamboree Contingent, Korea. Member and Vice-Chairman, World Scout Committee, 2002–2008.

Portions of this article have been excerpted from the article "The Story of Si-Won" by Bob Butcher and Ieno Wong, The Leader Magazine, December, 2003.