

관점 PERSPECTIVE

By: Gloria Baek

"This is a letter from me to you...."

I gripped my bag on my shoulder as I made my way alongside the tiled floors, with Blackpink's "Stay" blasting through my AirPods. I felt my arms tense up as I headed towards the gym for practice before I arrived.

Reaching the door, I pushed it wide open, eyes scanning the room. However, my teammates were lined up in front of the coach, hands behind their backs.

As I dropped my bag off on the floor, a single question went through my head. **What's going on?**

"As you know, ladies, we had a full season planned ahead of us this school year. You all worked hard over the summer, practicing daily. However...." He glanced at each one of our faces. "I'm sorry to say, the school has decided to cut the girls' volleyball team this year."

What?

I stared at him in shock, eyes feeling warm. I taste the saltiness on my lips.

My dreams. My goals. What am I going to do now? I was already a junior. I had plans to get a scholarship to college through volleyball. What am I supposed to do now? It's already so late into the semester.

Coach Lee crossed his arms. "Ladies, I am also devastated by this. Unfortunately, there is nothing I can do."

"Why? What was the reason for this? Why aren't they cutting both teams? We have been winning more competitions than the boys' team! This is unfair..." Yuna spoke out, arms crossed, pursing her lips.

"Calm down, please. As you may have heard in recent news, our district has been trying to reduce the number of sports programs because of the recent budget cuts by the federal government. Our province already struggled to receive funds from them. So, to adjust to the lack of funds within the school budget, the school board decided to cut some of the teams here..." I turned my attention to the floor, head

ringing with tears blurring my vision.

The bell rang, and as I packed my things up, my head began to throb. I was still in disbelief, as the memory from yesterday resurfaced. I headed home, almost missing my stop as I stumbled and pushed my way through the crowds of students on the train.

As soon as I entered the front door, I saw my parents and sister silently sitting at the table.

"Min-seo, come back downstairs when you're done washing up." I nodded, quickly rushing upstairs. As I headed downstairs to sit next to my sister, I felt a strange sense of tension.

"Min-seo... your mom lost your job."

I looked over to my dad. "What? What do you mean?" My heart began to beat faster, palms clenching as I felt my nails digging into my skin.

"They laid her off, and a couple of her coworkers, because of the budgeting crisis. Thankfully, I was able to keep my job but..." He glanced at my mom. She nodded, and he said the words I've never expected to hear. "I'm so sorry, my daughter, but we can't afford to pay the fees for your travel team anymore."

Overwhelmed, I couldn't do anything but stare. The sound of my parents' voices started drifting and my head started pounding even deeper into my skull.

Is this what my life has come to? Disappointment? Pain? At that moment, my heart felt heavy, like a stone sinking underwater.

But I had thought to myself: I had hope. I still had my school team. It's still possible, it's still worth it.

Now, I don't have anything. What has my life come to? Is my dream worthless now?

Slumping down on the table, I began to let it out.

"Thank you for listening to my lecture on Sport Event Planning & Operations. Just as a reminder, the women's national volleyball team is coming, as guest speakers for the Sports Management Department. Have a good rest of your day." Professor Lee dismissed us as she left the lecture hall.

**Now, I don't have anything.
What has my life come to?
Is my dream worthless now?**

I blink back the memory, at the professor's mention of the volleyball team. Reaching for my phone, I immediately set a reminder to notify me every day until the day of the event.

I pack up my things as the bell rang, humming the national anthem.

"Hey, Min-seo! Did you finish this week's assignment? I still haven't touched it yet..." Anna trailed off as she saw my excited smile. "You can't wait to see them too, right? I've always wanted to meet them..."

I link my arms around hers as we continue chatting, as we both head towards the gates. I check my phone and see a notification pop-up about my lunch with my mom. At that moment, I spotted her waving at me from her car. "Min-seo! Hurry up and come! I have our lunch waiting for us inside."

I waved bye to my friends as I climbed into the car.

My mom starts unpacking our lunch, asking me, "How have you been doing, my daughter? Everything's good? College is good?" She handed over my lunchbox, and I opened it, the smell of tonkatsu filling the air.

"Yes, it's been really exciting! Actually, the women's national volleyball team is visiting our school. Professor Lee apparently had some connections with them..."

As she listened, she then asked me

the same question she's been asking every year. "Are you happy?"

As I chewed on my tonkatsu, I reminisced on the past four years.

"Yes, I finally am. But you know it wasn't easy. You saw me going through so much confusion and loss for the past four years." I looked back at my mom. With a small smile, I continued, "But my dream of being part of the women's national volleyball team is in the past. I have a new dream now, to become an intentionally renowned sports manager."

My mom opened up the side dish as well, the smell of kimchi wafting up. "I'm happy you think that way, Min-seo. I've always been worried about how much you pushed yourself with volleyball back in high school." She gave some of the kimchi to me, while taking a bite of her own tonkatsu.

"To be honest I definitely miss it. The feeling of spiking the ball over the net, the euphoria of winning. I mean, I thought playing volleyball was going to be my entire career. But at a certain point I realized that my life doesn't have to be a one-way path. I can always create a new life for myself. At the end of the day it comes down to this: How you think about your life changes your life."

How you think about your life changes your life.

My mom's eyes welled up in tears.

"엄마¹, why are you crying? Please don't." I hand her tissues to wipe her eyes.

"It's because I know how much you had to go through. I still remember how you stayed in your rooms for days, not even coming out..."

I smiled. "Well I have a new dream now. I'll start with managing teams in the district and move my way up!"

She laughed and we both smiled.

"But enough about me. 엄마, how's your new job been? Good?"

Her eyes sparkled as she began talking about her new co-workers and her joy of being able to support the family again after a while. We finished eating and as we cleaned up, we said our goodbyes to each other.

As I headed back to class, the stone in my heart disappeared for the very first time.

Gloria Baek is a junior majoring in Music Performance and Politics. She was inspired to write this piece by people who didn't give up in pursuing their dreams regardless of the circumstances.

¹ "Mom" in Korean