

The Jeon-Kim Family



“I am thankful.”

These were the words of Gyeong Hak Jeon when he learned he and his wife, Ok Ban Kim, were accepted into the Habitat for Humanity program. But words were not enough. Gyeong cried tears of joy.

The Jeon-Kim family’s path to home-ownership has been more of a journey than the average Habitat family. Political refugees from North Korea, the family has endured perilous times as they made their escape to America.

In North Korea, Gyeong was a high ranking military general and Ok was a university professor. No one really owns anything in a Communist country, so the family lived in government-provided housing. Gyeong’s job involved trade with China and Russia, which allowed him to leave the country. When it was

discovered he received a Bible and a movie from a foreign missionary, his life was in jeopardy. To avoid death, Gyeong quickly fled to China, having no choice but to leave Ok and his son, Jin, behind. He gained political asylum at the American Embassy in Thailand after nearly two years on the run. In 2009, he arrived in Orlando, Florida where he had a distant relative to help him. Gyeong paid a broker to rescue Ok and Jin, and with help from the embassy in Thailand, they were reunited in Florida in early 2011.

The family moved to Tampa where both Gyeong and Ok are employed in dental labs where he creates dental molds and she does finishing (coloring) work. Seventeen-year-old Jin is a sophomore at Leto High School and is in the ROTC with the goal of serving in the U.S. Air Force.

The family is grateful for their new life.

고맙습니다

(Korean for “thank you.”)

“Home means belonging to the U.S.,” said Gyeong. Their physical home in Tampa is a tiny two-bedroom rental house that has an unresponsive landlord and several maintenance issues including malfunctioning plumbing and air conditioning. They live simply and frugally with over half of their modest income going to rent.

An affordable Habitat home will help ease their financial burden and provide an opportunity they’ve never had – ownership and control of their own destiny. And a Habitat home will provide the stability the Jeon-Kim family has longed for as they rebuild their lives in the country they now thankfully call home.