



the clear waters and swarms of fish lulling us into holiday bliss. Then, on the final night while preparing for our next leg of the journey, I carelessly dropped my laptop like a guillotine onto the big toe of my right foot. To say it hurt more than labor is no exaggeration.

The children nursed me with pillows and ice as my toe turned increasingly blue, the pressure behind the nail mounting. The following day, our itinerary limped us to Hong Kong. On arrival the hotel doctor insisted I go to an outpatient clinic. I questioned his authority, knowing that hospital queues would cut into precious time exploring one of my favorite cities.

Instead I turned the situation into an adventure of sorts, by hauling the kids around in the stifling heat for some rudimentary operation equipment. From a hardware stall in the street market, we bought a packet of nails. From a convenience store, we bought a cigarette lighter. From the hotel mini bar, I retrieved a small bottle of vodka for use as antiseptic. Then I heated the nail and slowly skewered a hole into my throbbing, black-and-blue toenail. My seven-year-old peeked around the corner of the bed, unable to look, while my three-year-old relished seeing the blood slowly bubbling up through the small hole and the evident relief on my face. He lovingly applied a bandage and within the hour we were back on our feet exploring the city.

The curative power of kimchi

When I woke to stabbing stomach pains one morning in small-town South Korea, I knew something was awry. My boss at the language academy took me to see the doctor at the only clinic in town. Local farmers awaiting checkups while visiting for market day buzzed at the sight of the English teacher doubled over in pain. My outlook grew grimmer with each wave of cramps.

It darkened more when the clinic's resident, the chief doctor's nephew, barged into the waiting room, holding X-rays and a Korean-to-English dictionary. He and my boss flipped the pages back and forth, talking rapidly, before my boss turned to me saying, 'You need a cut', drawing his finger along his side. He handed me the dictionary, poking at the word 'appendix'.

Reactions swirled through my mind. Are they going to operate on me here? Should I go to Seoul? Should I go home?? Suddenly, in came the chief doctor, waving more X-rays and barking commands. He grabbed the dictionary, flipped some pages and handed it back to me, pointing at a new word: 'constipation'. 'Too much rice,' he said to me. 'Eat more kimchi'. That was the day I realized why my students said 'kimchi is good for health'.