

I have had atopic dermatitis all my life, and while my condition has improved significantly due to a healthy diet, regular exercise, and self-care, I still experience occasional itchiness—something I have come to accept.

Reflecting on my journey, I realize that my condition has shaped me in various ways. For instance, I learned to incorporate it into my life rather than letting it dominate my experiences.

However, it wasn't always easy. Back then, I always wore long sleeves and avoided shorts, even in the summer, due to blisters and scabs. When I studied at Manchester, where it rained most of the week, inflammation easily flared up.

There were times when my condition worsened, and I yearned to return to my family in my hometown, a suburb about 1.5 hours from Seoul. While it may not be considered a fancy or well-developed area, it offers clean air. When I moved there 22 years ago, rice paddies filled the landscape.

Ironically, it was this very environment that fueled my desire to explore the world. Although my hometown's beauty provided stability and a natural setting, living there all my life often felt restrictive—like being on an “island,” a gated community. As a child, the transportation options were limited, with trains to Seoul running once every hour.

Inspiration also came from my father, an international businessman, who brought home stories from his travels. He was away four days a week and took thousands of red-eye flights. Whenever he left on business trips, I imagined with anticipation the stories he'd tell me about.

Yet another driver was that I was a bookworm—dreaming about the outside world as I read stories about foreign countries and characters who too managed to move beyond to realize dreams. As such, I literally “lived” at the library. While in the military, I read any book I could get hold of—I must have read over 150 by the time I was honorably discharged (books remain my favorite pastime).

Earlier this year, at the age of 29, I was diagnosed with adult ADHD. This revelation was both surprising and enlightening. It shed light on many of the struggles I had faced throughout my

life without understanding why—the restlessness in my small hometown, my insatiable appetite for reading, and the challenges in maintaining focus amid a whirlwind of ideas.

Looking back, I realize that my constant thirst for new experiences and knowledge was likely fueled by undiagnosed ADHD. My mind was always racing, seeking stimulation and novelty. Although confined in that little neighborhood most of my life, I grew up to become an individual with big dreams. As of today, I have realized many of my dreams. For one, I could pursue my passion for studying in Canada, the UK, and now the U.S.

Likewise, I'm so grateful for my father's sacrifice; he worked tirelessly for our family. During his busiest times, he could barely participate in family dinners due to business meetings. I can only second guess how challenging it must have been for this man who wanted to spend every moment with his family.

As I pieced together his story, it became clear that my initial assumptions were correct. Despite being a man of few words, I remember witnessing his tears. He left a prestigious job at a conglomerate to start his own business from scratch. Sometimes, he faced rejection or verbal abuse from clients. Even during holidays, he carried his business phone for overseas calls—now I understand the weight of his emotions a little more.

He did all of this for us, his two children. He endured these hardships to give us the opportunity to live in a broader world. My younger brother also studied in the U.S. thanks to him and is currently training to be a pilot—yes, to see the world.

Because of my father's sacrifices, I felt compelled to excel and persevere through challenges. I always put forth my best efforts in every position I held. As an international student, I earned scholarships throughout my education to help with tuition. While working as a researcher in college, I managed my studies alongside volunteering. Although my body often felt exhausted after long nights of work, the reward was worth it.

I also prioritize enjoying life—my parents' number one priority was, and still is our happiness. In high school in Canada, I performed at Roy Thomson Hall with the school choir and took part in activities like canoeing and skiing. During college in the UK, I sang in a rock band, organized Korean cultural events, and forged lifelong friendships. As a student, I often saved

money to travel, and even now, I explore the U.S. with friends or alone. This is why I strive to enjoy my life fully.

Upon reflection, I've learned many things. Although there is no "cure" for atopic dermatitis, I have developed skills to manage it effectively. Sometimes it relapses, but with exercise and dietary control, I maintain balance and manage my health.

Understanding my ADHD has also been a journey of self-discovery. Just as with my atopy, I have come to accept ADHD as part of who I am. I am actively developing strategies to manage it and feel more balanced and in control than ever.

As a result, my body and soul are much healthier.

This improvement made me realize that if I can manage atopy and navigate ADHD, I can overcome almost anything—like stage fright. In the past, I suffered from stage fright due to my atopy and was afraid to present in front of others. Now, however, I confidently sing in front of hundreds.

I also have developed a strong sense of empathy. Although the forms of pain I have experienced are unique, having struggled with atopy and ADHD my whole life enables me to understand the challenges others face. That's why I want to help people by engaging in work that has a positive social impact.

Above all, I learned important life principles from my father. Inspired by his sacrifices, I refused to give up in the face of adversity. I embraced challenges and grew into the person I am today.

Who am I? I am someone who has discovered a few formulas for overcoming challenges and, at the same time, has felt that motivation is the most powerful *why*.