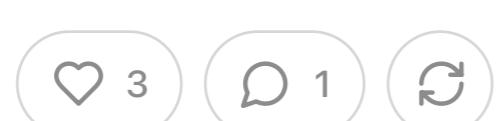


The Journey Begins!

Graduating TPS, Olmsted Orientation, and the start of language school.

JUN 26, 2022



The last two months have been a blur, but hey, that's good practice for what the next few years will bring! I had to graduate my Space Test Pilot School program first while trying to push the US Space Force system along to cut my orders, which proved to be an unnecessarily challenging process (more on that later). As for the school, I'm incredibly thankful that I was able to attend and help improve it for future iterations as it matures, and I look forward to working with the other graduates in future assignments throughout my career.



Prepping for the capstone tests



TPS Space Test Course 22-1

As class leader, I had the honor of giving a graduation speech too. I was nervous and fumbled a few times, but it was a privilege to give my thoughts on the Space Force's test culture and the impacts the school had on us. I was also thankful to get more public speaking practice in a setting like this because that doesn't happen often.



Graduation speech

Now that the school was done, I had to really focus on getting ready for language school. I started pushing for orders as soon as I knew where and when I'd be studying Korean, but the bureaucratic hurdles with the USAF and USSF assignment teams never fail to surprise me. I ended up finally elevating the lack of progress to the right person 2 weeks before my move across the country, and once I got the right person, everything was done within the same day. Such is live in the military...

As I only had 2 weeks before my move, the military told me to figure out the move on my own as there was a massive backlog for normal summer moves. I packed up all my belongings by myself and loaded up a POD and hoped my plan would work and that I wouldn't lose too much money on this move 🙌. The POD left and I drove across the country to Washington DC in time for the Olmsted Orientation weekend, thankful to be done with that mess.



My guide

Orientation weekend was an absolute blast. We started off on Friday night at a local bar for an icebreaker happy hour to meet the Olmsted Foundation staff and all the new scholars and spouses. The caliber of this group of scholars surpassed my already high expectations, and I feel honored to be included in such a group. This year, 19 officers were selected from the the six branches of the military to go study in countries around the world. I happen to be the first scholar selected from the Space Force, so this made for an easy conversation starter as everybody was curious about this new branch.

The next day was full of informational sessions about what the next few years would look like. We went into the ins and outs of how to navigate our service specific challenges, how to get into our foreign universities, how we'll get paid and do our unusual taxes, and learned all the benefits that this unique scholarship provides. The reality of this program finally hit most of us on this day too. I talked to many scholars during my preparation, but the true goals of this program became much clearer during this orientation day and my excitement grew even higher.



Gala fit

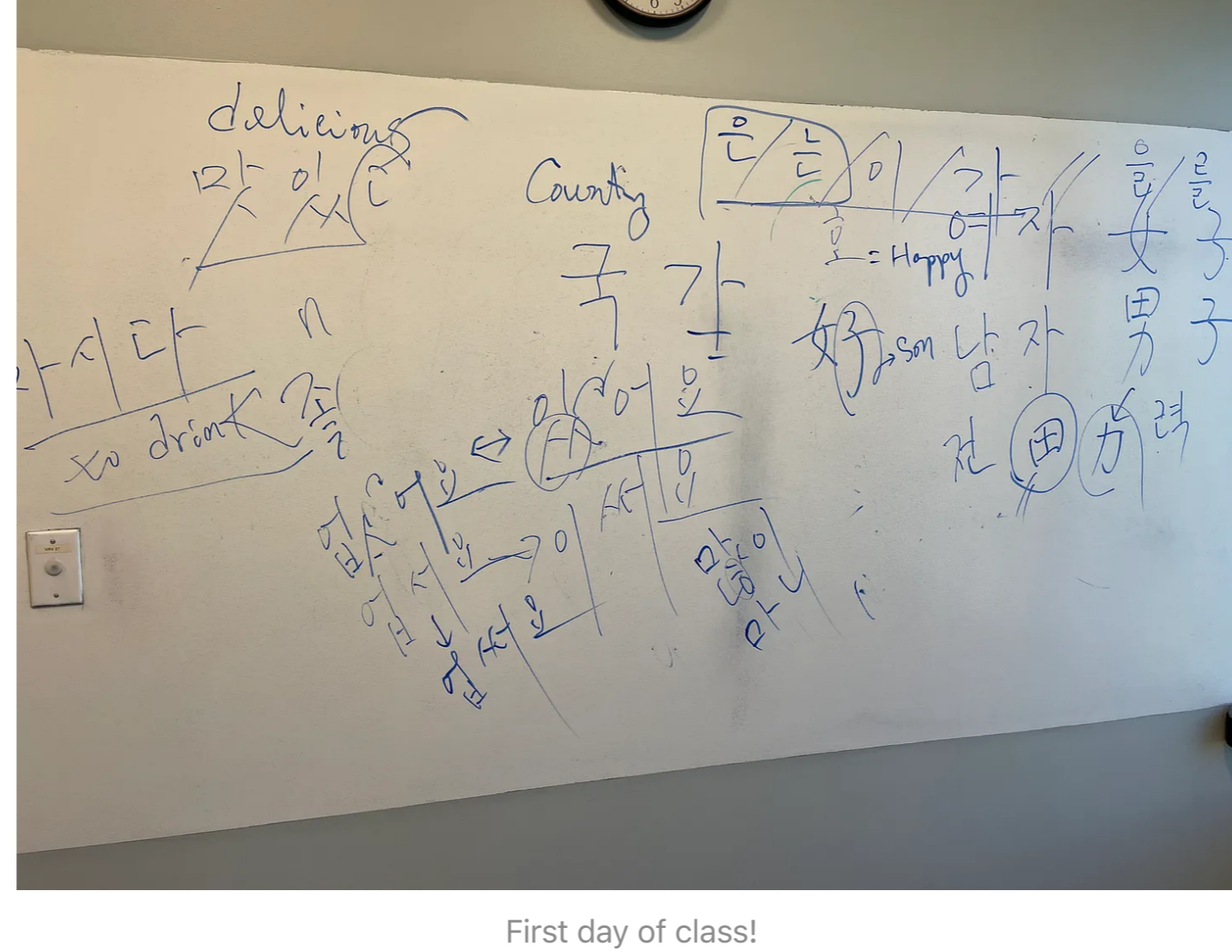
Following the orientation activities, we got all dressed up for the evening gala at The Anderson House, an incredible mansion downtown that has held this gala for many years. There, we wine and dined with prior scholars and got mentorship from scholars who studied in our respective cities or regions. The gala attendees were truly impressive! Retired generals and admirals everywhere, and scholars who've gone onto become C-suite executives or otherwise dominate their fields. Common to everyone though was their passion and gratitude for what this program gave them.



Olmsted Scholar Class of 2023

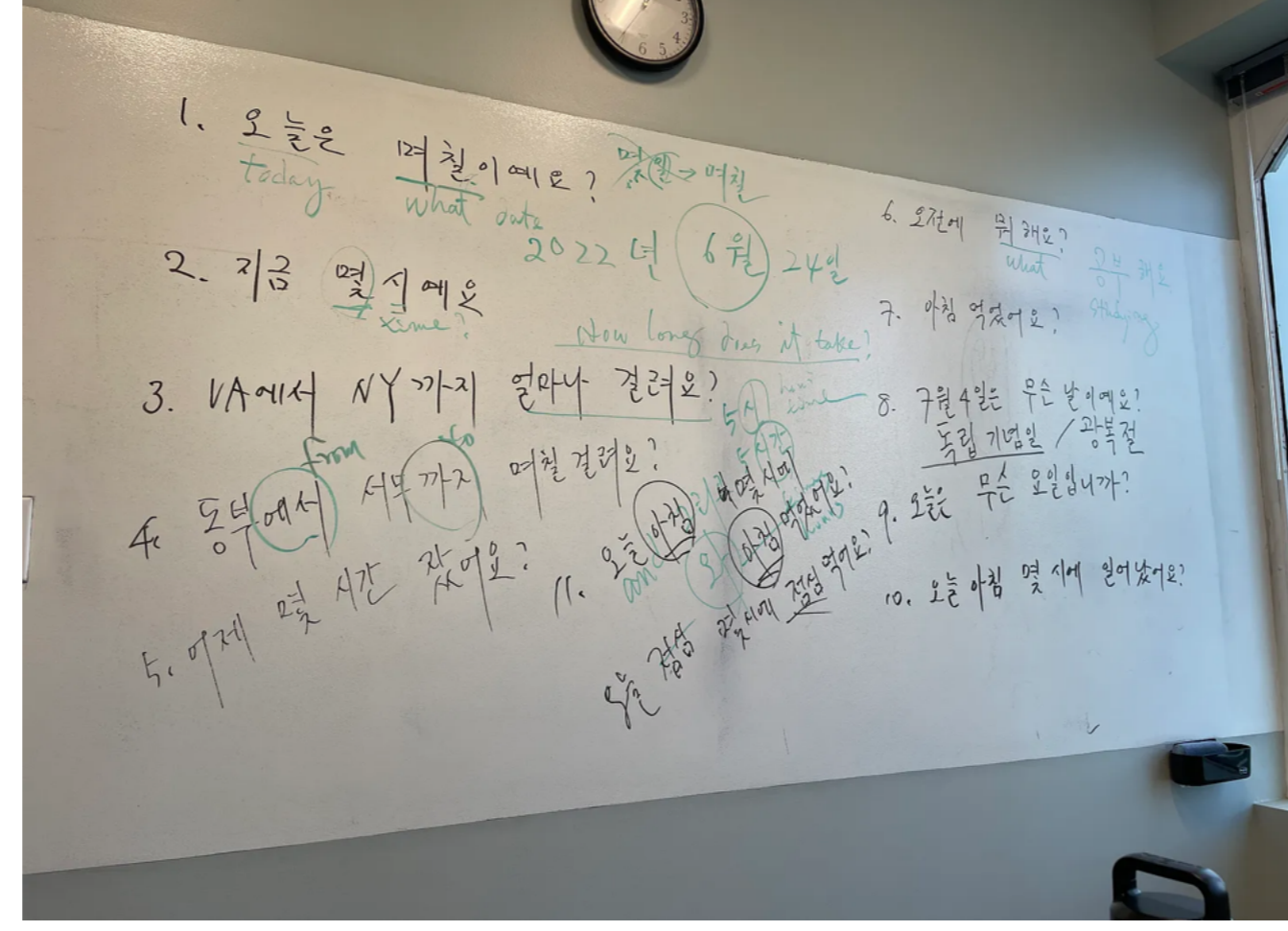
Following the gala, I moved into my apartment a few blocks away, unloaded the POD with my dad's help (thanks Dad!), and explored my new home for the next year.

Maybe it's because I'm coming from Edwards Air Force Base in the middle of the desert, but I'm absolutely in love with my neighborhood in DC. I don't need a car for anything, and there is an endless supply of things to do. I can take a 1-stop subway ride to my language school or get to school by bike in less than 20 minutes along a river trail. This is my kind of lifestyle! I can't even imagine how lively downtown Seoul will be.



First day of class!

Language school began on 13 June at a contractor facility that caters to diplomats, State Department officials, and some military officers. They provide 1-on-1 instruction at my pace with a Korean-born teacher for 6.5 hours a day, and the rest is up to me. Two weeks in, I feel that I have a good system down for self-study before class and in the evenings to keep making the progress I want to make without burning out. Thankfully, learning Korean is the only thing I need to focus on or care about for the next year which is a true luxury.



Two week review

It only took a few days to get comfortable reading and writing the Korean alphabet (Hangul, 한글), and each day I'm getting faster and faster at reading out loud and catching all the sound change rules. Reading my instructor's handwriting can sometimes be a challenge though...

Anyway, that's enough for now. I'll go into more about what makes 한글 interesting and how I'm learning Korean in future posts. I just wanted to write down some of what the last month entailed before I forget it all!

그럼, 다음 번까지!

-Sean 드림