



Barbara Zitwer signs an autograph on her book, "The Korean Book of Happiness: Joy, Resilience and The Art of Giving," last week at her home in New York. Courtesy of Barbara Zitwer

Her first encounter with South Korea was like love at first sight.

Since then, she has befriended Korean authors and represented them in the global market.

Zitwer discovered Han Kang, Shin Kyung-sook and many other Korean fiction writers and helped them and their works go global. Her agency has served as a career launchpad for several talented Korean novelists.

"I have had so many memorable, transformative, beautiful experiences in Korea and so it was quite easy for me to write everything I had experienced there," she said.

Among others, she said tranquility and feeling safe are two leading causes that made her feel at home in Korea.

"I can walk late at night alone and feel tranquil and safe," she said. "And I realize how stressful life in the U.S. and Europe is now because of wars, bombings and mass killings every other day in the U.S., it's just a very violent time I live in. But in Korea, even with North Korea so close, I feel calm, quiet and safe."

"The Korean Book of Happiness" has now been translated into Korean and will be released in

Barbara Zitwer was thrilled at a wave of positive feedback about her book, "The Korean Book of Happiness: Joy, Resilience and The Art of Giving," which has been on sale in physical and online bookstores since March last year.

The author said she felt rewarded because, through the book, she was able to fulfill her self-claimed role as an honorary ambassador for Korean culture, adding her literary effort paid off.

"With the serious interest in Korean pop culture, BTS and BLACKPINK, films like 'Parasite' and Netflix series 'Squid Game,' South Korea's soft power has captured the world," she said in a recent email interview with The Korea Times.

She said her book helped South Korea widen the global fanbase for hallyu or the Korean wave.

"Many people (in the U.S.) don't actually know much about Korea itself. Readers tell me they are planning trips to Korea and love the easy-to-make recipes. Many readers are cooking Korean food and loving it," she said.

"The Korean Book of Happiness" is about her first-hand experiences of South Korea, a country she said she is in love with, offering "good-to-know" information about the country and its culture for first-time visitors or those who know little about it.

In the witty and plainly written book, the New Yorker narrates her discoveries of Korean culture, some of which she learned through laughable mistakes, and Koreanness that people outside of the country would never know without physically going to the country.

It reads like a beginner's guide to South Korea and its culture, maybe because of the format the author chose to use. Consisting of 10 chapters, the book included Korean food recipes at the end of each chapter, along with stories about her friends or people with whom she ate those dishes.

The book has been published in Korea, Holland, Italy, and several English-speaking countries.

"The feedback I have received from South Korea, the U.S. and other countries where the book has so far been published is extremely positive and exciting," she said.

Zitwer, a literary agent and founder of Barbara Zitwer Agency in New York, shared a photo showing an unnamed book shop in Taipei in a post on her social media account. It was taken by her friend Anton Hur, a literary translator.

In the photo, "The Korean Book of Happiness" was right next to Michelle Obama's best-selling book "The Light We Carry: Overcoming in Uncertain Times."

Zitwer was excited about the way her book was on display in that bookstore in Taiwan.

As a literary agent, Zitwer is all too familiar with how bookstores curate books.

Best-sellers, "it" books and books with huge potential to fascinate readers are put together in the same section to grab the attention of readers.

With that being said, her book is recommended by the Taipei bookshop as strongly as Michelle Obama's work.

Zitwer's ties to South Korea began 14 years ago when she discovered best-selling author Kim Young-ha's "I Have the Right to Destroy Myself."