



US author and literary agent credits the book Please Look After Mom as the beginning of her love to promote Korean authors overseas

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By Honorary Reporter **Eftychia Dovletoglou** from **Greece**
Photo by = **Barbara J. Zitwer**



US author and literary agent credits the book Please Look After Mom as the beginning of her love to promote Korean

authors overseas. (Barbara Zitwer via Canva)

Barbara J. Zitwer is an enthusiastic follower of Korean culture because of the Korean book *Please Look After Mom*, and the search for other Korean books followed, which led to the promotion of Korean literature as an agent through her agency around the world. After that, she also wrote her second book, *The Korean Book of Happiness*, and hosted many times about her work on various popular websites and print media, such as *The Korea Times*, *The Observer UK*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, and many more.

I noticed her work through her book, *The Korean Book of Happiness*, in Greek, and after reading the first few pages, she immediately won me over with her direct writing and beautiful descriptions of her travels in Korea.

On February 29, I searched for her on the internet, and the email interview was completed on March 4.



Four different book covers of the book “The Korean Book of Happiness” in English, Italian, Bulgarian, and Greek translation. (Barbara Zitwer)

Briefly introduce yourself.

My name is Barbara Zitwer, a book agent and author born in Brooklyn, a borough of New York City, I grew up as a teenager on Long Island and then studied film at Columbia University Film School in Manhattan, where I received my Masters. I worked as a book scout and then agent for three years in Manhattan before starting my literary and film agency, where I grew into an internationally well-known award-winning literary agent and wrote two novels, among them my latest is “The Korean Book of Happiness: Joy, Resilience and the Art of Giving,” which was published in Korea Republic, the Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Spain, Finland, US, Canada, UK & Commonwealth so far.



American author Barbara Zitwer signs her book "The Korean Book of Happiness." (Barbara Zitwer)

Your book 'The Korean Book of Happiness' was released last year. Tell us how the idea for writing it started.

I wrote it because I was looking for a book just like it – a casual but informative, fun, educational book about the various places and experiences one can have in Korea, and I couldn't find one. So I wrote the book myself. I thought it would be a book that global readers would like and appreciate and that most people do not know much about the country of Korea. They know about K-Pop and K-Drama, but they don't know about the remarkable nature, people, and all the aspects of Korea I have discovered over the years. I wanted to bring readers to Korea without them having to leave their sofas!





Translator Joungmin Lee Comfort, Korean author Soyoung Park (Snowglobe) in the middle, and Barbara Zitwer in NYC. (Barbara Zitwer)

What was the process you had to go through to complete your book?

I have written diaries of all my five trips to Korea and collected hundreds of photographs over the years. Therefore, I already had a large amount of material regarding my personal experiences, people I had met, and other related information. However, I also conducted new research about Korean culture and statistics. For instance, I discovered that Korean women have the greatest longevity of anyone on the planet. Hence, I wanted to research about cultural customs and other relevant information.



From left to right, Korean award-winning Man Asian Literary Prize author Shin Kyung Sook (*Please Look After Mom*) with Barbara. Secondly is Agent Barbara with Korean author Han Kang (*The Vegetarian*) and thirdly, You Jeong Jeong (*The Good Son*) with Barbara, and Lee Jung Myung (*Deep Rooted Tree*). (Barbara Zitwer)

What drew you to Korea and made you write a book about it?

I was drawn to Korea, firstly, because of the Korean literature. I read about Shin Kyung-sook's novel *Please Look After Mom* having sold more than 60% of all books sold in Korea the year it was published. I then read a translation of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* which no one in international publishing heard about. I was amazed by both books and I discovered many women authors who really were the new wave of Korean writers and I identified with what these women authors wrote about. Their voices spoke to me. After that, I researched for other Korean authors and discovered Sun Mi Hwang's *The Hen Who Dreamed She Could Fly*, You Jeong Jeong's *The Good Son*, and books in all genres from thriller, mystery, romantasy, young adult, to historical fiction, philosophy and self-help and more. Won Pyung Sohn's *ALMOND* was astounding and I read it in my hotel room at midnight in Seoul. I was completely blown away. The breadth and scope of Korean literature is as vast as English literature... I was amazed that no one had heard of any of these authors before me. I just completely fell in love with the writing of Lee Jung Myung, Hye Young Pyun, Gong Ji-young, You Jeong Jeong, Kim Young Ha, Jo Kyung Ran, and others. After I represented these authors' books and had formed long-distance relationships with them, I decided to visit the authors I represented in person. They showed me their country, and I fell in love with its nature, culture, and people, and then I explored myself.



All the international publishers of the book Bandi's The Accusation gathered at the DMZ to honor the publication of the book. (Barbara Zitwer)

You have a global literary agency based in New York and have collaborated with many Korean authors, promoting their books abroad. Tell us about it.

I am a literary agent and founder of Barbara J Zitwer Agency, based in New York, representing many global authors. Among them, Korean authors occupy a significant number of the agency's authors. Big names and debut authors in Korean literature belong to my agency, and we work to translate their books into as many foreign languages as possible and make Korean literature known in many countries. I am amazed by the clever stories and how Koreans write, focusing on a particular issue with a deep analysis of the human condition; always from a unique point of view. I am excited to see more and more books I promote being accepted and published in many countries.



Barbara at a publishing conference in Korea and for the publication of her novel, “The JM Barrie Ladies Swimming Society.” (Barbara Zitwer)

From the book's title, you foreshadow the happiness, joy, resilience, and giving you found in Korea. What was your happiness while walking the Korean streets?

I love going to Templestay very much and disconnecting to connect! When I discovered Templestay and Buddhist meditation in Korea, it changed my life, and I also have been so positively affected by my warm and remarkable friendships. My most favorable memory is the Templestay in Jeondeungsa Temple in Incheon,

located in Samnangseong Fortress on Ganghwa island, which is said to have been built by the three sons of Dangun, the founder of Korea back to Gojoseon. Having great friends over a decade has enriched my life, and several of my clients have become mentors and best friends and offer me their unique points of view and ways of thinking. I have become more open, profound, and better because of my friendships with my Korean friends.

Do you remember a particular comment from a reader? Anton Hur, the famous translator (whose first translation I commissioned from him was for Shin Kyung Sook, *The Court Dancer*) and author, told me that he was so happy that someone (ME) had written about and illuminated that Korean people are happy! He said most people don't think of Koreans as happy, but they are, and he told me it took me, an outsider, to write about and talk about this. I felt very proud of myself and that I had done something for Korea... He loved my book, and that means so much to me. I feel deeply pleased that I could do something significant for Korea which has given me so much.



American author Barbara Zitwer with her Korean book “The Korean Book of Happiness.” (Barbara Zitwer)

What projects are in your plans?

I will write a new novel and have been thinking about it. I started working on it but had to put it aside because I am busy working for my literary agency. But maybe this summer, I will have some time to continue writing the first page – at least I have one paragraph! I am working out the plot in my mind, and I have the overall story – the beginning and the end and am developing the characters, but it takes a lot of thinking and solitary time. I am also Executive Producing the film

adaptation of my book The JM Barrie Ladies Swimming Society (which is published in Korea in Korean) with a British company and hope it will go into production in 2025. I have produced films, including the cult classic, Vampire's Kiss, starring Nicolas Cage. So I enjoy being involved in producing another film. Producing films is something I am considering doing more of in the future.

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