

There's Something About Mary...



Mary DuMont and Myke Holliday before his death.

My first encounter with Mary DuMont was indirectly. Long before I met her in person, I experience the hailstorm of buzz amongst the expats I know in Seoul coming back from the Anmyeondo Beach Party last year. The more I learned about Anmyeondo and the story behind it, the more interested I became.

Months later, at a party held by Dennis Mitchell at his absolutely *fabulous* studio apartment in Hywha, I found myself talking to Mary. There was definitely...something about Mary. The older we get, the more difficult it is for those around us to not be just another brick in the dusty stonewall we call reality. But she seemed different. Her presence was a dollop of techno-color. "Who is that woman?" I thought when I first entered the room. I soon met Mary and her friend Joel. The two of them seemed to have a special relationship -- like they'd be through a lot together. Mary and I flopped down on the couch and started to talk. Just as I was getting ready for a evening of flirtatious, wine-induced banter, the bomb was dropped.

She was a widow.

Not in the traditional sense, but a widow nonetheless. While currently she had a boyfriend -- one of the more famous DJ's in Korea, natch -- her previous boyfriend, Myke, had died tragically and suddenly from cancer about a year before. I felt a bit of an existential chill. I was a character in the coda, the epilogue of a story that was on the cusp on ending. I found myself wanting to be a major character in whatever story was about to begin.

I mentioned to her the movie seemed to fit her situation perfectly -- Moonlight Mile. The movie is a bittersweet, melancholy reflection on the effects of losing someone love suddenly and its after effects. Since we first met, I have frequently found myself thinking about her lost. I loved something a great deal, it was only a magazine, not a person, and I lost it, too. There is a reason they say that "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." The thing that great loss provides you with is understand of the need, the power of compassion towards your fellow humans.

Since we first met, Mary has been just on the edge of my universe. She inhabits some magical land of DJs and cool kids where nerdy street urchins such as myself are allow to visit, but never live. Ever since my ROKon Magazine days, I have talked to her about doing a story about Myke. The more I got to know her, though, the more I realized the story is not so much about Myke as it is his effect on her. Myke seems ever-present with her, as though he's just over her shoulder in her mind.

"I hated it here when I first arrived in March of 2004," Mary says. "The people did not excite me and the superficialities that seem to be put in front of much bigger problems irritated me in amazing ways. Unsurprisingly, the more I settled, it became easier for me to want receive a culture so distant from my own."

Before too long, Mary says, she found herself hearing about a fellow called Myke Holliday.

"I met him in the midst of a drunken night in Itaewon whilst waiting for my friends to grab a Kebab from the 'Kebab guy' I was shocked at the notion that this Myke Holiday standing before me, who didn't make much effort to say hi at the moment, was the boyfriend of the 'beautiful girl' who worked behind the bar in the biggest club in Hong Dae, M2," she said. "'Who is this Myke Holliday?' 'Why I am always hearing his name scattered around town?' At this point I had no recognition that he was a party planner and promoter. I didn't really care either... "

Mary says later, their relationship would become more intense.

"My world revolved around his life, but I loved every second of it," she says. "It's so strange really, in the beginning he had small annoyances that I didn't expect my heart to absorb. Not too long after getting involved, I was so empowered by this new love and life I was living. It was fun, exciting, and different. I was so devoted to him. Nothing else in my life seemed to take on as much meaning anymore. We always joked about being married from the very beginning. He would tell his friends "Mary will only marry me if it's on a small island off of Greece. I'll have to buy her a Vera Wang dress.. "

In the summer of 2005, Mary and Myke decided to organize another Anmyeondo party. It's funny that something that seems such a important part of the expat experience in Korea is actually just a few years old.

"We began organizing it June and spent our Sundays in Anmyeondo," she said. "We used to

stay out all night Friday and Saturday promoting and then go straight to Nambu Bus Terminal and wait for the first bus to Anmyeondo at 7am. I learned so much from Myke. First and foremost, he taught me music. Myke had over 200 records (all of which were later given to me) and when he was at work, I would listen to the records he talked about and I would experiment on his decks."

The 2005 Anmyeondo beach party was named Soulshine Summer Groove, 2005. Mary says that another foreigner, James from Australia, helped to organize and promote it. Myke would tell Mary and James what needed to be done.

"It was all brand new to me, but very very exciting," Mary says. "Now that I look back, I didn't play such an important role on the organizing, but man did I think I did at the time. Myke taught me everything he knew about promoting. He used to always say 'It's all about getting people excited! that's all promoting is.'"

The 2005 party did not go as well as Myke and Mary had expected, however. They failed to take into account a very important aspect of doing something on the beach -- high tide. "We actually talked about it loads and thinking about it, we did take it into account. However, the problem was that we trusted a source and we went with it," she said. It turns out the tide went up much higher than the source had said. There was a moment of panic, but ultimately some very expensive equipment was saved from destruction.

"It was crazy! I remember being so ashamed and embarrassed and Myke just laughed and continued to have an amazing time," Mary says. "The party pretty much ended at 3am that night, but the music continued again in the morning. That's one thing about Myke, he always believed when no one else did. That was what was so great about him. He never let anything get to him..."

On the way to Thailand to recover from planning the party, they talked about the future. The two of them realized they wanted the same thing -- a simple life back in the States. "He didn't have a strong family background so the idea of genuine love was so appealing to him. He had grown up in Korea since he was 16. His father left when he was 18. Myke didn't see him again until he got sick. He spent almost 9 years growing up in Seoul alone. He had loads of friends, but mainly just party friends. I think he starved for genuine love which is what I gave him... my family too."

That didn't work out, however, and they found themselves planning another festival the next year, the Anmyeondo Music Festival 2006. It was set to be a huge event, with international DJs descending upon Korea for the weekend event. Among them was InFusion, one of the best known DJs in the world.

This part of the story I learned face to face at the apartment Mary shares with her boyfriend. It reminds me of one I might see back home in Richmond. Mary brought out an assortment of teas for me to choose from. She pulled out a few pictures of her as a model in a lot fashion magazine. I thought back over the times I've seen her in the past. One image that stands out is seeing her with a brown 'fro wig backstage of the big DJ event that took place on the Han River recently. The expression on her face as she watched makes me imagine iconic and leaves me wishing I'd taken a picture of it.

Mary says Myke had been complaining of abdominal pains for some time as we sip our tea. Whenever he went to a Korean doctor, they told Myke it was just too much spicy food. Myke finally went to an American service hospital to get a full check up. Throughout the experience, Mary stresses, Myke was the most positive person one could be.

It was July 6th, 2006, a Thursday, when he found out.

"He called me at work," Mary said. The doctors said he had a tumor on his liver and it was inoperable. "That night, I didn't stay at his house," Mary says with a bit of sadness in her voice. Things went very quickly at that point. By July 10th, his father, Tom had come to Korea to be with him.

"By the end of July, he was in a lot of pain," Mary said. "He was in so much pain, I didn't know what to do."

In the final days, Myke left the hospital and went to a hospice to die. Looking back, Mary says she has a few regrets she didn't stay more with him while he was in the hospital. At the time, Mary says, she was so worried about her job that she didn't stay over night. "Why was I so concerned about losing my visa," she asks out loud.

As the days flew by, Myke "started to hate the doctors," says Mary. Mary says she worried as the days went on that he might die without her being there. "I was so worried about that every single night," she said. In the end, however, she was there with him when he died at a hospice in Bundang, on July 24, 2006. He was 26.

She was determined, after his death, however, to see some sort of music event take place on the Anmyeondo Beach. Thus, with the help of some friends -- most specifically well-known Haybonchon resident Hoppe -- Mary was able to organize a new event that year, in honor of Myke. The called "Anmyeondo Beach Party 2006, A Tribute to Myke Holliday," was a way for her to honor Myke's memory in a way he would appreciate.

"I never had time to mourn," Mary says of the time between Myke's death and the beach party. "It was a tribute. this was his party. Everyone in Seoul knew it. It was his party."

While there were numerous problems, Mary ultimately believes the party she and Hoppe organized was a success. "There were so many things that Myke wanted to do that he never got to do," Mary said.

Mary says she learned a great deal about many different things due to Myke's untimely death. She says it has put her life in perspective. She now knows to focus on the people who are really important in your life. "There are so many things that you don't realize until you have an experience like this," Mary said.

These days, Mary has her eyes on the future. She is taking online university courses and would like to snag a marketing job somewhere in the United States. "I don't want to stay in Korea too long," she notes.

I often see Mary around these days. She's always got a smile on her face. Mary says there won't be a Anmyeondo Beach Party this year and that saddens me greatly. I keep thinking of how determined she looked backstage at the DJ festival on the Han as her boyfriend played. My heart tells me that she was thinking about Myke and how his dreams will come true through her hard work.

We all want to believe in something. I guess I want to believe in Mary.

