



- 사람들 >>
- 별책부록 >>

독자투고 안내 >>

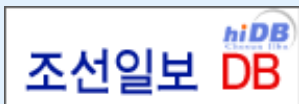
- 월간조선 소개
- 월간조선 지사소개
- 월간조선 해외지사
- 광고문의 02) 724-6851-6852



한국의 100대 개인 홈페이지

추천 사이트

탈북 난민을 돕는 단체



He testified about "the National Defense Department guard who shot and killed at will," and about Kim Chul-min, "who was shot dead as he picked up fallen chestnuts," and the ensuing fight among the inmates for those chestnuts. Kim also gave an account of Kal Li-yong, "the basketball player who was killed for boiling and eating the whip of a guard," and seeing inmates "picking through cow dung to find bits of corn to eat and also to eat the fleas feeding there."

**A witness to the absolute control area of a political concentration camp**

We regularly use the word 'hell' to describe things in our lives. We talk about "examination hell" and we use the term "hell-way" to describe an overcrowded subway. Yet few people know that they have only to step over the truce line to discover that a real hell exists in which the only purpose is to exterminate human lives. North Korean detention camps are places where once you are taken there, not even your remains ever make it out again. (In North Korea, detention camps are called control camps). The detention camps are places where lives are drawn out on 20-30 pieces of corn and salt per meal. They are places where people slave for 15 hours a day in mines; where guards can shoot inmates dead at their discretion, or beat or starve them; where the bodies of inmates are dragged like animals to be buried. They are places where death is a matter-of-course. It wouldn't seem so wrong if these people had been dragged off because they'd actually committed a crime. Instead, most of the crimes were things like being the child of a landowner, an expatriate from Japan or damaging a picture of Kim Il-sung. And it wasn't just the alleged perpetrator who got dragged off. Even innocent family members right up to the second and third generation, including children and babies still on the breast, have been taken to the camps and lost their lives. That's because Kim Il-sung and Kim Jung-il's doctrine to "terminate three generations of the seed of reactionaries" is taken literally. In late March, this reporter met with Kim Yong, who escaped from the No. 14 and No. 18 detention centers, which are generally considered to be the most feared detention centers for political prisoners in North Korea, and then defected to South Korea.

He didn't look well. He was 50, born in the year the Korean war broke out. His face reflected his

wretched recent past.

Kim Yong had the distinction of having lived in both the heaven and hell of North Korean society. His favourable experience came when he was in the National Defense Department, the agency which upheld the system and controlled the distribution of goods. He was a lieutenant colonel, a member of the privileged class. When he worked for the West Sea Asahi Incorporated Trading Company, a foreign currency-generating business under the Defense Department, he had access to US dollars and foreign culture and goods, as well as a chauffeur-driven car. But he was swept from heaven to hell overnight, spending five years in a detention center that's better described as a death camp.

### **The Defector who Experienced an 'Absolute Control Area'**

There are three men, Ahn Hyuk, Kang Chul-hwan (both defected in August 1992), and Ahn Myung-chul (defected in September 1994) who have previous known experience of the detention camps and who have subsequently escaped to South Korea. Ahn Hyuk and Kang Chul-hwan were detained at the No. 15 detention center (Yodok, South Hamkyong Province) in the revolutionized area. Ahn Myung-chul was a driver at the No. 13 (Onsong, North Hamkyong Province) and No. 22 (Hoeryong) absolute control area detention centers. By contrast, Kim Yong is the only person known to have been detained in an Absolute Control Area (Kim Yong used the term 'closed area') and to have survived and escaped to the free world. The absolute control areas are reserved for political prisoners and are known as places where once you enter you never come out alive, where not even a corpse leaves.

According to the testimony of those who have experienced the detention centers, they house not only the person who commits a political crime, but according to the state's premise of guilt-by-association, they also accommodate parents and other family members up to the second and third

generation. When the decision is made to send someone to a detention camp, the whole family is often incarcerated in other camps. In an interview with the Monthly Chosun (March 1995) Ahn Myung-chul related that "a person who commits a political crime is sent to either the No. 15 (South Hamkyong Province Absolute Control Area) or the No. 25 (Chongjin, North Hamkyong Province) detention centers, and that their families are detained in camps such as No. 14 (Kaecheon, South Pyongan Province), No. 15 (Yodok revolutionized area), No. 16 (Hwasong, North Hamkyong Province) and No. 22 (Hoeryong, North Hamkyong Province)." The existence of the No. 14 detention center became known for the first time outside North Korea only after Kim Yong defected. According to his testimony, No. 14 is where the inmates are held, while their families are housed at No. 18, which is adjacent to No. 14.

Thus Mr. Kim is the only person to speak of the existence of the No. 14 detention center in an Absolute Control Area. This camp is where the situation is the most desperate of all the political prison camps in North Korea. To some extent, other defectors to South Korea have already spoken about how North Korea's political prison camps are operated. Kim Yong confirms the testimony of those who have also experienced the camps. As well, Kim Yong's story can be corroborated with previous testimony of other defectors.

### **Kim Yong's Tragic Life in the No. 14 Detention Camp**

When Kim Yong was sent to No. 14 detention camp he was restricted to working as a miner at the Mujin No. 2 Cutting Face(Mujin2gaeng). Thus he knew nothing about the other areas because he had no freedom of movement outside the area where he was confined. Some 300 other inmates worked with Kim Yong in the restricted area.

So Kim Yong's story is based on the premise that "we see the trees, but not the forest." There are some limitations to his testimony.

Kim Yong has had three names in his lifetime. His first name, the name his parents gave him, Kim Bong-su; his second name, Park Bong-su; and his third name, Kim Yong. He changed his name to Kim Yong when he defected to South Korea and was issued a Resident Registration Card as a way to help him try and forget his tragic past. Just as he has had three names, his life can be divided into three distinct periods. First the story of the Kim Bong-su period. He was born in Taepyong-ri, Jokyeo-myon, Shinkyekun, Hwanghae Province just before the Korean War broke out in 1950. He lost his parents during the Korean War and when he was four he was admitted to the Pyoksong Orphanage in South Hwanghae Province. Since he was so young when he lost his parents, he had no recollection of them. He lived his life in dedication to Kim Il-sung, who he felt was his true father. When he grew up he stayed solidly loyal to the party and Great Leader. Thanks to the Leader, he grew up as a son of the revolution, a vanguard unit of the North Korean system. After graduating from Kangso primary school in South Pyongan Province, he was assigned to work as a labourer for a dredging company which was helping to build a port in the Shinam area, Chongjin City. He also worked on constructing the Ungsang and Najin ports in the Sonbong area.

He joined the army in 1970 and he earned a place on the judo team (a second lieutenant at the time) with the Tongnogang Sports Team in the General Escort Bureau.

After the team was disbanded in 1974, he worked for six years in the publishing department of the automated engineering department at Kimchaek University of Technology. He was the head of the Korean People's Army No. 489 unit in Wonsan (the equivalent of a lieutenant colonel) in charge of managing the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces Building, when in 1986 he experienced his first major stroke of misfortune. One day his mother (Kim Chan-il), whom he thought had died during the Korean war, suddenly reappeared. At first he couldn't believe that this woman who claimed to be his mother was for real. When he eventually got the whole story from her, it went like this: Prior to the outbreak of the Korean war his parents entrusted Kim Yong, his older brother Kim

Kwon-su and his older sister Kim Ok-sun with their maternal grandmother in Shinkyekun, Hwanghae Province. His parents lived in Panmun-kun, just north of the 38th parallel, which generally marks the division between north and south. During the war most people were poor but his maternal grandmother, who had several mouths to feed, was desperately poor. Kim Yong's older sister died of starvation, which really scared his grandmother. Fearing that her two grandsons might also die, she decided to take them to the Pyoksong Orphanage in South Hwanghae Province and say that she had "found them on the road."

### **The Family Register was Falsified so Kim Yong could get into the Ministry of Public Security**

According to his mother, Kim's father (Kim Chong-kuk) secretly moved back and forth across the 38th parallel peddling goods. As a result, he was accused of spying for the Americans and shot. His mother was taken to a reform center in Shinuiju. Kim Yong also later learned that when his brother found out what had happened to his parents, he decided that because of his family background he would never make it in North Korea. He tried to escape to South Korea, but was caught and shot by the Defense Department in Unpa-kun, North Hwanghae Province.

When Kim heard this story from his mother, he shuddered at the realization that he was no hero, no "son of the revolution." Instead, he was a "son of the enemy." It was obvious what would happen to him if this were ever revealed. After considerable worry, his mother decided to conspire with relatives to falsify the family register to read that Kim Yong was the offspring of an illicit union between herself and someone by the name of Park Bok-dok, a man from her hometown who had risen to deputy chairman of the Provincial Party Committee. It required a bribe of \$10,000 US to make the changes. That's when his name was changed from Kim Bong-su to Park Bong-su and his second life began. To those around him who asked, he explained that: "I lost my parents during the war and when I found them again, I discovered my family name was Park."



With his sudden change in class, in 1988, "Park Bong-su" was promoted from a clerk at the Donghung Trading Co. to become an executive agent(vice president level) of the West Sea Asahi Company Ltd., a company that traded seafood products with Japan. The company headquarters were in Hakada, Kyushu, Japan and the company mainly exported flounder and sole to Japan. A monthly salary of \$600 US was remitted from Japan directly into the Ministry of Public Security account and the employees were paid in North Korean currency. At the time, Kim Yong earned 180 won per month. He made a great contribution to trade with Japan and in 1990 he was awarded the Certificate of Revolutionary Martyr for contributing a loyalty fund of \$360,000 US to Kim Jung-il, who subsequently gave special instructions to "take good care of Park Bong-su in Wonsan City, Kangwon Province."

Following orders from Kim Jung-il, the company was moved under the direct supervision of National Defense Department on May 3, 1990. Kim Yong excelled in the fish trade and gained the trust of OOO, a high level cadre at the Defense Department. The high level cadre, who had no idea of Kim Yong's background, regularly praised his work. While working at the National Defense Department, Kim Yong had the opportunity to peruse documents concerning his birth parents. According to the documents, his father had worked as a spy for the CIA under the code name "Virus No. 3" until he was arrested in Panmun-kun and publicly executed (the Panmun-kun, Kaesong City spy-ring incident). There was also a record of his mother being taken to the reform center in Shineuiju. Park Bong-su's false identity didn't last long; his cover was blown in 1993. There is a residential area in Pyongyang city close to Kim Jung-il's executive office called the "Kim Jung-il No. 1 administrative region." The registrations for all the residents in the area are checked regularly to ensure that they are all pure elements since they could possibly come into contact with Kim Jung-il. Living in this same residential area was none other than Park Chan-hyuk (at the time he was the photography editor at the Minju Choson, the second son of Park Bok-dok, who was Kim Yong's father according to the falsified documents. One day someone from the Ministry of Public

Security was doing a resident registration check and asked Park Chan-hyuk: "Is the youngest in your family named Park Bong-su?" Park Chan-hyuk had never heard the name and asked, "Who is he?"

The Ministry of Public Security authorities became suspicious and started to check into the whereabouts of Park Bong-su. As a result, Kim Kye-son, the resident registration guidance officer in Suhhong-kun, North Hwanghae province, and others who had conspired to falsify the register to say that Kim Yong's mother had given birth to a son by Park Bok-dok as a result of an illicit relationship, were all rounded up and investigated.

### **Arrest, Incarceration, Torture**

One day in May 1993, as Kim Yong stepped onto the dock after inspecting a shipload of exports bound for Japan, people appeared from nowhere and grabbed him. Without even knowing the reason, he was arrested and taken to a special agit of Maram in Yongsong District, Pyongyang. The interrogation began and excruciating torture followed. He was ordered to explain the reason for falsifying his personal history and infiltrating the Defense Department. As he listened he realized he was being taken for a spy, or perhaps an anti-revolutionary. When I asked him about the torture he said: "It was so horrific and painful I don't even want to think about it." Instead, he responded in writing:

"They apprehended me and took me to the special agit of Maram in Yongsong District, Pyongyang, where they started interrogating me. "Why did you infiltrate the National Defense Department," they demanded to know. "What nerve you have, the child of a spy wearing the mask of a patriot." They tortured me in many different ways. They put a 5cm X 5cm plank between my thighs and mercilessly stomped on me as I knelt. Then they put handcuffs on me and hung me up so that the tips of my feet barely touched the ground. At night they put me in a solitary tank filled with water



up to my belly button and watched me to make sure I didn't nod off. When my whole body swelled up and I collapsed, unable to feel anything, they kicked me and made me stand up again." For three months he was sent several times to the special agit of Moonsu, near the area of the Taedong River in Pyongyang, and there he experienced all manner of torture. They took out his mother's testimony and the testimony of Kim Kye-son, the resident registration guidance officer in Suhhong-kun, North Hwanghae Province and ordered him under threat of more and more painful torture to confess his collusion. He despaired every time he was tortured over that three-month period, and many times he was tempted to capitulate and "say whatever they want me to say".

### **Dragged off to a Concentration Camp of Death**

One night in August 1993 he was taken away in a prison van with shackles on. The van left Pyongyang and travelled for about 4-5 hours. The van stopped at a checkpoint and a creaking heavily-braced door was slowly swung open. He got out in a daze and wondered where he was, when suddenly someone shouted: "You bastard. Down on your knees!" The driver of the vehicle handed a document to the checkpoint guard and left. Kim was transferred to another vehicle that was waiting for him.

"Hey bastard, get in." Right from the outset orders were issued with profanities. Kim didn't know why, but he had to keep his head down on the floor. When he lifted it a bit to look around, the escort demanded to know: "Hey bastard, why do you keep lifting up your dog head?" The escort then stomped on his head. Kim froze in fear, thinking "This is it, I am going to die," forgetting even what severe pain he was in.

After passing through a series of checkpoints and rattling along for some time, the vehicle finally stopped. When they took off his shackles and he got out, he saw a building with a sign on it that said "Storage"(a type of storage for provisions) The escort guard ordered Kim to strip and threw

him a ragged grey prison uniform. Kim stood there blankly in the nude, not even thinking to put on the stinky old garb. Suddenly the guard said: "You bastard, do you want to start obeying me? Down on your knees!" Then he smashed Kim Yong's head to the ground. The use of the word "bastard" was standard fare. According to the rules at the No. 14 detention center, when a "Sir" (the title for the guards) appeared, the inmates had to fold their arms behind their backs turn around and put their heads down on the ground until the "Sir" passed by, at which time they could scuttle off in the opposite direction.

A bit later a young fellow appeared who said that orders had been issued "to send this bastard to join the Mujin2gaeng tunneling brigade." Two escort guards transported Kim in a prison van and went along a winding mountain road before letting him off around the mid-point of the mountain. Kim saw a sign that said "Mujin2gaeng" at the entrance to the mine. He shuddered at the cold, desolate sight. Only then did he fully grasp that he had been brought to a concentration camp, a place he had only heard about until then. It was the most infamous detention center of them all, none other than the National Defense Department No. 14 Political Prisoner Control Center. He wondered if he'd ever be able to escape. Everything went dark before his eyes. He said he felt like ending it all. Having worked at the National Defense Department, he realized that once he'd been brought to a "control center" he would never live to see the outside world again.

### **The National Defense Department No. 14 Political Prisoner Control Center**

"Human skeletons . . ."

Officially Kim was held in the No. 14, detention center located in Deukchang-ku, Pukchang-kun, South Pyongan Province. However, according to Kim's testimony, the administrative area was purposefully misleading. The actual location was a remote mountainous area surrounding Teukchang-ku, Youngdae-ku, Kaechon-kun, Sunchon-kun, Unsan-kun and the main part of the camp was close to Kaechon, South Pyongan Province. The guard who took and led Kim to the

Mujin2gaeng was his "Chief Sir." From that time on, he spent two nightmarish years at the Mujin2gaeng, No. 14 Political Prisoner Control Center.

He was sent to Mujin2gaeng, located in a remote mountainous region on the right side of the No. 14 detention center. He felt like he had been hit over the head with a hammer as soon as he saw the inmates limping along as they tried to perform their tasks of hard labour. That was because he couldn't believe how thin they all were, with nothing but skin hanging on their bones. "When I first saw the inmates, all that was left of them was a human outline, with no fat to be found anywhere on them. They were all dried up, crooked like scarecrows. Besides, they were covered in soot so that they looked like walking stick-men built with soot-covered kindling."

Ahn Myung Chul, a guard at the No. 13 and No. 22 detention center who defected to South Korea, has testified that many of the people who work in the camps in North Korea are disabled from accidents. Kim said his first impression of the camps was of "starving old people bent over so far that they couldn't use their backs, who gasped for breath with every step." He testified that at the No. 14 detention center there were many inmates who were crippled after losing an arm or leg in a work accident." "Whether they had all their limbs or not, they still had to work to eke out their existence. That is why people with one leg had to make a crutch so that they could at least limp around to do some work." The inmates work clothes were mere rags from having been stitched so many times. This reporter showed Kim a picture of the inmates at the No. 22 detention center that Ahn Myung-chul had sketched (Monthly Choson, March 1995 issue). Kim looked at it and said: "These people look a lot better off than those at No. 14." "The one daily meal consisted of 20-30 pieces of raw kernels of corn and salt soup with some cabbage leaves floating on top. It was impossible to do any work on that diet. It took more than 15 minutes to walk 100 meters into the mine shaft. We got dizzy shovelling. We gasped for breath. The mine bosses didn't seem to have any productivity expectations and didn't particularly think that work goals were that important."

Yet work was still expected to be performed, because if it wasn't done it was considered by the guards to be "rebellion against the Republic."

All that one could see from Mujin2gaeng was an entrance that looked like a hippopotamus with its mouth open, and beside that a dilapidated barracks which was the workers' residence, a restaurant cum washroom, saw mill, a general pump chamber (see picture below) The barracks was divided into 6 rooms housing 52-53 men in each. Kim Yong recalls there being approximately 300 inmates in the Mujin2gaeng area. The detainees were divided into a tunneling team, preparation team for tunneling, loaders, track layers, rail car operators, saw mill, prop workers etc.

### **Covetous of a job where you could steal some pig feed to eat**

The doors were made of steel. When work was over at the mine and the workers went into the barracks, the steel door was closed from the outside. When you entered the barracks there was a hallway in the middle and on both sides there were triple-layered wooden bunk beds. There were no such things as blankets, only a broom and a drum cut in half for a urinal.

Being a coal mine, there was lots of fuel. The heating system was coal-fired and the older men fueled the fire in the barracks. Everyone carried a twig around in their pockets to clean up their buttocks after a bowel movement.

Ahn Myung-chul testified that at the No. 22 detention center, any woman who became pregnant was executed. Mr. Kim Yong said that "at the No. 14 detention center, men and women were strictly kept separate so that a pregnancy would be impossible." During the two years he was interned at No. 14, only once did he see a woman when inmates from other areas were brought in to work on a road improvement project. Kim said that because there were informers among the inmates, he was very careful about what he said. Since no one knew who was an informer, there was a culture of suspicion, distrust and hostility amongst the inmates. If an inmate revealed his

background or shared a conversation, it would be passed on immediately and they were interrogated. When three or more inmates were caught talking, they were considered to be conspiring and punished harshly. Thus the inmates were in no position to engage in small talk. According to Kim Yong: "In my opinion one in every three inmates was an informant. The reason that informing thrived was that when inmates ratted on those with subversive thoughts, they were moved to a work site where conditions were better than at the mine. If one got dispatched to a farm, at least they'd have a chance to steal some cattle or pig feed. Besides, it was a much better place to be than at the mine, where you never knew when the next accident would occur. Since most inmates could plainly see their lives wasting away from starvation, most would willingly rat on their fellow inmates." That is why, even though Kim Yong was held at Mujin2gaeng for 2 years, he only knew the names of a few people who he worked with on the tunneling team, but never their reason for being there or what they did prior to being sent there. He said the following about Kim Jae-keun, who was the leader of his tunneling team; "When I was first sent to the tunneling team, Kim Jae-keun told me: 'You don't need to talk here.' After several months he realized I was not planted and we started talking while we were working when no one was around. He once said to me, 'Do you know who Kim Jae-keun is? That's me.'" Kim Jae-keun had been in charge at the Ministry of People's Armed Forces No. 519 Liaison Office (training center for spies) and he had been a major general in the Korean People's Army. He was purged and taken to No. 14 detention camp for having sided with Kim Pyong-il, a stepbrother of Kim Jung-il.

Kim Yong said: "[Kim Jae-keun] introduced himself as having made 26 overseas trips and having stolen the blueprints of a new U.S. military tank."

**There were about 15 cases of summary execution over 2 years**

Death was commonplace in the concentration camp. Kim Yong recalls experiencing "a constant state of anxiety where you never knew when or how you might lose your life." During the two years

he was interned at the No. 14 concentration camp, he recalls approximately 15 incidents that the guards dealt with summarily, and about 25 cases in which men died of starvation or in mining accidents, or of cases where men were called in by the guards and never returned. In the vicinity of Mujin2gaeng there were so many chestnut trees that in the fall there be would be piles of chestnuts on the ground. The chestnuts were so inviting, they would open right up after falling to the ground. There were also chestnut trees above the mine entrance and we would pick them behind the guards' backs. But on the mountain not only was the security tight, if we were to put one foot onto the mountain, the guards would consider it attempted escape and shoot us on the spot. So that's why the chestnuts were only rarely eaten, even though we faced starvation.

### **Witnessing the execution of Kim Chul-min**

It was around October, 1993. There was a railway from the mine entrance that went around the mountainside and was used for transporting coal. There were a lot of chestnut trees in the vicinity and hundreds of ripe freshly-fallen chestnuts alongside the track. One day the operator of the coal car Kim Chul-min (he was about 54 at the time and from Taekwan, North Pyongan Province) was returning to the mine when he stopped the car to pick up chestnuts lying beside the track. Suddenly a voice said: "Hey bastard, don't move." Kim Yong, who had been moving a railway tie nearby was surprised by the shout and looked in that direction. The guard who was in charge of Kim Yong's group was a ruthless character whom the inmates had nicknamed "Oppashi" (a wild bee that lives in the mountains and has a deadly poisonous sting). Kim Chul-min was concentrating so much on picking up chestnuts that he never even heard "Oppashi" calling him. The guard ran over and kicked Kim Chul-min in the back, knocking him over. Then he started to assault him. Kim Chul-min was spurting blood and moaning. Despite the brutal assault, the guard was not through. He took the pistol from his holster and cocked it.

"You, bastard, you were a poisonous element when you were out in society. You haven't changed in



here either. How dare you revolt against the system. You deserve to die." After shouting this out, he put the gun to Kim Chul-min's forehead and pulled the trigger. At the sound of the gun going off, blood came pouring out of Kim Chul-min's head and mouth. The guard then ordered the group director (the representative chosen by the inmates, a kind of informer) to "take this bastard away." The monitor ran over and held the bleeding Kim Chul-min in his arms. The guard screamed: "Bastard, are you commiserating with a poisonous element? Do you want to share his fate? Just drag him away."

### **When the guard was in a bad mood, the chance of getting killed increased**

The monitor folded Kim Chul-min's legs and dragged him along the tracks. Every time Kim Chul-min's head hit a tie it made a thumping sound. Kim Chul-min was still clutching tightly onto the plumply-ripened chestnuts when he was shot. Kim Yong shuddered as he saw the body being dragged off like an animal carcass. Other inmates expressed indignance: "The bastard should die, he's lower than a dog".

"The concentration camp is a lawless zone," according to Kim Yong. "The inmates are not killed for any specific crime they have committed, or after going through any kind of legal process. They are killed at the whim of the guards. If a guard is in a bad mood, that increases the inmates' chances of getting killed. That is why the inmates live in a state of extreme stress and anxiety that makes the hair stand on end. First, you must obey the orders of the guard in charge of you. If two different guards give you contradictory orders, you obey the guard in charge of you first. There was an instance like this when the other guard said, 'you bastard, are you playing strange with me,' and killed the inmate." The testimony that the "guards can shoot at will" coincides with the testimony of Ahn Myung-chul (who was a guard at the No. 22 detention center).

Kim Yong told this reporter about the time he almost lost his life, which occurred when he was

working as a tunneling worker at Mujin2gaeng in the 6th underground work shaft. The first level underground was usually 120 meters down, so the 6th level would be approximately 720 meters below ground. (see diagram) That day Kim Yong was in the mine shaft loading rock and earth onto the mining car. He pushed it some 200 meters to the pulley, but because he'd had nothing to eat and had no strength, the loaded car started rolling backwards. Suddenly someone from behind said: "What bastard is pushing the cart backwards?" Kim Yong faced the wall of the mine shaft and with his hands behind his back bent down and put his forehead down to the ground. Then all of a sudden he heard: "People who can't work, can die," and after that he saw stars. The guard had pounded the back of Kim Yong's head with the butt of his pistol handle. Kim lost consciousness and fell to the floor, which had turned to a muddy mix of coal dust and water. He regained consciousness several hours later. When he felt the back of his head, his skin was torn and there was a hole. Blood from the wound had seeped down the nape of his neck and his whole body was covered in blood. However, if the guard had been out of sorts that day, instead of being pistol whipped, he would likely have been showered in bullets.

### **The death of Kal Li-yong the basketball player**

After he regained consciousness, Kim Yong felt so wretched and wronged that he gritted his teeth, saying: "If life is going to be this humiliating, I might as well try to kill the guard and die." Kim still bears the scar from where he was hit with the butt of the handgun. He calls it the "unforgettable scar of hatred."

He also recalls the death of Kal Li-yong, a basketball player who was detained in the same barracks. Kal Li-yong was about 57 at the time. He was brought to the concentration camp because his father was a landowner. He had once been famous for his outside shooting ability on a basketball court.

One day after the "Oppashi" had finished making his rounds in the mine, he left without the cow-

tail whip he always carried with him to keep the workers in line or to punish them. Kal Li-yong was so starved that he hid the whip, then soaked it in water and ripped it apart and ate it. The next day the Oppashi found out through the grapevine that Kal Li-yong was the guilty party and brutally attacked him, saying: "You turncoat against the party and the people". After Kal li-yong had been beaten to the point that he had fainted, the guard told the monitor to go to the outdoor toilet (just a hole dug in the woods with straw matting around it), and bring him a stick daubed in feces crawling with parasites. As he stuffed it into Kal's mouth he said: "You bastard, this is meat too, so eat it". Kal Li-yong writhed, but as the stick was forced into his mouth, something in his mouth got ripped or torn and blood came pouring out. Kim Yong said, "Kal Li-yong was hit so much that day that he came down with a high fever and his whole body swelled up. I nursed him by putting his head on my lap to comfort him. As he lay on my lap he said through his tears, "What is so sinful about being the son of a bourgeoisie. What is so wrong about inheriting my father's fortune that they have to put me through this?"

Inmates were so weakened from chronic malnutrition that most were unable to overcome even a few blows. Kal Li-yong, too, was unable to overcome the after-effects of the Oppashi's assault, his body turning into a feverish ball of fire for four days before he died. "Death is so common in the camp that when someone dies you don't feel anything. You think to yourself 'there goes another one' and you drag them along and bury them any old place. You are punished if you try to leave any type of mark or mound. Showing any kind of sympathy is strictly forbidden."

### **Fighting Over the Clothes of the Deceased**


Any humanity the inmates once possessed quickly evaporated, so that even when an inmate who shared the barracks died, no one felt any sympathy. If they did, they risked being accused of being a poisonous element and experiencing the same fate. According to Kim Yong: "When Kim Chul-Min was shot dead by the Oppashi, one inmate rushed over to grab the chestnuts out of his hand. But

even as he was dying, Kim Chul-Min clutched the chestnuts tightly in his fist. The inmate was trying to pry the chestnuts out of Kim's hand when Kim Jae-keun came over and kicked the inmate, saying: 'You bastard, do you not have a conscience?' The inmates even fought each other trying to strip Kal of his prison uniform. One time an inmate was caught with a newspaper clipping during a personal effects check. He was hauled off and executed. The inmates at the No. 14 camp weren't provided cigarettes. Instead, they smoked crushed mugwort and dry leaves which they rolled in the paper occasionally provided for written confessions.

In 1994, Byun Chul-woo, a former soldier with the Korean People's Army who worked laying rail track, was caught carrying a palm-sized newspaper clipping. After a severe beating, Byun still refused to confess how he got hold of the clipping. "I still wonder how Byun got his hands on the clipping, given the strict controls," said Kim Yong. "Ultimately, Byun hung on a tree for two days, accused of attempting to escape, and then he died. As he hung there he writhed in pain, defecating and urinating on himself." When asked why the punishment for possessing a newspaper clipping was so harsh, Kim replied: "The authorities think of it in the same way as starting a revolt."

Àì Àü: <a href="#">The Tragic Stories of North Korean Refugees</a>	SO
ˆ ÙÀ½ : <a href="#">[SHOCKING REPORT ] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea</a>	SO

[☰ 목록](#)

 **자료실** Source Material

[남북관계](#) | [한국현대사](#) | [강연·연설](#) | [국제관계](#)





# 朝鮮

[파카 45 스페셜 만년필(54,000원 상당)]을 선물로 드립니다.

Update : 2003.05.16

기자클럽

통신원클럽

독자마당

자료실

도서쇼핑몰

구독신청

Search

상세기사검색



지난호보기



이달의 전체기사



기사제보

주요기사

편집장의 편지 >>>

시론 >>>

특종 / 심층취재 >>>

정치 >>>

사회 >>>

교양 / 문화 >>>

경제 / 과학 >>>

인물 / 인터뷰 >>>

북한 / 통일 >>>

인기연재물 >>>

만평 >>>

이달의 화보 >>>

>> HOME > ÀÚ Æ¼Ç

## The Tragic Stories of North Korean Refugees

ÀÚ¼ ÀÚ so

¼¼ Æ¼: 2674

ÀÚ Æ¼ÀÀ¼

### The Tragic Stories of North Korean Refugees

#### Foreword

Translator's note:

This interview with Chul and Soyeon, a 10- and 8-year-old brother and sister who escaped extreme hardship and starvation in North Korea, provides a heartbreaking human portrayal of the deteriorating conditions being experienced by millions of people in the totalitarian state. In particular, widespread suffering has been cruelly inflicted on the young and it appears now that the development of a whole generation is threatened. Many people are trying to help, but the country's communist masters seem to be living in denial about the seriousness of the social catastrophe in their midst. Beginning with Chul and Soyeon's story, we will be presenting a series of translated





- 사람들 >>
- 별책부록 >>

독자투고 안내 >>

월간조선 소개

월간조선 지사소개

월간조선 해외지사

광고문의  
02) 724-6851-6852



한국의 100대 개인 홈페이지

추천 사이트

탈북 난민을 돕는 단체



interviews with those who have escaped North Korea in the hope that an awareness of the problem by an international audience will contribute to a growing outcry that can help to end this monstrous inhumanity.

This interview with two North Korean children was first published in Korean in the September, 1999 issue of The Monthly Chosun]

The numbers tell the story: As many as three million North Koreans have died of starvation according to distressing reports by a Johns Hopkins University research team.

During the past three years(1996-99), an estimated 1.5 to 3.0 million North Koreans have died of starvation. It is Korea's greatest tragedy of the 20th century and it has taken a tremendous toll on the North's youth and the elderly. The gripping testimony of brother and sister, Im Chul and Im Soyeon, is a North Korean version of Anne Frank's diary. Meanwhile, South Korea's leadership is treating the terrible tragedy as if our fellow Koreans were something less than human. Saving our compatriots would be a compassionate act of mercy. Are we bound to sink to the depths of a third-rate nation, a third-rate people who fear saving our kin, or will we as a first-rate nation and a first-rate people decide to take responsibility for their fate.

Cho Kap-Jae, Editor in Chief, The Monthly Chosun

The famine in North Korea has resulted in thousands of deaths, including the parents of the boy and girl interviewed here. The father was a university graduate who had worked as a miner, while the mother had performed in a dance troupe before she was married and the family came to live in a mining village. After the parents died, the children wandered around as Gottjaebi (beggars in search of food) before sneaking into China. We hope their heartrending story will rouse compassion for them and for thousands of other North Korean children who share their grim fate.

This interview was conducted in July 1999 by Park Hon.



"After my mom died, I wanted to die too. But I had a younger sister. I vowed that even if I died I would make sure my sister lived."

"We want to study. Please help us get an education. We want to go to South Korea and study."

"My mom didn't die. My mom is laying down, playing on a mountain"

### **Soyeon sings a song**

- Umm. That was very good. What is the boy's name. "My name is Im Chul."

- How old are you? "I'm 10." - What's the girl's name? "It's Im Soyeon." - How old are you? "I'm 8."

- Do you have a mom and dad? "No I don't. They died." - Where did your father go? "He went to get rice and hasn't come back yet. No one knows where he is." - Since when? How many years has it been?

"It's been 3 years."

- What about your mom? "My mom died of starvation." - How many years has it been since your mother died? "One year."

Soyeon: "No. Mother, didn't die. Mother is laying down, playing on the mountain." - Right, your mother isn't dead. Soyeon, you're a smart girl. You're right, your mother didn't die. Where did you live? "In the mining village in \*\*, \*\*\* South Hamkyong province."

- Is \*\* a mining area?

"Yes."

- Chul, can you tell me about where you lived. Tell me about what it was like. "I'll start from when

my dad disappeared. It was difficult for my dad and we didn't have any rice. He thought we'd starve so he left secretly on his own to go and get some rice. And then he never came back. When we asked our mom where he went she said he'd gone to get some rice. That's why only my mom lived with me and my sister. With my dad gone I had to do the work. It was OK for awhile. Mom collected the branches and coal for the fire, so I didn't have to do that much. I thought that since I had my mom, I could live without my dad. But then one day mom said that her side hurt. I asked her to go to the hospital. She went and came back and said she had a bad illness."

**A 10 li (about 4 km or 2.5 miles) return trip with a 15 kg knapsack of coal**

- What kind of illness?

"An illness that hurts the side but I don't know what it's called . . . it's a bad illness. . . it's an illness that kills people. . ." - Was it tuberculosis?

"Tuberculosis, that's it. From the very next day mom was so sick she stayed in bed. That's when I had started having so much work to do. So much work it was endless. And I carried the coal backpack that mom had carried. From the next day I carried the coal backpack and went back and forth a distance of 10 li. It was 10 li from the mine to our house and back." - How heavy was the backpack?

"15 kilograms" - You carried that for 10 li? "Yes."

- How many times? "Usually two or three times a day." - How long did you do it for? "About half a year." - Please go on. "When I first started carrying the coal knapsack, it hurt so much I got blisters on my feet and marks on my shoulders. Every time I came home I told my mom it hurt and she'd get tears in her eyes. She'd say: "From now on mom is going to carry it." I cried a lot with my mom and my sister. Everybody was always crying in our house." - Right, please go on.

"But then I got to worrying about something. There was nothing to eat at the mine and none of the workers came to work. Since the coal was almost all used up, the little bit that was left had to be guarded. But I wasn't afraid of that. That's because if I didn't get the coal, we wouldn't have anything to burn and we would die. That's why I took my life in my hands, waiting for the guard to go to the bathroom and then I went running into the mine. I took a small hoe and picked out the fist-sized pieces, barely filling up the backpack. Then as I was coming out (of the mine), there was the guard staring at me with a real scary look. He came toward me, but I was so scared I used all my strength to run away. Then another guard saw me and started running after me. I got so scared I stopped dead in my tracks. "The two guards ripped off a tree branch . . . and hit me so hard. They hit me like they wanted to kill me. My face was covered in blood. . . they took off my backpack and dumped everything out on the ground. Then they beat me again, handed me back the empty backpack and sent me off. I was so mad I forgot about being scared. I picked up the coal that was scattered around. By that time it was raining and I put the coal in the backpack along with some dirt. On the way back it kept raining and the blood ran all over my face. I was covered in blood.

When I got home, mom saw me covered in blood. She didn't say a thing and fainted right where she was. I thought she was dead. But then two hours later. . . she came back to life. I felt happy that mom was alive.

Starting the next day I put the knapsack on tighter and kept carrying the coal even though I was beaten many times. That's how we had coal at home.

After mom fainted that time, she got sicker. We needed to buy medicine but we didn't have any money. We borrowed rice from the neighbors and some from my grandmother's house."

**"Unable to find a coffin, she was wrapped in cloth and cremated"**

- Who is your grandmother?

"We had a maternal grandmother. Later, my grandmother and grandfather had nothing to eat. They came to live at our house, but our mother was alone and there was nothing to eat and everyone starved. Our neighbors loaned us a bit of corn flour, but no money. Mom just stayed put, sick in bed." - Did she take any medicine?

"No, because we didn't have any medicine." - Why not?

"Because we didn't have any money." - If you went to the hospital, did they have any medicine?

"They didn't have any medicine there and we couldn't get any from the market because we didn't have any money. Mom died before the month ended. After mom died our lives became very difficult. I just wanted to die too. But when I thought about it, I realized I had a younger sister. I felt sorry for her. So I took charge of things and swore on mom's memory that even if I were to die, I would make it so my sister could live. But really, if I were to die, she was so helpless she would surely die too. After mom died we needed a coffin, but to make a coffin we needed some wood. Since dad left, our storage shed had fallen down and was gone, so we didn't have any boards. We had no choice but to put mom in a large white cloth that she'd brought with her when she got married. We wrapped her in that. Some people from dad's workplace came and helped to carry her out."

- So you're saying you wrapped her up in the cloth and put her in the ground?

"Yes. And we went around the whole village to collect one glass of alcohol to pour on her." - Did you have to go around and ask for the alcohol? Didn't the people from your dad's work bring some liquor? "The people from dad's work didn't have any money, so they couldn't bring any."

- You had a hard time. What was it like after your mother died?

"We stayed at home. We didn't have anything to eat at home and I felt sorry for my younger sister. I fed my sister by going around to the neighbors and my friend's house asking for money. That's how

we got by." - Who lived next door to you? Did they have money?

"The kid we called "Stray". They were poor too. \*\* got some flour and made some weed gruel with it. Since they didn't have any rice . . . they only ate weeds and their bodies and feet swelled up. After awhile they all died too."

**"There wasn't enough to eat at home, so how could anyone pack a lunch for the train?"**

- Chul, after your mother died, where did you two stay?

"We stayed together. We are so thankful to the people from dad's work. . . They let us stay with them. We asked them to take care of us and they did for a bit. We went there and ate a meal or two and slept at home. We also begged for one meal a day in the market." - Right, so you lived like that and then what did you do?

"So our house was our parents' house and there was no one to protect it. They said it belonged to the country and they took it away from us. Since there was nothing to eat at the place we were staying, they applied for us go to the orphanage. But we were too young to qualify, so our grandmother who lived in \*\* came to get us and she looked after us for a bit." - Could you get to \*\* in north Hamkyung province in a day and a half's journey by train?

"We travelled for 5 days"

- Why did it take 5 days? "Because the train didn't run properly . . . The train needed diesel fuel to run and there wasn't any so they said the train couldn't run. Since our train didn't have any fuel it couldn't leave. It stayed there for four days and on the evening of the fourth day it left and finally got there on the fifth day after it was totally dark out. It was just so much trouble. . . - What did you do without anything to eat in the train?



"We starved."

- Could you bear it not eating for so long? Were you okay? What about the other people? "We were OK. Most of the other people had nothing to eat either. People couldn't even eat at home, so how could they pack a lunch for the train." - How was life in \*\*?

"When we went to \*\*, we lived with the neighbors and we ate weeds mixed with corn flour. We added salt and mixed it around and slurped it down. We only had it once or twice a day. We were so hungry . . . we thought we would die." - So what did you do?

"We were so hungry we went out to the market and begged for food, and we were given some food. About half of the people in the market were Gottjaebi. We weren't so quick since we were small, so if we had something [to eat] in our hand someone would often grab it away from us. There were so many times we had food snatched from us. We hardly ever got to eat the food that was given to us. - How many beggars were there in the market in \*\*?

"I already said. The market was half full of them." - About how many?

"About 50." - Did anyone ever try to kidnap you? "Yes. Since life was hard. There were even kids that were just a few years old. Kids who were separated from their parents because they didn't have anything to eat. Kids whose parents had run away because they couldn't feed them. . . If you gave those kids some candy, they were won over. Some people would lure these kids away and kill them. They would cut them up with a knife and use them as meat topping for noodle soup. It's true."

**"I decided that even if it killed us we would make it to China."**

- How did you two come to China?

"My grandma and grandpa don't even know that we are here. We went to the market every day and

we heard that about five hours away by train there was a place called Sambong, and that if you went there you could see China, and that China was a rich country. There was nothing to eat at our grandma and grandpa's house, so I thought that if we had to beg, it would be better to die on the way to China. We crept out of the house at night, went to the station and luckily there was a train to China. We bought a ticket right away and got on the train to Sambong. What was supposed to take 5 hours took a whole day. The train didn't have enough fuel and then the train in front ran into something on the track and rolled on its side and had to be fixed. We couldn't pass by, so we had to wait." - What did you do when you got to Sambong?

"When we got to Sambong, we scouted around for a day. There were lots of people crossing over [into China]. Since we were so young, we really wanted to go. I thought I'd take my sister and just cross over, but because it was a border there were guards. At noon they went for lunch and I used that chance and quickly went to where I thought the water was shallow enough. We jumped in but it was still a river. The water was up to my chest and up to my sister's chin. At first I thought my sister was going to drown. But then I thought we were going across even if she was going to die. I held her hand tight and we went right to the other side. That's how we got to a place called Kaesantun. After we crossed, we were able to get food by begging and from people who felt sorry and gave us some.

- So what was it like when you crossed over?

"Some people here gave us clothes, washed our faces and hair, and gave us lots to eat. That's how we lived. If we were still in Chosun [DPRK], we would've died. I thought that living here wasn't bad at all." - When did you cross over?

"We crossed at the end of April." - Soyeon, could you tell me what it was like. Speak up and tell me, were you afraid when you were crossing the Tumen River? "I wasn't afraid."

- Where did the water come up to? "Up to my chin here." - Up to your chin? What if you had fallen in the water and drowned . . . did you hold on to your brother's hand? "Yes"

- What if you had drowned? "It's OK."

- What do you mean, OK? You must want to live. What are some of the good things about China? "First of all there's lots to eat, second, the trains run well. Since the trains run well, it's convenient for people to live here. . . and it's good because there's lots of cars and buses that we never saw in Chosun. When we go to the market, we see lots of things we never saw before, so it's good. "Over there (in North Korea), there's nothing to eat, so the kids don't go to school. And people don't really know what's going on. But here, the children eat well and since everything runs well, even kids who live far away get to school quickly and get to study. That's good and I wish I could do it."

**"School . . . was pathetic"**

- How did you study at the school you attended?

"The primary school that we attended had four grades and each grade had three classes. But 80% of the students didn't come to school. The grade 1 and 2 students studied together in one class and the grade 3 and 4 students studied together in another class. So there should have been six classes, but they were all in one. . . that's how pathetic it was." - Why didn't most kids come to school?

"Because they didn't have anything to eat . . . you need strength to come to school. You need to eat to have the energy to come to school and study hard. They didn't get to eat and they didn't have any energy, so how could they come to school to study? Even if I went to get my friends, they would be lying on the floor at home. And when I'd say, "let's go to school," they'd say they hadn't eaten and didn't want to go. They didn't even think about going. It was pitiful. Since there was no rice, their mom and dad didn't have any energy either and they didn't even think of sending their kids to school. Even when we went to get them they would just lie there without any energy and not say a

word. So now I don't even go to get them."

- But still, didn't the teachers get after kids for not coming to school?

"They weren't in any position to do that. The teachers were all the same . . . they knew that since most kids didn't have anything to eat, they weren't coming to school. And the children who did come, do you think it was because they'd eaten well? The teachers were in the same position. No one eats well." - What about school in \*\* ?

"Since \*\* is bigger, the kids didn't think they had to go to school." - Did no one go to school?

"It was worse there. They didn't go to school. They just did what their mom and dad asked them to do at home. The kids don't eat, they just lie on the floor . . . and some kids are sent out to sell rice cakes made with weeds (in the market) . . . none of them go to school." - When you compare China and Chosun, which is richer?

"They are as different as night and day. China is very well off. There's lots to eat and the transportation is good and there are lots of interesting things. Chosun doesn't have anything interesting or anything to eat, and its hard because the trains don't run." - So, Soyeon, you say something. Do you like China? What do you like?

"I like everything. I like studying, eating and drawing." - How do you like studying and eating? How do you eat here? "I eat well."

- Chul, do you go to school here? "No I don't. The school won't take us because we don't have parents." - Soyeon, do you want to study too?

"Yes."

- Chul, how did you study in North Korea? "I finished the first semester of grade 3 there. I kept

going to school while I looked after my mom. And every Sunday I went to collect coal. I was thought to be a good student in primary school. I was the top student."

- "Chul, what do you like to study?"

"Science and math are my favorites."

### **He read Gorky's "Mother" and "Sweet Dreams"**

- Chul, you are very well spoken. You must have been good at writing, too." "Yes, I was."

-Did you read lots of books? "I read lots of novels. I read "Mother" by the Soviet writer Gorky and things like "Sweet Dreams". And I read science books, like "How to make a rocket." - Soyeon, how long did you study?

"Two months."

- Do you know all the Chosun letters? "Yes."

- Can you read well? Can you read the newspaper? "Yes."

- Chul, do you miss your dad? "I miss him and I am going to find him. I want to study hard and make a lot of money and find my dad." - What about you, Soyeon?

"I'll go with my brother and find my dad when I'm big." - Chul, do you want to study here?

"I want to, but I can't. Children who don't have parents don't get accepted [to school]. And the language here is really difficult. I haven't learned it. If you go to South Chosun, you can learn in the Chosun language and speak the Chosun language . . . and I heard that they give you money and raise you, so I want to go there to study." - What about you, Soyeon?

"I want to go to South Korea with my brother to study." - Chul, what would you like to do in the

future? "I want to study hard and become a famous scientist and invent lots of things even more exciting than rockets. Things that people haven't invented yet. That's why I want to become a famous inventor." - Right, if you study hard you can do that. Do you want to go back to Chosun again?

"If I go there I'll have a hard time again, so I don't want to go. I eat well here and there are lots of neat things, so it's a better place for kids to study." - Is it better living here in \*\* than in \*\*. Are there any Gottjaebi in \*\*?

"There's lots. There aren't that many Gottjaebi, but there are still a lot." - How do the Gottjaebi live?

"Gottjaebi means 'beggar.' They don't have a home or anything to eat. They steal stuff to eat or they beg. If they get caught stealing, they get beaten . . . you get hit more than 10 times when you get caught stealing food. And since you don't have a home, you sleep curled up in the market at night. You sleep under some cloth or a straw sack." - Chul, weren't you a Gottjaebi for awhile?

"Yes I was."

"I have been through all kinds of hardship" - So where did you sleep?

"I slept outside once . . . I have been through all kinds of hardship." - Right, and Soyeon do you want to study?

"I want to study and to dance and to sing and play the accordion." - Do you know how to play the accordion?

"I'm good at it."

- Have you learned any songs since you came here? "Yes I have."

- Which songs do you like better, Korean songs or North Chosun songs? "The Korean songs are a lot more fun than the North Chosun songs." - What songs do you know?

"Soyang River Girl." - You know that song? Would the two of you like to sing it together? "Yes."

**(They sing a magnificent duet of "Soyang River Girl.")**

- What is your greatest hope? Chul, you start and just say one thing? "We want to study. Please help find a way for us to study. Can't you help us study? We want to go to South Chosun and study Korean."

- Don't you want to go to North Chosun to study? "[Heavy sigh], If we go there, forget studying. We will starve. I won't go." - And you, Soyeon?

"Please help me to go to South Chosun to study with my brother." (I told the children that we were recording what they were saying, but they weren't expressing themselves very well at this time. Many Koreans have heard their story and everyone who hears it begins to cry . . . but they weren't expressing themselves well. It's unfortunate. Perhaps it was because they had suffered so much. They are several years more mature than their age. They are really very bright children. In China, there is no fear of them starving, but they are quite bright and here all they can do is be wanderers. The ethnic Koreans living here have a hard enough time providing for their own families and they aren't in a position to take in these children. Furthermore, they have no citizenship, so there is no way to provide a future for them. So I would only ask that you please do something for them. Today is July 1. So long for now.) (Editor's Note: In August, the second tape of the interview with Chul and Soyeon was delivered to the Monthly Chosun. This tape contains vivid descriptions of a classroom situation in North Korea and heartbreaking scenes of Gottjaebi rummaging in the market.)

## The story of Eungol Kim, a friend

- Chul, tell me about the kids at your school.

"Almost all of the kids never came to school because they didn't have anything to eat. There used to be 45 students in our class, but since they couldn't get enough to eat, they didn't have the strength to come to school. So there were barely 10 students who came. The kids became simple-minded.

There was a kid in my class and his dad had worked for the security bureau. But then he did something wrong and he got demoted. From then on their family started having trouble. They became poor . . . later on, even their dad became a Gottjaebi. It was so hard. He finally died because he never got to eat." - Who, his father?

"Yes, Kim Eungol's dad. At first, Kim Eungol was a really good student. He was the top student in our class. After their dad died, their mom didn't have the strength to take care of her sons. So at night, when her sons were sleeping, she ran away on her own. After that, Kim Eungol couldn't come to school. Since both his mom and dad weren't there any more, he went out and roamed around and went to the market to beg for food. He got beaten and became a total Gottjaebi. I don't know whether he died or not. Then there was another kid in our class. A kid named Sung Keumseok. His mom and dad worked as laborers. They worked hard. But no matter how hard they worked it didn't do any good. You have to have money to buy rice. You just run out of energy working hard. You don't have any strength because you have nothing to eat . . . but his dad was very strong. Eventually he became so weak he turned completely to skin and bones.

Then later, his mom and dad said they couldn't get by and they went looking for ways to make money. His dad was looking for work when he fell down in the street and couldn't get up. Even the hospital had no medicine. And since his mom couldn't provide for her sons, she sat them down in the market and told them to wait while she went to the bathroom. Then she ran away and nobody knows where she went . . . From then on, Song Keumsok became a Gottjaebi and never once came



to school. I saw him once at the market . . . his face was all swollen up, he'd been beaten . . . his hair was all dirty and stuck to his head . . . you couldn't even see his face. He never came to school again . . . .

Three classes of grade 4 students were all in one classroom and even though the classroom was big, it wasn't full. Grades 3 and 4 were in one classroom and grades 1 and 2 shared another classroom. One school could fit into two classrooms. The kids were all becoming simple-minded. Even those kids who came to school didn't get to eat and they could barely get there. And during the lesson they'd just lie there. It was even worse during the break. They'd lie on the floor, and even when the teacher came in they didn't get up. The teacher didn't have any energy either, so she didn't have the willpower to make them get up. She'd say "get up" once, and if they didn't get up, she'd just leave them alone. All the kids were lying down. The teacher didn't get to eat either, so during the break she just sat in a student's desk and rested there. I don't know how to describe that school . . . anyway, it was a mess."

**The children just lay there and the teacher had no energy**

- So then, tell me about how you taught Soyeon.

"You mean my sister? Up until then I never thought about it, but it was after my mom died. I was in grade 3 at the time. So I could read and study properly, but Soyeon still didn't even know one letter of her name. So how could she survive like that? She'd die. So I thought that even if I couldn't study, I'd have to make sure Soyeon learned something. So I went to my first grade teacher and begged her to teach my sister. My first grade teacher knew that we didn't have our mother and everything else. The first grade teacher talked to the principal and they must have decided something. So then she said she'd teach Soyeon. I was so happy, so grateful to that teacher. And that's how I got Soyeon taught. Starting the very next day, Soyeon went to school.

But then she lost her school bag. I took a plastic bag we had at home and sewed it up and made a handle, and then she put her books in and carried it like this. But when Soyeon came back from school, she was so tired.

Then I went up to grade 4. This was not at the same school that I had attended before. It was a city school, one that city kids attended. There were five grades there, but when I went into the grade 4 classroom, three classes were empty and one was full. There was only one teacher. At first glance, almost all of the kids were lying there and the teacher was giving a lesson, but her voice sounded like a bird. The children weren't listening and almost all of them were lying down. Then I went to a different classroom and it wasn't even half-full of students. The teacher was teaching a lesson there, too . . . and it was the same situation as the class that was full. So I thought, I won't be able to study at this school. I went to the grade 4 teacher. With five classes in one grade, she was an assistant teacher. I pleaded with her. I said I had fallen behind and that I hadn't done any of the grade 3 studies and I asked if I could borrow that textbook . . . so I could study on my own.

**At night the market was full of children trying to sleep**

Then the teacher hugged me and with tears in her eyes she gave me five textbooks. I was so thankful that I started crying, too. So from then on, Soyeon attended that school and I studied at home. I learned everything I studied. That's how Soyeon and I both got to study. And Soyeon knows her studies. She knows math and she knows Chosun writing." - Soyeon, could you tell me about your studies?

". . . I was a good student and a top student." - What about the students in your grade, did they all come to school? "No they didn't. Just one or two might come . . . Sangmi and \*\* couldn't attend school because they didn't have anything to eat. Chul couldn't come because he didn't have a mom or dad . . . they'd left." - Is that so? Chul, you said that you kids did the Gottjaebi thing. Well what

about your friends, can you tell me about them?

"You mean their names?"

-Tell me their names and tell me about them. "Some of best friends were Changchul, a kid named Kim Jinhyuk and one named Eunhyuk. Those three and me were best friends. The kid named Changchul was really tall. His mom and dad had already disappeared somewhere. He didn't have a house and no one to take care of him, so he started doing the Gottjaebi thing. That's because he didn't have anything to eat. If you think you're going to die, you say to yourself, well, I'll just go and beg some food before I die. So that's why, because there was nothing to eat . . . Then there was the kid named Kim Jinhyuk. His mom and dad had taken off somewhere and he lived at his grandmother's house. His parents weren't around, but then once in awhile they'd come to visit their son. He was too weak. He was a good student, but he was so weak that his parents finally took off for good. His father worked in the mine, digging. He was a manager, but since there was nothing to eat at the mine, it didn't matter if you were a manager or what you were.

His father was a manager and he said he'd have to quit. He said he'd have to go and make a living somewhere else and he went and never came back. And then his mom went to find his dad because she thought the two of them couldn't make it, so she left to find his dad. But nobody knows what happened to her. Her whereabouts became unknown. Their whole family broke up and Jinhyuk lived as a Gottjaebi in the market. Although, the same thing happened to me, too. . . ." - How did you live in the market. Tell me about how you lived in the market with your friends.

"Since we didn't have anything to eat at home we always stayed in the market. Since there was nothing to eat, the children stole or begged for food, or ran errands for scraps. They'd do odd jobs for something to eat, or even just sweep the market to get a bite to eat, then the next day they'd just live off any scraps they could find. They were beaten so hard when they got caught stealing. . . the grownups, they didn't even consider the situation. They'd just beat you. You'd get covered in blood.

. . trying not to drop what you'd stolen while they stomped on you, holding tight to what you'd taken and that's when you'd cry. And other kids did it too. The grownups would give them really hard work to do. . . . I mean it was really hard. Gathering rocks and bringing them to the market and piling them up and digging dirt and carrying water . . . it was so hard. And you never even got to eat. . . the work they gave us was really hard. And still you'd barely survive by begging for food and stealing food and getting beaten.

The market sellers would put down a straw mat to sit on and then throw it away at the end of the day. So you'd get a few of those to put over you when you slept. Some kids slept on the hard ground . . . some kids used a rock for a pillow. The kids would fill up the market area. There were so many of them . . . . "

**Gottjaebi who died would be put in a sack and dumped on the mountain**

- Could you tell me your friends' names and something about them?

"Kim Jinhyuk was a very smart boy. He was very good at his studies and he was outstanding in math. A kid named Chang Chul was good at writing and a kid named Chang Eunhyuk was good at art. Kids who had the brains to do great things were out in the market living the Gottjaebi life . . . . Kim Jinhyuk got started as a Gottjaebi after his mother disappeared. He was still smart, but he couldn't get anything to eat, so what do you do? He didn't have anything to eat, so he didn't have the strength to use his brain. He'd beg and steal and get beaten . . . and because he slept on the ground and didn't get anything to eat, he'd get sick all the time. So he died at the age of 10. He was one year older than me." - So where did he die, in the market?

"Of course he died in the market, where else would he have died. He was begging in the market . . . ." - How?

"He was begging. Dying is not a big deal for us. When I woke up one morning, he couldn't even get up. The pedlars don't like it when a Gottjaebi dies. You know the sacks that the pedlars sit on. They put him in one of those and then put him on an ox cart that you carry hay and stuff on. At the time we left, he was our best friend. We were so sad. So I followed him for 100 meters and cried. They just dumped him on the mountain in front of the market and came back. Then after that a kid named Kang Chul starved to death. He was tall. He was a good printer. Even if you're a good printer, that doesn't help you to beg. So he died too, just like Kim Jinhyuk. So, two of our good friends died. A kid named Chang Chul lived too long. He couldn't eat and his legs and face swelled up and you couldn't even see his eyes.

We couldn't feed him either. We couldn't even take care of our own mouths, so how could we feed him? He swelled up and couldn't move, and since he couldn't move around, he couldn't steal anything if he wanted to. He couldn't work either, and even if we said 'lets run errands,' he couldn't, so all he could do was pick up scraps. His feet even swelled up and he couldn't even move his feet. So he lost his last bit of energy and his breathing stopped. And that's how he died. We couldn't do much, so we told the old man who managed the market. He brought some people and they put him in a rice sack and took him to the mountain and either buried him or threw him away. When he left I was sad and cried a lot. They were our best friends, those two.

- Soyeon, did you have any friends in the market?

"I did."

**"How could we have survived this long?"**

- Tell me about it. What were your friends doing in the market Soyeon? Tell me their names as well. "I hung around with Hyangryeo and we picked up scraps and stuff. And we ate off the ground."

- Where is Hyangryo now?

"In \*\*. She died." - How did she die? "We were going along together, and then she went pee and died." - Soyeon, how did you sleep in the market at night? "I slept on the ground and . . ."

- Soyeon, how old were your friends? "I had a lot of friends who were seven." - Were there many?

"There were nine." - Were there nine friends in the market? What are they doing now? "They all died."

- How did they die? - They all died? "They all died except for two." - How did they die? "One was seven . . . (inaudible)" - Oh, she got tetanus because she stepped on a rusty nail. Where did she die? "In the market.

- And what else? "And another one never got anything to eat and her face and feet swelled up and she couldn't walk. Then some germs went into her fingernails . . ." - So she died after some germs went under her fingernails. Did those kids not have any mom or dad?

"No."

- Where did their parents go? "I don't know where they went." - Did she not have a family? "Her dad once had a job. He didn't eat and died, and her mother ran away somewhere. She didn't have a home because she never had a mother or father." - Chul, how many of your friends do you think are still in the market?

"I don't see how they can live like that and still be alive. How could they still be alive? I think they have probably all died. Even before I left, a lot of them had already died. I think they're probably all dead." - How many kids, how many Gottjaebi were there?

"In the market you mean? As far as I know, there were over a hundred. There were an awful lot.

The market was crawling with them." - Your friends, do you think they have all died in the market?

"Yes."

- Soyeon, what do you think has happened to your friends in the market? "I think they're all dead."

- Why?

"Even when I was there, eight of them died, so how could they still be alive? I was as good as dead too." - But how did you survive Soyeon?

"I lived because of my brother." - Because of your brother, right! "I came here and lived." - Right.

### **The Soup Story**

Chul: "I'll just say one more thing. . . . a lot of kids Soyeon's age and a lot of kids my age died. There were about 20 kids around our age. Two kids Soyeon's age and one kid my age died. Soyeon almost died one day too. I remember thinking that I had to save Soyeon. There was a woman who sold noodles. I kept pleading with her and ended up, you know, with the leftovers that they throw away. I took them and ran. Then right in front of me, before I could go 10 steps, a man appeared in front of me and grabbed me. He said, "you beggar bastard," and dragged me to the woman selling noodles and hit me. And then a man who was eating noodles beat me . . . . All I was thinking was that I had to save Soyeon and I quickly shoved the noodles under my clothes. They beat me and my nose bled . . . so with one hand I wiped my nose and with the other hand I held the noodles under my shirt . . . but my nose started bleeding really hard. Soyeon was oblivious, just lying there staring up at the sky. I pulled the noodles out one at a time from under my clothes and fed them to Soyeon. And that's why she lived." - Right, Soyeon what was it like?

"My face was swollen and so were my hands and feet. I just stared up at the sky. That's when my

brother brought me the noodles and I lived." - Oh?

"That day two of the girls lying beside Soyeon died. One was six and one was seven. They had swollen faces and feet just like Soyeon, but they didn't have anyone to feed them . . . that day their deaths couldn't be avoided. After they died, those two were put in one sack and taken away. When I saw those two being taken out, it was like they were taking out two piglets. And the men who took them to the mountain said to us, "you puppies, if you die this will happen to you." That was so unfair . . . ."

### **I too have a dream**

---

"I'm a woman, too. I despise the fact that I'm a North Korean woman." [The ordeal of a North Korean woman confronted by sex exploitation at age 19]

(Editor's Note: Nineteen-year-old Kim Su-hee (not her real name)

sent this story to The Monthly Chosun in September, 1999. She writes about the painful incidents she experienced when she fled North Korea and went to China in search of food.)

---

I was born in Hoeryong city in North Hamkyung province. At the time I was born my dad was working as a machinist in a tobacco factory and my mom was a high school music teacher.

Thanks to my mom's influence, I took a special interest in playing the accordion when I was in daycare and kindergarten. By the time I finished kindergarten, I could play accompaniment to just about any song. In primary and middle school, I studied hard under my parents' strict control and I always joined school clubs and played the accordion and flute. My mom said that when I graduated from middle school she would send me to a performing arts school, pledging to make a famous performer out of me. It was lots of fun when my school club rehearsed songs and dances and went



to perform at the tobacco factory where my dad worked or at the mining machinery factory where my uncle worked. When the soloists sang to the accompaniment of my accordian, the audience clapped on and on and I felt like the whole world loved me. At that time, around 1990, there weren't any goodies in North Korea like the candies or cookies you find here in China, but we had corn toffee that we made at home to eat at performances. I never would have guessed that my dream of becoming a musician and finding success as a performer would gradually fall apart. I was in grade 9 in 1995 when the horrible food shortages began. The distribution center couldn't give us rations and we didn't have any rice. Despite mom's busy teaching schedule, she would take any spare moments to run over to the distribution center just in case something might have come in that day. When mom was teaching, I'd have to skip class to go stand in front of the distribution center to see if they might give us some rice. We'd have to wait two weeks sometimes for the truck carrying corn meal and flour to arrive at the distribution centre, but each time all we got was 1-2 kilograms of corn meal. There wasn't even enough flour for us to eat one spoonful each per meal.

Mom and I went to school in the morning and then in the afternoon we scoured the mountains around Hoeryong city, picking weeds that weren't poisonous. We'd boil them, add a few spoonfuls of flour and the resulting weed gruel was edible. In fact, it tasted not too bad.

If you asked me to eat that stuff now that I'm in China, I think I would throw up, but at the time it tasted so good. In China, even the pigs are slaughtered before the Chinese would ever eat the likes of that gruel.

### **My dad and brother went off in search of food and . . .**

My dad and my brother, who was studying at Hoeryong Teacher's College, always took pancakes made of corn meal and edible weeds for lunch. Those lunches used up so much corn flour that mom and I made do with the broth of boiled weeds.

My mom had a very good voice and when she was still single she performed as a soloist with the Arts Propaganda Team at the Chungjin steel mill where she was a big hit. Later, when mom was a music teacher at Hoeryong high school, and even when she got older, she continued with her singing and still won prizes at musical contests.

After the food shortages started, she would come home after school and try to teach us kids a few lines of a new song, but then she just couldn't sing any longer. Her throat closed right up after she couldn't get enough to eat. Whenever I saw my mom like that, I felt embarrassed in front of other students. I went to great lengths to explain to my friends that if I were to boil up just a handful of corn, my mom would be able to perform at least 10 songs.

Then in August 1996, some unexpected misfortune hit our family. My dad, who'd been laid off from the tobacco factory, and my brother, who had temporarily suspended his studies, went to Haesan in Yanggang province to try and find some food. They said they were going there to look for potatoes that were left behind after the fields had been harvested. They were going to have them ground into potato flour to bring home.

When they were leaving, dad took half a bag of cigarettes that he had been saving from the supply he got when he was laid off from the tobacco factory. Mom and I waited anxiously for them to return with a bag full of food. One month went by, then another, and even after the New Year, they didn't return. We desperately wanted to go and search for them, but we didn't know where to begin.

People in our neighborhood said they had either gone to some unknown place and died of starvation, or else they'd crossed into China and escaped from North Korea. My mother was in no condition to go to school and teach, so she handed in her resignation. Without enough to eat about 70% of the students weren't coming to school anyway and there wasn't any need for many teachers. The school principal told mom that given the situation, they really didn't need a music teacher anymore. Mom was so upset she cried all day.

All the same, she kept sending me to school, but I was too hungry to keep my mind on studying. My once beloved accordion now lay forgotten and covered in dust. It had already been two years since our club had performed. My class of 45 students was down to barely 10, and we joined other classes to study.

During this period our family had traded away our sewing machine, tape recorder and all our nice clothes for corn. A year later, after I had graduated from high school in August 1997, my future looked bleak. Mom got sick and was bedridden from the physical and mental stress of the disappearance of my dad and brother. Barely able to speak, she whispered: "If they'd escaped to China, then at least they would have sent us some food to eat." But there was no word from them and the security bureau and the safety bureau both continued to harass us to reveal their whereabouts, but how were we to know?

I looked after my mom in our dispersed family. Meanwhile, I had graduated and applied to the Chungjin Performing Arts School, still not having abandoned my dream of becoming a performer. Then I got a notice from the school saying they would not be accepting any new students until the situation got better. Obviously they couldn't accept boarders because they didn't have enough food to feed them. So, in the space of a few short years, who could have guessed that my hopes and dreams would have been shattered and that my family would have fallen apart? To make matters worse, a year after I had graduated mom passed away after succumbing to diabetes and the effects of severe malnutrition. Mom saw it coming and left the following will: "Su-hee, do whatever you have to do to survive. Try to find your brother and dad, and go out and see the big world."

### **"Are we lower than animals?"**

I had to bury my mother, but there was no way I could do it on my own. I went to the tobacco factory my dad had worked at, but so many people who'd worked there had died there that there was

no way I could get a coffin. I decided that if I couldn't bury my mother, then I'd die, too. I started tearing apart our dresser at home and cutting it up with a saw and began making a coffin on my own. How they heard about it I don't know, but about 10 of my brother's classmates from the Hoeryong teacher's college came over to our house. I was so grateful to them. We cried together and they collected some money and rice and somehow came up with a coffin. They even brought over a dish of rice cake.

Then they went out to a farm and borrowed an oxcart to carry off mom's body. When we went to bury mom close to the mountain, a group of young Gottjaebi (beggars) approached me. They were students that mom had taught and all of them were dirty and dressed in rags. I don't know whether they stole it or what, but these Gottjaebi pulled out a bottle of alcohol and two packages of noodles. My brother's classmates and mom's old students poured the alcohol for mom and bowed in her honor. I cried my eyes out at having lost my mother and also because the students' situation was so sad. Then we all gathered together and shared a half piece of rice cake each and I boiled the noodles that the Gottjaebi had brought and everyone had something to eat.

Now, just because I'm expressing sorrow over my situation doesn't mean that I was the only one suffering. Grief and misfortune were being experienced by everyone in Hoeryong city. There was no way anyone could get ahead. Being on my own after graduation from middle school, I searched everywhere for work. I went to big factories including the Hoeryong tobacco factory, the rice refinery and the soy sauce plant. I even tried small provincial factories like the agricultural machinery repair factory. Since there were no raw materials anywhere, nobody seemed to be working and the factories were as quiet as if they had taken their last breath. Even the workers who still had jobs were at home and out of work, so there was no need for a new employee like me. And when I'd get home, our house was cold and empty and the thought of being without work was so frustrating that I felt absolutely abandoned of hope. On top of that, there was no food and when I roamed the mountains and fields to pick weeds I felt lonelier than ever. I even found myself feeling

envious of the farm animals that were grazing on weeds beside me. Later, I began gritting my teeth in defiance, thinking; "Are we lower than animals?"

In order to live I naturally had to focus on the local market. Even though families were openly banging on empty plates because they had nothing to eat, there was always food for sale in the market. I have no idea where it came from. Doubtless, it was the grain that trickled out from party workers who wielded power, or the police, or soldiers' families. With the country wavering on the brink of mass starvation, families with government and military ties were clearly profiteering. What stood out most was the Chinese peddlers who were pretty well dressed and sold clothes and greasy Chinese food.

The sight of young guys with moustaches, which young North Koreans aren't allowed to grow, wearing flashy clothes and selling stuff seemed oddly funny and kind of fascinating at the same time. I also found myself embarrassed by the image of a woman in skin-tight pants, which I was seeing for the very first time. I looked at the Chinese with envy every day thinking; "How happy they must be not having to concern themselves with what they will eat or wear!"

### **The Chinese man I met at the market**

Then one day a thirty-something Chinese man who came selling stuff near our house looked at me as if he knew me.

"Hey miss, come here please." Fumbling awkwardly, I approached him, and as I did he smiled widely, saying: "Miss, I heard you live on your own, you must be hungry." And as he spoke, he pressed two pieces of Chinese bread he was selling into my hand. It felt like a dream having that bread in my hand. I was so hungry. He watched sympathetically as I devoured the bread. Then he asked me how old I was, and I told him I was 18.

"You're 18?! What a pity for such a pretty young woman." Then he handed me a handful of the candies he was selling and started packing up the rest of his goods. He said it was hard work and then he asked if I wouldn't mind taking one of his bundles to my place for him. Feeling so grateful to him, I picked up a bundle of his stuff and quickly went off home. About an hour later, he came by our house. Without taking his shoes off, he came into the kitchen and spread out his goods. Picking out a dress that looked like it would fit me, he asked me to try it on. I was taken aback and refused his offer. He said that outfits like this were common in China and that since I was on my own at such a young age without any parents it would be next to impossible for me to buy anything like it. He held it up against me. I got flustered, thinking it was wrong for a man to come into a house where I was living alone, but at the same time I felt I owed him something and I didn't have the confidence to turn him down. Then he took out a dozen or so pieces of Chinese bread, some candies and a fistful of cookies, looked at me and again told me to try the dress on. He was so persistent. With my face flushed, I went up to the top floor and changed into the dress. When I came down, he looked me over from head to toe and said I looked great.

Then he reached out and touched me, in a nice way, as if to emphasize the good fit, and I suddenly felt a strange sensation drawing me to someone of the opposite sex. He said he'd like to have a rest before leaving and without hesitation he removed his shoes and sat down on the floor. Reaching into his bag, he pulled out some dried pollack, a bottle of alcohol and a dozen or so eggs.

### **Feasting on bread and boiled eggs for the first time in a about a year**

He spread out the food on a newspaper and invited me to join him on the floor, but something held me back. He kept asking me to eat with him and then he got up and came toward me carrying the bottle of alcohol. Taking a drink, he seemed to sense my hunger and pulled me toward him. I couldn't resist any longer and sat down beside him.

Since I was eating bread and boiled eggs for about the first time in a year, it tasted really delicious. I'd been getting by on one spoonful of corn meal mixed in boiled weeds for the previous week. He asked me for a big wine glass and filled it up. Then he forced it into my hands even though I tried to turn it down, saying that if I drank when I was feeling sad it would help to settle me down. I couldn't help but drink after he'd gulped some down and was so persistent in getting me to try some, too. It felt like my throat was burning as I took a sip, and my stomach felt totally queasy. The Chinese alcohol seemed much stronger than any North Korean alcohol my father had drunk. When I was young I had sneaked little sips of my father's alcohol to see what it tasted like. He kept holding the glass up to my mouth until it was gone, and when I had finished it all he gave me a satisfied smile and said: "Regardless of whether you are a woman or a man, you have to have determination."

The burning taste of the alcohol was making me feel sick and he tried to calm me down by taking a boiled egg, dipping it in salt, and feeding me. Outside it was already dark and everything started moving in circles and my whole body felt like it was sinking into the ground, so that all I wanted to do was lie down. But with a Chinese man there who I'd never met before, I struggled to keep thinking straight. But I was already not myself, and even though I felt him holding tightly onto my hand, I felt like I was falling into a bottomless pit. I recall him muttering something as he held me and laid me down where the blankets were spread out. I also recall his unshaven face rubbing against mine, but I don't know what state of mind I was in. I only remember lying perfectly still.

A little later I was shocked as I raised my pounding head and opened my eyes after feeling a pain that felt like the lower half of my body was being ripped apart. I mean I was naked and the man on top of me was naked and he was grinding his lower body against mine. I kept my eyes closed and had to endure to the very end what he was doing to me. My whole body shuddered from the pain. When he rolled away from on top of me, I quickly covered myself with the blanket, turned away

and started crying silently. I was so sad, and at that moment the sadness of my situation was coupled with the sadness of no longer having my brother and my father around. I never even heard the voice of the man next to me trying to console me. A long while later, after he'd left, I got up and saw that the white cover on the bed was a huge mess, spotted with blood stains.

That night I cried over and over again, but I also remembered what some of my classmates had said and that was some comfort to me. I recalled them saying: "You can ask a high price for new goods and eat well for awhile, and in this day and age there is no reason to hesitate." The next day as darkness fell, the Chinese man came back. Of course he brought a bag full of food with him. I wanted to curse at him and tell him to go away, but I didn't have the courage. Practical matters overcame me, for without his help I wouldn't be able to get anything to eat this year. And given the way things were, I might as well get something out of it. Those of you reading this might laugh, but my life was on the line, and those of you who have had to put up with something that couldn't be avoided might understand my compliance. That night he gave me ₩200 and a pile of bread, apples and cookies that I could sell. I also agreed to be with him until he left. For a woman in my desperate situation, I was grateful.

### **Swallowing shame to end the pregnancy**

That night he asked me if I would like a drink, but I said I had a headache and he drank on his own. After that, he did that thing all night long. According to him, a woman with a body like mine could get a high price in China and could live in luxury. I started having illusions about living in China, becoming increasingly drawn to the idea. I slept with him about 10 nights until he returned to China, and when he left he explained in detail his address in China and how I could escape from North Korea. He said that if I escaped from North Korea we could live happily together for the rest of our lives. There was an incredible 15-year age difference between us, but I was beginning to feel love and respect for him in my heart.



By the time he left, I had already decided that I was going to escape from North Korea. Everyone knows the saying that love knows no borders, but then I was overcome with anxiety about leaving my hometown and the country that I had been raised to love. I kept hesitating, and in no time at all two or three months had passed since he'd left and I was still in North Korea.

Meanwhile, something was happening to me physically that made my stomach twist. Faced with the reality of no promise for the future, I swallowed my shame, went to the doctor and had an abortion. It seemed there were lots of other young women in my situation, going out to the market at Musaneup, the station or the area around the Tumen River and doing this kind of stuff just to survive. They were prostituting themselves with men on business trips, with soldiers who were guarding the border along the Tumen River, as well with Chinese men who were crossing the border to sell goods.

### **I wanted to live, not die**

In September 1998 as the first harvest started coming in, I thought I could avoid starvation. But as always, we weren't given a single grain of rice, nor did it even appear. With starvation staring me in the face I tried everything within my means to get by. Using the money the Chinese man had given me, I tried making bean curd to sell, and then I tried making noodles to sell, but each time I only made enough to feed myself and before I knew it my little bit of money was gone and I was facing starvation.

I was so upset that I began sharing my plight with the lady I sold rice cakes with. I really trusted her and I told her about my relationship with the Chinese man and she encouraged me to escape. "In such dire circumstances I really have a hard time tolerating a young woman like you," she said. "Just because you are starving to death does not mean everyone is going to sympathize with you.

Hurry up and go to China where that man is!" She said she would see to it that I got over the Tumen

River and into China, for a price. She asked for the house that I was living in and the W300 that I still had. I asked for a day to think about it. I went home, but no matter how hard I thought, I had to agree with her that I wouldn't last very long if I stayed. I also started missing that Chinese man. I felt that I could rely on him and that I wouldn't feel so fearful and lonely. It made me more determined to escape from North Korea.

In short, rather than struggling to survive in North Korea and likely dying of starvation, I desperately wanted to go and live in a comfortable place. The next day I went to that lady, made an agreement and handed over the house and money. Then two days later I followed her to the Tumen River. I was surprised when she went up and started chatting with none other than one of the border guards, and then after walking for quite a distance we got to the bank of the river. Sure enough, there was no guard on duty. We were just above the neck of the rapids where the water flowed slowly. It was lunchtime and even in China it is very quiet at lunchtime. I held my pounding heart in check as I hurried across the river with the encouragement of the woman who told me to trust her. When I looked back, she was waving her hand motioning me to go quickly. I just grinned and climbed up to the road on the other side, not having the presence of mind to wave back. My destination was clear, since the road I was on led into the village that the Chinese man had told me about. As I approached the village I spoke to an elderly man and asked him where I could find the Chinese man I knew. The old man gave me a doubtful look, but he invited me to his house. When we got there the old man told someone who looked like his 20-odd year old son that I was a guest and gave him the name of the man I was looking for. He got on the phone and said something in Chinese. After he put down the phone he said the man would be coming over in about 30 minutes and asked me to wait. I finally heard a motorcycle stopping in the yard and the man came into the house.

**Young Wife**

I was so happy to see him that I wanted to hug him, but with other people around I held back and I think he was happy, too. Riding on the back of the motorcycle he took me to his house. There, in a big straw-roofed house, I was surprised to see his 32-year-old wife and eight-year-old son. I had a surprised expression on my face and tried hard to conceal my disappointment, but the man had a cocky expression as if to say, when did I ever promise you anything when I was in Hoeryong. His wife didn't pick up on anything and expressed sympathy as if she had already heard the whole story.

"You poor pretty young girl with no one to rely on," she said. "You've done well crossing the border. Now that you're in China you can go somewhere and make a good life for yourself."

The wife said they were some of the poorest people in China, but their electric appliances including a color TV, refrigerator, and sewing machine would have put them in the category of high officials in North Korea. There is no doubt that all the sweet talking the Chinese man had done in asking me to come to China without his wife's knowledge was just a bit of a lie. And now he was cajoling me, saying he would create a future for me in China. At any rate I was in a bind, my fate being in his control. From the next day on I became his "younger" wife.

When his wife went out to buy vegetables, he couldn't wait to get hold of me for sex. And at night when his wife went out to play mahjong, he went crazy with lust for me. After about a month of this arrangement, his wife started to catch on and began to despise me. The man, who became desperate to patch things up, took gifts to his parents-in-law and pandered to his wife. One evening after about two months had passed, the man took me out and asked me how I would like to have a look at someone who could be my future husband. I felt embarrassed, but I guess it was inevitable so I went with him and he took me to a large brick house.

When we went in, a fat, brazen man who looked to be about 40 was sitting on a sofa in a big living room. I presumed the family was well off from the large fancy interior. When the man who took me

gave a questioning gesture, the fat man said, "Yeah," and beamed at me to show his approval. I felt my face turning red and went and dutifully sat in a corner on the floor. The man who took me reassured me saying: "This man is a very good person. You can stay here without having to worry about anything." The two men prepared a light snack from the food that was in the fridge and shared a few drinks as they talked about the tragedy of the situation in North Korea and sympathized with me. And then the man who had brought me there left.

### **Like a sailboat . . .**

The fat man looked at me and comforted me, saying not to worry that although he was older he respected young women like me and that he would open up a future for me and make me happy. Foolishly, at the time I had visions, thinking how great it would be if I could rely on a rich man like this for my livelihood. The fat man combed through the dresser and pulled out a light-pink dress. At his urging, I went into the bedroom and changed, but it was see-through. He opened the bedroom door and was standing there with his mouth open admiring how well it fit me.

He came closer and felt around to check if the shoulders weren't too big, then suddenly he held me so tight I couldn't breathe and started kissing me all over. After quickly undressing me and putting me on the bed, he tore off his own clothes and started doing that thing. He said he'd been starved for love for a long time and from what he was doing I felt like I was laying out flat like a blanket in no time. After a long time he rolled off me exhausted and covered in sweat, praising me that since I was young it was a new taste for him.

He drank a cup of coffee and then stuck himself back on top of me and was even more vigorous this time. It hurt so much I let out a scream. He said that was what I was supposed to do and got even more excited. but when he was finished his assault I was flat out. He lazed around the house without going to work, except to go downtown, and after he'd had some drinks he'd stick himself on top of

me several times a day, each time making me almost faint. This went on for two weeks until one day the man I'd met in Hoeryong brought a woman in her 50s and a man in his late 30s to the house. They all went to the bedroom and whispered as if they had some secret to discuss. They came back into the living room after quite some time, all with satisfied expressions like they'd achieved some great accord in their discussions. The fat man called me and took me into the bedroom and said he had to go on a long business trip to the interior of China. He said: "If you are here alone in this house, you don't speak Chinese and you don't have any ID. If the police come to inspect, it could be dangerous. So, you go with the lady here for the time being." I thought the police could very well come and check on things and I didn't hesitate to agree with his suggestion.

I got ready and went with the lady on a bus to a faraway place that I didn't know. I later found out that I had been sold to a 37-year-old widower for 6,000 yuan. I also learned that the fat man had a wife who operated a large inn in the Yeonbyun district. Here I was in a strange land like a sailboat moving in any direction the wind blew. Fall had come and the trees were starting to shed their leaves.

Following the woman, I ended up in a farm village. There, ethnic Korean farmers were making a basic living growing rice. The woman who came with me was the older sister of the 37-year-old man. She said her brother was an old bachelor who couldn't afford to get married. He lived on his own in a small thatch-roofed house. They had agreed to pay back the money they owed for me with the money they earned from farming. The old bachelor was very pleased to have me as his wife and he treated me well, but he clung to me day and night. Just as they say people who discover alcohol and cigarettes when they're older drink and smoke with a vengeance, my body collapsed under his rock-like body from farming. We agreed to practice birth control and not have children until we were better off. We didn't have any choice because he didn't have two coins to rub together.

### **I became a sex object**



killing myself. But I didn't take any action. I told myself that it was my duty to find my dad and brother, even though I didn't know whether they were dead or alive, and also that I had a duty to see the world. Even after that, the middle-aged man always came once a week to have sex with me. The result was that I became the sexual property of two men. And the middle-aged man continued to pay for my husband's drinks and mahjong. I felt bitter resentment at living with a man who could not protect his one and only wife, but I felt resigned to my fate. My husband picked up on my resentment and began locking the door on the outside when he went out. I knew he did it out of fear I would run away, but there was nothing I could do about that.

People in the village didn't find out what was happening for about a month, but they gradually figured it out and protested his inhumane actions. After being locked up in the house for close to two months, I promised my husband I would not try to escape under any circumstances and was freed once again. Suppose that I tried to escape. I couldn't speak Chinese, didn't have any money, didn't have any siblings or friends to help me, so how could I go anywhere or do anything?

### **"I am a woman too"**

The grandmothers and some other women in the village took me to their homes for chats and visits. I'm so thankful to those people who gave me the courage to live, but still my heart is full of bitter sorrow. I am a woman, too. I never had any intention of getting married at a young age. I wanted to spend my single years as fulfilled as possible, waiting until I was 25, like men, before getting married. Now I like to play the accordion or flute when I'm at home alone, or to play Korean songs to accompany the singing of the village people.

Korean songs are really fun. I don't think people of Hwoeryong would ever have imagined that the popular song "I Don't Think You Know" is a Korean song. I learned and enjoyed singing this song when I graduated from middle school. If you sing a Korean song in North Korea, they come and

take you away, but probably some ethnic Korean from China taught it to someone when they came to Hwoeryong and then it secretly spread. Even though I am married due to some awful twist of fate, I have a strong desire to be in control of my life, just like Chinese women.

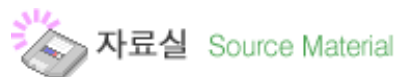
I want to show my dead mother, my dad and my brother that I am living like a woman. I am still a naive 19-year-old and I don't really know what marriage or family life is. I am a young girl who has never known love between a man and a woman.

I can't understand why my fate made me a sex object before I ever experienced love or marriage. Why was I born? I detest the animal-like existence that sent me in search of food simply to survive. I think that had I been born a Chinese woman or in some other country my life wouldn't have been so ill-fated. I feel sorry for the countless North Korean women who like me are living oppressed in our village, or others both near and far away. I detest the North Korean system that has allowed us to be born and then has not embraced or been responsible for us and forced us to go wandering in search of food. Moreover, I despise the fact that I am a North Korean woman.

August 1999: Su-hee Kim

Ài Àü: <a href="#">The account of a Korean-Chinese couple's recent visit to North Korea</a>	SO
ÜÀ½: <a href="#">±North Korea's Auschwitz± -- the inside story on the No. 14 detention center</a>	SO

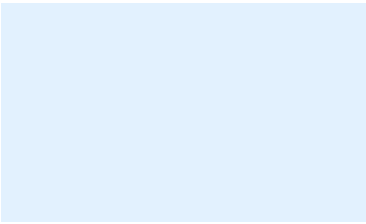
[☰ 목록](#)



자료실 Source Material

남북관계 | 한국현대사 | 강연 · 연설 | 국제관계





Á¶¼ÄÏ ° | ÄÖ £Á¶¼ | ½° ÆÛ-Á¶¼ | ÀáöDB | xç Á° Èxö | °³ Äî Á° ° È£Á¶¼

Copyright (c) 2002 MONTHLY CHOSUN All rights reserved.  
Contact [pubmonth@chosun.com](mailto:pubmonth@chosun.com) for more information.



朝鮮



Update : 2003.05.16

- 기자클럽
- 통신원클럽
- 독자마당
- 자료실
- 도서쇼핑몰
- 구독신청

Search

상세기사검색

>> HOME > ÀÚ ã¼Ç

[SHOCKING REPORT ] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea

ÀÚ¼ ÀÚ so	ÀÚ áEÁÁÌ
À¼ È¼ ¼ö: 2416	:

[SHOCKING REPORT ] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea

The testimony of An Myong-chol, an ex-guard at a political prisoners' camp in North Korea. (조선일보 1995년 5월 16일, 1면 10~11면)

Resme of An Myong-chol  
 Birth date and place:  
 Born in Hongwon-eub 1, Hongwon-gun, South Hamgyong Province, North Korea, on Feb. 22, `1969  
 Education and Occupation  
 Aug. 1975~Aug. 1985  
 Graduated from Hongwon Senior Middle School, South Hamgyong Province, North Korea Sept. 1985~July 1986  
 Dropped out of Hongwon Agricultural Junior College, South Hamgyong Province, North Korea Dec. 1986~Apr. 1987  
 Served as an assistant driver in the transportation platoon, Hongwon Commercial Resort, South Hamgyong Province, North Korea

- 주요기사
- 편집장의 편지 >>>
  - 시론 >>>
  - 특종 / 심층취재 >>>
  - 정치 >>>
  - 사회 >>>
  - 교양 / 문화 >>>
  - 경제 / 과학 >>>
  - 인물 / 인터뷰 >>>
  - 북한 / 통일 >>>
  - 인기연재물 >>>
  - 만평 >>>
  - 이달의 화보 >>>



5월의 목차

World Village 1호 목차보기

World Village 2호 목차보기

World Village 3호 목차보기

기자 趙甲濟의 홈페이지  
www.chosun.com

- 사람들 >>
- 별책부록 >>

독자투고 안내 >>

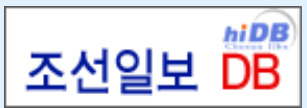
- 월간조선 소개
- 월간조선 지사소개
- 월간조선 해외지사
- 광고문의  
02) 724-6851-6852



한국의 100대 개인 홈페이지

추천 사이트

탈북 난민을 돕는 단체



May 1987~Sept. 1994

Served as a guard at Political Prisoners' Camp 22, Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province, North Korea, under the control of the North Korean Ministry of State Security (hereafter MSS)

Oct. 13, 1994

Sought exile in the Republic of Korea

Below are excerpts from an interview with An Myong-chol, by Kim Yong-sam, a reporter with the Wolgan Chosun (a monthly magazine). The excerpts have been translated into English with the permission of the Wolgan Chosun. Center for the Advancement of North Korean Human Rights was established in Dec. 1994 for (1) raising domestic and international interest in the reality of North Korean human rights violations and striving for the improvement of the North Korean Human rights situation and (2) contributing to the reunification of the Korean peninsula and the formation of Korean Commonwealth. The Center for the Advancement of North Korean Human Rights has made a contribution to (1) raising international interest in North Korean human rights violations through holding international seminars and giving lectures and reports on North Korean human rights violations at international conferences along with publishing books on North Korean human rights violations and (2) meeting the goals for the improvement of the North Korean human rights situation through urging the release of North Korean political prisoners, raising public warnings and seeking solutions in close cooperation with various authorities such as the Un Human Rights Committee, foreign governments and civil organizations and in support for investigations by human rights organizations.

### Stark Reality of North Korea's Gulags

#### Defection of a Simple Country Boy

This is the account of a young, age 24. His name is An Myong-chol. He looks no different from many young men in the Republic of Korea (ROK, or "South Korea"), but Myong-chol is unique in the world because he can reveal the truth about North Korea's Political prisoners. (The English term "Political prisoners" is misleading in the case of most inmates in North Korea's internment camps.

They are guilty of no crime, have broken no law, not even North Korean law. They languish in North Korean Gulags merely because they are family members of political prisoners, who themselves are interred without benefit of trial.) An Myong-chol was born in 1969 in Hongwon County, South Hamgyong Province, the "Democratic People's Republic of Korea"-North Korea. He



graduated from Hongwon Senior Middle School and for one year attended Hongwon Agricultural Junior College. To fulfill his military service obligation, Mr. An joined the Camp Guard Force which provides security at North Korea's internment camps.

After basic training, he worked as a driver at two Gulag camps, which fall under the control of North Korea's Ministry of State Security (MSS), Camp 13 (Onsong, North Hamgyong Province) and Camp 22 (Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province). The inmates at both internment camps were family members of political prisoners. Not one inmate has been tried,, convicted, or sentenced, yet all serve the same term: life imprisonment. An Myong-chol escaped from North Korea and defected to South Korea on 13, October 1994.

Mr. An served for a total of eight years at the two internment camps, which North Korea calls "administrative centers." Mr. An's experience is unique because he is intimately familiar with North Korea's brutal "Maximum Security Areas," internment camps from which few ever return.

An Myong-chol sat down in a restaurant with me, a reporter for Wolgan Chosun, and we ordered Salty Onion Noodles, or "Jajangmyon." The noodles are served in one bowl, of course, and the sauce in another, but this confused Myong-chol. Flushing with embarrassment, he said, "This is sure a stragne dish!" He seement to know about coffee, though, adding sugar and cream like an old pro. But Mr. An got confused each time he encountered something new and showed himself to be every inch a country boy.

Myong-chol is something more, though. He is a man who served as a Gulag guard. He has witnessed enormous cruelty and seen inmates die wretched deaths. As a camp guard, Mr. An stood at the forefront of those preserving the North Korean regime, but he began to suffer doubts, asking himself, "How can human beings treat other human beings this way?" Guilt finally drove him to defect, leaving behind a beloved mother and a younger brother, who themselves now face the terrors of the internment camp because of his defection.

"Why did you defect?" The question came too fast, and seemed too harsh. Mr. An is very much a youth and remains far from mastering life in modern Seoul. I read shyness in his face as he answered: "To indict them for exterminating people." In August 1992, An Hyok and Kang Chol-hwan escaped from North Korea's Camp 5 (Yodok, South Hamgyon Province) and defected to South Korea.

They told us about "Maximum Security Areas and Indoctrination Areas in the Special Dictatorship Target Areas," and their defection revealed to the world the stark truth about North Korea's internment camps.

### **Maximum Security Areas Are Top Secret**

An Myong-chol furnishes us with a priceless opportunity to learn what happens in the Maximum Security Areas. Kang and An Hyok earlier provided us an account of the camps from the perspective of inmates, while An Myongchol affords us a view at the camps from the viewpoint of the Camp Guard Force and the MSS, those responsible for control of the inmates. Taken together, then, the two accounts weave a damning tapestry of the Gulag.

We must recognize that Myong-chol's information has limits. We have, of course, no direct way to verify his account. The Maximum Security Areas are top secret in North Korea, and even South Korean intelligence agencies, which have world-class information on North Korea, have virtually no information about the camps. In an ironic sense, our lack of knowledge actually undercuts the credibility of An Myong-chol's information.

If we have no means to verify An's account, however, neither do we have reason to reject it out of hand. Little credible evidence suggested to the world the horrors of the murder camp at Auschwitz before allied forces liberated it. The absence of proof does not mean the absence of reality, however, and hundreds and thousands suffered and died in the German camps despite the ignorance

of the world. The experiences and the accounts of those who suffer in such camps speak louder and more convincingly than does any ideology.

A second limitation on Mr. An's account is that he was only a camp guard, filling his obligated military service as a member of the Camp Guard Force. Mr. An was not a member of the MSS. The MSS administers the camps and conducts the secret executions.

Mr. An's experience in the camp was limited largely to the security mission of the camp guards, and we cannot expect him to be privy to the Gulag's innermost secrets.

That said, Mr. An served many months as a driver. This assignment allowed him to travel widely within the camps, so he saw more things and talked to many more people than other guards. His job also brought him into frequent contact with MSS personnel and senior administrators. Myong-chol accumulated an impressive amount of camp information.

I asked Mr. An to draw pictures of what he saw at the camps, and his drawings accompany this article. An expert on design reviewed the drawings, and characterized Mr. An's power of observation as "extraordinary." The expert said the drawings include detail that the ordinary observer likely would omit.

I worked hard to screen subjectivity from Mr. An's account, investing many hours with the former guard to sort out what he saw and heard personally and what others told him. We tried to base the account on recollections based on personal experience and to indicate hearsay when it appears in the text.

I also met with Kang Chol-hwan, who had been imprisoned at Camp 15, and compared his narrative with An Myong-chol's Executions and Experiments on Living People

### **2,000 Inmates Missing Arms or Legs**

An Myong-chol's fate brought him into contact with North Korea's Gulag in 1987. Mr. An was to be drafted and was slated to serve with the coastal Guard Force's 19th Brigade. Then he failed his pre-induction physical, complicating the situation. His mother was a member of North Korea's communist party; the Korean Workers' Party (KWP, or simply Party), and she went to see the recruitment officer.

Bribery is endemic in North Korean society, and Mr. An's mother's bribe brought immediate results. the recruitment officer then ignored the physical examination results and asked Myong-chol whether he would like to serve in an antiaircraft unit or whether he would prefer to serve only three years in the military and then enter "political college." Mr. An's ears pricked up when he heard "political college," and he said he'd much prefer the latter course. Only later did he learn that "political college" is the term used for Camp Guard Force, the unit tasked to guard internment camps for "political prisoners".

Mr. An was soon on his way to basic training at the Camp Guard Force training facility inside Camp 11, in Kyongsong, North Hamgyong Province. A training instructor told recruits before they entered Camp 11 that they were absolutely forbidden to talk to any "emigrant," the euphemism used for political prisoner. The instructor repeated this warning several times, sparking the trainees' interest.

What in the world could be inside the camp, they wondered, that could warrant such strong warnings? The camp's main gate opened, and the trainees entered. The scene inside, Mr. An said, hit him like a sledgehammer. The area swarmed with dwarfs wearing the rags of slaves. "Are these humans?" Myong-chol asked himself. "Or are they animals?"

When I first saw them, I thought we had captured a bunch of the South Korean beggars we often see depicted on North Korean TV. One of my buddies said later he'd heard that midgets live in



special communes, and he thought we were entering such a village. The inmates were all short, like midgets. They were walking skeletons, nothing but skin and bone. They frightened me."

I asked Mr. An what other impressions he drew of the inmates. "On average," he said, "they are about 4 feet 11. Their faces are covered with cuts and scars where they have been struck. Most have no ears; they have been beaten off. Many have crooked noses, only one eye, or one eye turned in its socket.

These deformities result from beatings and other mistreatment in the Gulag. About 30% of them bore such scars." Myong-chol was shocked at the large number of inmates who hobbled about with missing legs. Some have crutches; some walk with the aid of tree limbs; but all must work. Mr. An says 2,000 of Camp 22's inmates have missing limbs.

Basic training lasted two months. When it was over, Mr. An was stationed at Camp 13 in Onsong, North Hamgyong Province. He was assigned initially to a guard post on the camp's perimeter but later worked as a driver. He was assigned initially to a guard post on the camp's perimeter but later worked as a driver. He began to learn the truth about the Gulag in that assignment.

During training and throughout his service in the camps, senior guards ceaselessly drilled into Mr. An's head the single refrain, "Inmates are not humans." Inmates are slaves, not humans. If they live, all right; if they die, that's all right, too.

The first place the "subhumans" face extermination is in the detention barracks. Inmates who break a camp regulation or who are "obstreperous" are incarcerated in the detention barracks without a word of explanation.

Said An Myong-chol, "They shave your head as soon as you get to the barracks, whether you're male or female. You get 3.6 ounces of corn and a little salt each day, and you must try to survive on that. You can't see the sun, and you can't hear the wind. After a month there, all inmates become



skeletons, walking mummies." Had the inmates in detention done something worthy of serious punishment, they could understand their harsh treatment, but most are thrown into detention for merely thoughtless actions or minor offenses-stealing something produced at the camp, misunderstanding a guard's orders, hitching a ride on an ox, showing too much interest in news from the outside, not following operating procedures, or producing less than the quota.

The psychological duress is horrible because the harshness is so disproportionate to the offense.

Camp 22's detention barracks are located near camp headquarters in Hoeyong-ri. It holds 50 inmates. The building has no windows or ventilation and reeks of blood and pus.

Detention barracks keepers mercilessly beat inmates during their time in detention. The hapless prisoners emerge from the barracks more dead than alive. From September 1993 to September 1994, An Myong-chol stood guard at an ammunition bunker located next to the detention barracks. "It was hard to pull duty there," he says, "because of the inmates' terrible screams and the ghastly sounds made by the keepers' blows.

The keepers decide who will be released from detention back into the general population. They decide also who will be executed and who will be reassigned to the "Major Construction Projects." Those to be executed have committed "serious" crimes: they disobey MSS personnel or camp guards, or actively resist their orders; they kill camp livestock; they impede production rates by rioting, revoltin, or attempting murder; or they get pregnant.

Those selected for Major Construction Projects are sent to work on secret tunnels or nuclear facilities, meaning they will be transferred to the control of the 3rd Bureau, MSS. No matter where the Major Construction Projects are, though, inmates posted there will never return to whatever familiarity camp life afforded them.

The sadistic keepers torture inmates in detention all day long. the keepers force them to kneel with a

thick wooden bar inserted between their legs and buttocks. The legs begin to rot after a week because the wood cuts off the blood supply. Those lucky enough to be released cannot walk and must be carried by family members. They usually die within six months.

Here in South Korea we believed that executions in North Korea's internment camps are conducted openly. Mr. An says this is not true.

Public executions are forbidden in Maximum Security Areas. They were conducted previously to instill fear or to make an example of an inmate. They caused antagonism and rage instead, perhaps because they were so frequent they desensitized the inmates. The administration requires the camp guards to mobilize in full combat gear for each public execution. We have to encircle the execution site so as to prevent a riot or rebellion. They had so much trouble they replaced the public executions with secret ones."

I asked Mr. An what inmates were subject to secret execution. "Those who know about corruption by the MSS, those who learn the camp's secrets, those caught while trying to escape, those who attempt murder, those who are dissatisfied, those who are pregnant, and those who get them pregnant."

Section 1 (Security) of the camp's Security Department conducts secret executions. The section's personnel hold the power of life or death over inmates. I asked Mr. An about the means of execution. "Whatever methods the MSS people want. They fret, how are we going to do it today? They decide on a whim. They use pistols on days they don't want to get their hands bloody. On other days, they kill them slowly and painfully just for the fun of it."

### **The MSS Executes Prisoners on Whim**

I asked him for some examples of the execution methods.

°I've heard but not seen myself that they beat them to death with clubs, hit them in the head with rocks, cut out their hearts with knives, or knock out the eyes by striking the back of the head with a hammer. If the condemned is a women, they may cut off her breasts, cut out her sexual organ, or insert a shovel handle into the vagina and force it upward until it reaches her throat. In the case of a pregnant woman, they may place a plank on the abdomen and jump on it until the fetus emerges.

°Based on what a senior MSS person told me, they kill people as a kind of game. He said the'd bring out the inmate to be executed and use a pistol to play the 'hit the left eye game.' He said if an in-mate swears and puts up a fuss they sometimes strip him naked and bury him alive. Worst of all, he said, they sometimes take the condemned to the detention barracks where they force inmates there to punch, kick, and bite the person to death."

Sometimes camp guards and not the MSS kill an inmate. Here is one eyewitness account.

Said Mr. An, "It was the winter of 1990. Camp 22's Transportation Squad Leader Chu Sung-chol grabbed an inmate and yelled, 'You're not obeying me!' Chu threw the man down and stomped on his back, rupturing his liver. The inmate died soon after. The administration adopted a deliberately ambiguous attitude over the case and did not discipline Chu. You don't get in trouble for killing inmates unless you cause a commotion when you do it."

Camp 13's secret execution site was located near Sobaengnyon at a place called Onsok Peak. It was renowned as a secret camp used by Kim Il-sung in his alleged gurrilla resistance against the Japanese. Camp 22's secret execution site is located at Sugol; a commonly called "Corpse Valley".

Mr. an says the inmates do not know about the execution sites because they are guarded by a separate unit, the Sugol Investigation Unit in Camp 22.

When An Myong-chol was stationed at Camp 13, he served for a year at Sobaengnyong guard post, located a scant five meters outside the Onsok Peak execution site. The area was distinctive for its



It is common sense that there are going to be executions at a camp. I was a camp guard, but they kept this secret even from us. How do I make others understand that the killings occurred? I can argue with you, insisting the executions are fact, but you saying no, but even as we argue many inmates in North Korea are facing death at secret execution sites. That's the only truth I know."

Mr. An says he heard often about secret executions because he was a driver. He says drivers had ready contact with the MSS. When his driving duties took him away from camp, Mr. An would do "capitalistic favors" for the MSS, (These favors involved helping MSS personnel with black market activities and other sordid means of making money.) In return, MSS personnel were in the habit of inviting Mr. An to drink with them.

"When they drink," Mr. An said, "the MSS people brag about their executions. 'I got him right in the eyeball! You should have seen the blood!' I took supplies to the Sugol Investigation Unit (the special guard unit which provides security at Camp 22's secret execution site) all the time, and they would tell me all about the executions."

What evidence do we have, however, that such executions actually took place? "I have seen the bodies of inmates killed horribly at the execution sites a number of times. Most of the men died from gunshot wounds, but the women did not enjoy such easy deaths. I personally saw women with their breasts cut off and women with shovel handles shoved up their vaginas. I've seen bodies at execution sites with the backs of the heads completely crushed."

Mr. An recalls that the MSS killed some inmates by disembowelment. One MSS person told a story Mr. An called "cowardly." "I was having sex with this inmate when she actually slapped me. I slit her." When the MSS kill a woman "who has committed the crime of granting her body to anyone," a number of them pull open her legs and "slit" her, disemboweling her starting at the vagina. Said Mr. An, "I have seen bodies at the execution sites with the entire trunk slit open, with arms or legs

cut off, and with the throat hacked out."

°Rocks dotted the landscape at Camp 13's execution site, so the MSS placed rocks on their victims' bodies. The place smells horribly of decomposing bodies, especially in the summer, attracting crows, hawks, and wild pigs. I've seen what remains of bodies after the animals feast on them."

Mr. An said he saw bodies from which wild animals had eaten all the internal organs. He was enraged. "How can they treat the dead that way?"

The Camp Guard Force's field combat training exercise course passed by Camp 22's secret execution site. Mr. An says a number of guards vomited while looking for firewood when they discovered a human corpse crawling with insects. Mr. An trembled as he told about unearthing a human skeleton while setting up a tent during a training exercise near Sugol.

An Myong-chol heard about experiments on living people. He learned that Gulag doctors conduct experiments very much like those perpetrated by the Japanese Army's infamous 731st Unit and by Nazi death camp doctors.

North Korean internment camps have two very different types of hospitals. One treats inmates, while the MSS and camp guards use the other. Camp 22's MSS hospital is located at Chungbong; inmate hospitals are located at Raksaeng and at the coal mine.

The Chungbong hospital, at least, had some medicine and some medical facilities, but the inmate hospitals virtually never have drugs. The coal mine produces a steady stream of crushed limbs, for which the doctors' standard treatment is amputation, although without the benefit of anesthesia. The patients' screams break glass they are so awful. The hospital workers stuff rags in their mouths.

### **Sadistic Experiments on Living Human Beings**

The Chungbong hospital military staff consists of 10 military medical officers and three nurses. The

medical officers are new graduates of the Military Medical College and know virtually nothing about operating techniques. They routinely kill or cripple people on the operating table with their tentative and bungling procedures.

It was August 1990 at Camp 13. One of my fellow guards, Comrade Yi Yong-gon, collapsed on duty with a stomach ulcer, and we took him to the hospital. Medical Officer U was on duty. U examined Yi, who was sweating profusely, said Yi had an upset stomach, and gave him some herbal powder for indigestion. Yi's ulcer had advanced to the point that his stomach was ready to explode, but U didn't know how to operate, so to cover up he treated Yi for digestion."

Yi's stomach in fact ruptured the next day, and he died. This incident enraged the guards, and a group of them beat U up, frightening the medical officer so badly that he seldom ventured out of the hospital thereafter. U decided to improve his operating technique and began to have inmates brought to him for practice. Inmates with serious diseases like pneumonia and tuberculosis were sent to U.

He would tell them he could cure their condition and then proceed to conduct experimental surgery unrelated to their ailments. He opened up the abdomens of patients who had no need for such a procedure, just to practice his surgical technique. U removed different organs from inmates, killing many and permanently crippling others. Mr. An tells of cases in which Military Medical Officer U conducted an experiment on a living person.

Raksaeng Zone Direct Command Tractor Platoon Leader Kim Kyongchan, 35, was taken to U. There was nothing wrong with Kim. U made an incision about eight inches long in Kim's abdomen and removed his appendix without administering anesthesia. They couldn't stop the hemorrhaging for a long time, and Kim barely managed to survive. They forcibly operated on the perfectly healthy eye of Tractor Operator Kim Bok-nam, 25. Kim's eye turned permanently inward after the surgery."

Military Medical Officer U practiced on live subjects for two years, and in the end won respect for his improved medical skills. Nor was U's an isolated case. All the medical officers used the inmates to gain surgical experience their training neglected.

I asked Mr. An whether he personally had witnessed experimental medical procedures performed on living human beings, and he acknowledged he had not, that his information came from others. Mr. An said, however, he heard "hundreds" of accounts of experiments on living humans from doctors as he drove them to and from duty or drove them to the scene of accidents.

"Each military medical officer had conducted at least 50 experiments on living people," said Mr. An. "I heard their brave stories many times, how they opened up some hapless inmate free from medical flaw and cut out his liver or some other organ. So common was knowledge of these practices that camp guards universally believe that medical experiments create most of the camp's numerous cripples, many of whom are missing arms or legs."

MSS dependents also used Camp 22's Chungbong Hospital. Those whose maladies persist after treatment complain to the doctors, asking them why they can't cure them after all their practice on inmates. The plain fact is the medical officers experiment and practice on inmates so as to develop skills they can use in treating the MSS, the camp guards, and their dependents.

Inmate Kang Chol-hwan escaped from Camp 15 and adfected to South Korea, and he supports Mr. An's account. "I heard often that inmates kept in the Ideological indoctrination Area were made victims of medical experiments." Kang said rumor had it that if an inmate became ill, he would be taken aay, given an injection, and become the subject of a practice operation in a medical procedure, such as opening an abdomen. Sex and Execution

### **Why Is Sex Banned in the Gulag?**

One of the most unusual facts to emerge from An Myong-chol's account is that North Korea bans



sex in the Gulag. If camp officials discover that a couple has had sexual relations, they are dragged to the detention barracks to undergo "instruction"(merciless beatings).

Once the keepers instruct the couple sufficiently, they send the man to a Major Construction Project and assign the woman to "disciplinary labor" at the coal mine. (An inmate must work underground for a solid week during disciplinary labor.) If the woman is pregnant, the MSS execute both her and the baby's father. Mr. An said women who get pregnant usually wrap their stomachs tightly to disguise the pregnancy as long as possible.

They are killed when discovered. Births are sometimes allowed in the camps," said Mr. An. "A husband and wife who are imprisoned at the same time can have children. Very obedient inmates may be allowed to marry and have children. Camp rules forbid other pregnancies or births."

What, I asked Mr. An, are the reasons the camps ban sex? why do they execute women who get pregnant? "first," he said, "there's the danger that unrestricted sexual activity, pregnancy, and childbirth will trigger a population explosion in the camps. And, second, women who are pregnant, who deliver babies, and who raise young children are not available to perform camp labor."

No amount of intimidation can alter basic instincts. Can male inmates be interested sexually, however, in women inmates who cannot bathe, who lack any semblance of feminine shape, and who dress in rags?

"These people." Mr. An says, "have lost all hope and live like animals. In such circumstances, sexual release becomes even more a basic instinct." **Directive on Political Prisoners** 김일성 Kim Il-Sung "We must make class enemies taste clearly the dictatorship of the proletariat.

"Factional elements are stumbling blocks to our revolution, and the revolution must single them out for eradication.



struggle. You must strengthen your uncompromising struggle against class enemies and factional elements.

Personnel of the MSS Farm Guidance Bureau (7th Bureau) and the Camp Guard Force must take pride in the fact they stand on the forward outpost Line of our class. They must bring joy to the Honorable leader by conducting camp control activities without blemish and by preventing any of the emigrants (political prisoners) from escaping.

Mr. An says he experienced real human compassion for "these pitiful people" as he watched the inmates risk their lives to have sex. Mr. An's compassion didn't prevent him from describing camp incidents that developed from this problem.

The inmates engage in sex mostly at noontime because camp guards and the MSS enter rooms repeatedly at night unannounced to check to see if inmates have escaped. The inmates hurry through lunch and then have time only for momentary sexual union, usually in toilet, a corn field, or in the brush and foliage. The guards call this activity "rabbit sex" or "lightning sex."

Age is not a factor in these sexual liaisons. The women usually initiate sex because, Mr. An says, women hold up better than men in the extreme conditions which prevail in the camps. The camps do not discriminate among inmates, either along sexual lines or by age. Inmates perform camp labor whether young, old, male, or female, and they subsist on the same rations. The women grow coarse in personality, becoming wild, like animals.

There are many cases in which trouble develops when a camp guard or MSS officer has sex with a female inmate. The MSS execute the woman if she becomes pregnant. The man may be demoted, lose his position, or be "discharged from life," which means being returned to one's birthplace with a blemished record that rules out any chance of joining the Party. Mr. An told me about some problems experienced by guards and MSS personnel.

### **You die if You're Pregnant**

Kim Man-su was a member of the North Korean elite. He was a deputy platoon leader in the Camp Guard Force at Camp 13 and was allowed to join the Party at the earliest possible age. Kim liked to hunt wild boar around the Salbawi guard post, near Work Group 19 in the Tongpo Zone. Hunting frequently in the area, Kim met Work Group Guide Choe, and she soon became pregnant. Choe bound her swelling abdomen tightly under her clothing and she managed to escape notice. She was working in a field in her ninth month when the baby came. The MSS took her away.

Her baby was no bigger than a fist, since Choe had little to eat during the pregnancy and bound herself so tightly for so long. She would not reveal the name of the baby's father, even after initial MSS torture because she did not want Kim to be disciplined.

This enraged the MSS torturers, who threw the baby to a dog, and put a snake into Choe's vagina. As the torture worsened, she finally told the MSS the father's name. The MSS executed Choe and banished Kim to the Unyul Mine.

Mr. An says women inmates who become pregnant by the MSS or camp guards are killed in a more brutal way than are other pregnant women. Mr. An says this is a form of revenge against women inmates who tempt the MSS or the guards into sexual activity that ruins careers.

In October 1989, an MSS major shot himself with a pistol at a unit dayroom in Camp 13's Punggye Zone. The major used all the women guides under his jurisdiction in the 7th Work Group as so many sex toys. He sold the inmates old shoes, clothes, and makeup and made 20,000 won. (Inmates earn 500 won per year to keep them from rioting.) In the midst of the major's black market activities and sexual athletics, a 7th Work Group Guide named Yi, 28, got pregnant.

When her size betrayed her, the MSS hauled her to the detention barracks, but she held up under

initial torture and would not reveal the name of the baby's father. The MSS torturers slit her stomach open, tore out the fetus and stomped it to death, forced an iron lever into her vagina, and applied highvoltage electricity to the lever. Yi thrashed and turned red before virtually burning to death.

### **Shovel Handles**

The MSS abandoned her body at the execution site, placing a large rock on her stomach to keep the body in place. (Mr. An says he saw bodies with rock on their stomachs at the execution site.) The MSS major heard the woman had been sent to detention, and realizing his political life was over, he ended the rest of his life with a pistol.

When Mr. An was stationed at Camp 13 in 1989, Senuir Private O Wonchol of Platoon 3, Company 2, was on roving patrol when he encountered a young inmate and raped her. (O now serves as 3rd squad leader, 2nd platoon, 4th company at Camp 22.) The frightened gir reported the rape to the MSS. The investigation that followed revealed O's father to be Dean of Faculty at the MSS Political College, so no action was taken against Senior Private O.

The girl was not nearly so lucky. She was killed for "running naked at;± and seducing Private O. She died horribly. They cut off her nipples and shoved a shovel handle up he vagina until it reached the throat.(Mr. An said he saw a body with a shovel handle in its vagina.) Mr. An told me about a girl whose name he could not remember. She repatriated to North Korea from overseas and was interned at Camp 13. People said she was related to an executive in the Chongryon-the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan.

She was a pretty, gentle person, and a detention barrack's keeper began secretly giving her food, and befor long fell in love with her. She complained about being sent to an internment camp in a letter to a relative in Japan and asked the keeper to mail the letter, which he did, allowing an inmate to

communicate with the outside world.

The extra food she consumed caused her face to fill out, someone noticed, and she was sent to the detention barracks. The suspicious keepers tortured her most maliciously, pumping a smooth piece of wood the size of a penis in and out of her vagina in such a way as to keep her in a state of heightened sexual arousal for two hours, eventually causing her to lose her mind. At some point, she told her torturers the story of her secret food supply. The guilty keeper was put on restrictions. The MSS executed the inmate.

An Myong-chol did not witness the incident above but heard most of it from a MSS interlocutor. Mr. An did witness the result of an incident involving Han Chin-tok, 23, an inmate at Camp 22. Han was very beautiful, and a number of the guards fell desperately in love with her. Her father was a veterinarian in Kanwon Province's Anbyon and was closely related to Kim Changbong, a senior official who was purged. Han's whole family was sent to the camps when kim was purged. In 1991, An Myong-chol was put in charge of the pig pens and got to know han, who worked at the pens.

Camp Guard Force company commander Yang Gi-chol started visiting the pens frequently, entering the area after getting the keys from an, whose squad leader ordered him to turn over he keys. Mr. An didn't think any more about it, but Yang and Han were having sexual relations in the pens. Somebody turned them in. Yang was put n restrictions, and the MSS hauled Han away to detention, where Mr. An understood she had died.

Later, Mr. An went to pick up a load of coal at the camp's mine and saw Han Chin-dok there. He was glad to learn she had survived and spoke to her. She told him the detention barracks keepers gang-raped her and then tortured her severely. They inserted a pipe in her vagina, hurt her in every possible way, and finally heated up a skewer and branded an X on her chest.

### **Sex Between Brothers and Sisters, Mothers and Sons**

Sobbing, and Chin-dok showed Mr. An the scar the hot metal left on her chest. The shape of the X was very distinct on her breasts. Mr. An asked her why they let her live, and she said, "Because I was a MSS spy." Han was pulling disciplinary labor in the mine sometime later and was involved in a tunnel cart accident that cost both her legs. When she recovered she was assigned to Work Group 44, where she shucked corn all day. Mr. An said Han Chin-dok was the only female involved in such a sexual incident he had ever known to survive.

Sexual activity is so circumscribed in the camps that it is an open secret that brothers and sisters and mothers and sons engage in sexual activity with each other. Mr. An said, "The inmates are not human beings, and refined traits like morality and virtue simply don't exist among them." The MSS were so dumfounded when they caught a mother and son in sexual relations that they didn't kill them, satisfying themselves by assigning the son to disciplinary labor in the coal mine.

An Myong-chol spoke directly with inmate Choe Sun-ae, 26, about her sexual relationship with her brother, Choe Hui-yu, 24. Mr. An asked Sun-ae how she handled her sexual desires, and she responded as follows. "When we sleep at night and sexual cravings occur and I can't sleep, I play with my brother's penis. In the heat of passion, I don't think of him as my little brother, just as a man. Mother knows we do it, but she pretends she doesn't."

Sun-ae eventually became pregnant by her brother. She did everything to abort the fetus, jumping off a cliff, eating toxic weeds, and drinking contaminated water. the fetus refused to abort. she stabbed herself in the abdomen with a stick; she even drank urine. Nothing worked. She finally ate poisonous royal azalea root, and this aborted the fetus but damaged her liver to the point where she almost died.

The other inmates are very envious of a brother and sister because they can relieve their sexual desires with comparative ease.





animals are very scarce.

Maybe it's the dogs' training, but whatever the reason they do not bother camp guards, MSS personnel, or their dependents. When an inmate appears, however, the dogs immediately become agitated and display unrestrainedly aggressive behavior. Mr. An tells of instances in which the dogs killed inmates.

°The dogs killed two women inmates at Camp 13 in July 1988. They consumed all the women's flesh, leaving nothing but bones. I was right there and saw it all. The MSS fed two 15-year old boys to the dogs in May 1991. It is considered nothing to feed an inmate to the dogs."

Mr. An told me of another instance of complete disregard for human life during a May 1993 fire at Camp 22's coal mine. "A fierce fire broke out at the mine. Some inmates assigned to the mine got out when the fire started, but dozens were trapped inside. The MSS supervisor of mine operations directed that a charge be set off at the mouth of the mine in an attempt to snuff out the fire. The inmates refused, reminding the MSS man of the inmates still trapped inside. The MSS fired blank rounds, to break up the group. They set off the charge, and the flames did stop, but 50 inmates were inside the mine at the time, and none survived."

Inmates frequently die merely to preserve the honor of camp guards or the MSS. In October 1993 Camp 22's Camp Guard Force unit, of which An Myong-chol was a member, received the coveted "Three Revolutions Red Flag" award. Mr. An said his unit won the honor based on the number of bodies of many dead inmates.

°The cultural revolution segment of the Three Revolutions program contains a section calling for well-groomed guard posts. In a bid to win program honors, the Camp Guard Force's leaders from May to October 1993 mobilized inmates to tear down and rebuild every important guard post in Camp 22. Twenty inmates lost their lives in the process." During this project, the guard unit fed the

inmates a lunch concocted of spoiled tomatoes, pork bones, and even a little rice.

The guards laughed and hooted as they watched the inmates fight each other viciously to get to the broth and its pork bones and pitifully few grains of rice. The inmates lapped up the stuff ravenously because it was so superior to their usual lunch of steamed corn kernels. The Executioners: The MSS  
3rd Bureau

### **Smoke from the 3rd Bureau's Chimney**

Hitler created a living hell during World War Ⅴ±, exterminating millions of jews and leaving a barbaric scar on the history of civilization. Last year Steven Spielberg's "Shindler's List" recalled the horror of those years to viewers' minds, shocking us but at the same time sounding a warning bell. How must we react when we learn that North Korea's internment camps are repeating the same kind of extermination?

An Myong-chol's account informs us that the 3rd Bureau, MSS, is a unit of murderers no different from those who operated at Auschwitz. The 3rd Bureau is also called the Preliminary Adjudication Bureau. The 7th Bureau, MSS, operates North Korea's internment camps, but Mr. An says the 3rd Bureau operates a station at each camp. Third Bureau personnel conduct executions, research torture technology, experiment on living inmates, gather oil from human beings, and commit other depredations.

기°The 3rd Bureau's Camp 13 station was located at Chukgigol in 1984. It moved for a short time to Camp 16 but returned in 1986 to Camp 13. When Camp 13 was disbanded, the station returned to Camp 16 in May 1990.

Mr. An began to learn of the existence of the 3rd Bureau in October 1987 when he was assigned to a Camp 13 guard post. He was in charge of Tokgol Sub-guardpost, south of Salbaui Guard Post. He



told Yi Ui-song. When he got off duty, he reported the smoke to the guard post commander, who said, "You're new, and it looks like you don't know anything. That smoke's from burning human bones. That's you need to know."

Almost all the camp guards had seen the smoke from the burning bones while standing guard duty in the early hours of the morning. An Myong-chol began to learn detail about the 3rd Bureau after he was assigned to temporary duty as a driver in 1989. Drivers deliver rations and other material throughout the camp and develop a broad range of contacts among work group directors and other MSS personnel. In his many trips and visits through the camp, he heard many accounts of the grisly activities of the 3rd bureau from senior MSS and senior camp guard personnel.

In the fall of 1989, Mr. An had to stop frequently at the motor pool to have a vehicle problem looked at. The Transportation Section was responsible for all camp vehicles, and a vehicle belonging to the 3rd Bureau stopped by for repairs while he was there.

Mr. An was smoking and chatting with Yi Myong-hak (then driver for director of the camp's Political Department and now a fuel tank guard at Camp 22's Transportation Section), a driver from the camp's Raw Materials Section, and a driver from the Rear Area Section. Two drivers from the 3rd Bureau and the Security Section Chief had driven up.

Yi Myong-hak stared at the men from the 3rd Bureau and said, "Man, I mean those guys are real lucky. I hear they get gifts every month from Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. They can go anywhere they want without being challenged; they can have any woman they want. Man, that's living!"

### “Crows” Take Away the Inmates

That remark triggered a flood of furtive talk among the group. Mr. An recalled what he heard that day and what he heard from many sources over time around the camp. Ordinarily, the longer a rumor circulates the more overblown it tends to become. We cannot rule out the possibility, therefore,

that what he heard from others in the camp may be exaggerated. Despite this drawback, his statements at least provide us with solid information that the 3rd Bureau exists and provides at least a dim outline of the organization.

ì¸°When you throw people into boiling water in a big pot, they thrash about terribly for a while but grow quiet within five minutes."

ì¸°When you sever a human's wrist or heel with a knife, white tendons appear. You can pull these out with pliers, dry them, and use them to make a swagger stick of exceptional toughness."

ì¸°I heard Hitler in World War ¼± slept in a bed made out of living people. That's supposed to be the best possible way to get a really sound, refreshing night's sleep. The third Bureau sadists mimic Hitler by sleeping in beds made of people. You tie inmates' legs, arms, and necks and spread blankets over them, and it makes the best possible bed.

ì¸°They tied a man and a woman upside down and cut their carotid arteries, letting the blood spill out to see whether men or women have more blood. They starved men and women to see which sex could last longer without food.

ì¸°They researched how people reacted to blows to vital areas. They made a tonic out of human uteruses. It is taken by injection and is great for sexual stamina. I heard they provided it as a gift to Kim Jong-il.

ì¸°The MSS 3rd bureau are human butchers. When they have an inmate ready, they drink the booze Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il send them before they get started. Once they start they are masters of their craft. They don't bat an eye."

ì¸°They tested the effect of using a rubber hammer on a human. They found if you hit a person with a rubber-headed hammer on the back of the skull, it paralyzes brain function, causes memory loss,

and essentially turns the person into a vegetable. They also tested the strength of a blow necessary to cause death. I heard they let Special Operations military units use some inmates assigned to Major Construction Projects for firing practice and for practice in stealthy, hand-to-hand murder."

Mr. An says that when the 3rd Bureau needs people, a five ton Zil truck roars into camp. The truck is covered in canvas to frustrate prying eyes, but has a small window toward the front. The truck does not have a license plate and is painted black. Camp inmates call it the "crow," and the words the crow is coming throws inmates to work on the Major Construction Projects. Actually crows always came in pairs, meaning that each month the trucks haul away 40~60 people.

°Major Construction Projects refers to secret tunnels or underground nuclear facilities, but nobody knows where the crows take these inmates."

Kang Chol-hwan was interned at Camp 15 but had never heard of the 3rd Bureau. He did say, "Once a month a five ton Russian truck would take people to work on the Major construction Projects." Kang's description of the truck and use of the term, "Major Construction Projects" matches An's account. Both said nobody taken away in the trucks ever returned. Kang explained it this way.

°A black truck would appear regularly in the early morning hours, load up with inmates, and drive away. Rumor had it the truck returned inmates to the outside world. When they freed an inmate in the Ideological Indoctrination Area, you had to attend a little ceremony in which camp officials announced you had been cleared and could return to the outside world. The people taken away in the trucks had not gone through this procedure, so we didn't believe the rumor about release. We thought they were being hauled a way to the Maximum Security Area or being mobilized to work on Major Construction Projects."

### **The 3rd Bureau Operates in Strictest Secrecy**

After the 3rd Bureau's station moved to Camp 16 in May 1990, an Myong-chol, his friend Ham ki-hung, and three other camp guards were assigned to remove the barbed wire from the station's now empty under ground bunker. The station's perimeter guard post had been torn down; only a few bricks remained.

The same was true of the mokestack, a machine-gun tower, and the station's headquarters itself, which had comprised two buildings a kilometer from the perimeter guard post. All had been destroyed. The guards found the entrances to two tunnels a kilometer farther down the valley.

"The tunnel entrance had been destroyed and covered up with earth to within about 20 inches of the top. I wanted to see what was inside, so I tried to crawl through the space. I had gone barely six inches when I realized the tunnel had collapsed, and I could go no farther. The place reeked of blood and gunpowder, and I staggered back, retching."

The camp guards and even the regular MSS are afraid of the 3rd Bureau's station and are very guarded even about mentioning it, as well they might be in view of rumors the 3rd Bureau kills those who become privy to their operations.

Members of Section 1 (Security) of the camp's Security Department are aware of the 3rd Bureau's existence and some of its activities because the section's personnel typically serve extended tours of duty, but Mr. An said First Section MSS personnel are careful to say as little as possible about the 3rd bureau. The 3rd Bureau maintains very tight security, and Mr. An has little information about it. He said, "All 3rd Bureau people are majors or above and wear civilian clothes in peacetime.

Their uniforms are identical to those of other MSS personnel assigned to the camps, so they cannot be identified by distinctive uniforms. Those assigned to the 3rd Bureau are graduates of The MSS Political College and have studied torture or experiments on live humans."

The Mss and Camp Guards Control the Gulag Valuable Tools to Support Regime The MSS operate

North Korea's internment camps, and the Camp Guard Force provides security in the camps. The MSS and the camp guards, then, are directly responsible for the complete absence of human rights in the Gulag.

Do they really have the authority to treat the inmates inhumanely, even to kill them? An Myong-chol said, "You'd understand if you could see the situation in the camps." The MSS are the center of the camps. MSS personnel are carefully selected for ideological purity and strong loyalty to the Party.

MSS personnel selected to serve in camps for political prisoners are chosen on the basis of their "pure class rating and strong socialist foundation."

Mr. An said 400 MSS personnel and 560 camp guards handle Camp 22. MSS personnel, military personnel, camp guards, and their dependents bring Camp 22's total official complement to around 10,000. He said Camp 13 had about 200 MSS personnel, 300 guards, and 1,500 dependents.

"The MSS personnel," he said, "have the 'finest' socialist foundations in North Korea. They're loyal to Kim Il-sung and Kim Jeong-il, even worshipful, and they're vicious communists." He made the following points about standards for selection to serve in the MSS or in the Camp Guard Force.

To be selected, one must be the descendant of a man who fought in the guerrilla war against the Japanese, the descendant of a man who served as a policeman during the Korean War, the child or close relative of a man who presently serves in the MSS, the child of a person who serves now or who has served in the past at a MSS internment camp, the child or close relative of a MSS person who died while serving at an internment camp, a person who served as a camp guard at an internment camp while completing his military obligation and who then graduates from the MSS Political College and is assigned as a MSS member to serve at an internment camp; a person who serves as an officer in the camp guard and who leaves the service and transfers to the MSS; or a



person fulfilling his military duty as a camp guard whom the MSS decide it likes. The MSS have such people transferred to the MSS.

MSS personnel receive extraordinarily preferential treatment because they are responsible for managing the camps, which are regarded as top secret in North Korea. Most MSS personnel are in their 40s and 50s, and they retire at age 60. Even after they retire, they belong to the select "600-60 class," persons who receive 600 grams of food ration per day and a 60 won stipend per month. There is a "dependent village" in each camp for the families of MSS personnel, camp guards, and military officers. The dependent villages are on a different planet from the camp proper, like a heaven in the center of a death camp.

### **Heaven and Hell inside the Same Fence**

The MSS personnel's life style is equivalent to that of the rank of cadre or above. They have beef on the table every day, and their rations include precious seafood like octopus and shark twice a month. On holidays they each get 11 pounds of pork, one chicken, one duck, 20 eggs, 2.4 pints of beer, one pint of stronger alcoholic beverage, sugar, candy, various vegetables, watermelon, and other sweet melongs.

Mr. An noted, "The MSS personnel eat so well they have overweight problems like the people in South Korea." The camp commander and the political department director live in freestanding, 5-room houses. MSS personnel and guards with families live in three-room duplexes with indoor bathing facilities. It is common for one home to have two or three color television sets, and they all have the "ojang, yukgi," (5 chests, 6 machines) desired by all North Koreans: a dresser, a blanket chest, a side dish cupboard, a wardrobe, and a desk: a television set, refrigerator, tape recorder, camera, washing machine, and sewing machine.

They live sumptuous daily lives. Their monthly salary is higher than MSS personnel who do not

serve at the internment camps. A MSS major in a regular unit receives a total of about 250 won, counting their zone allowance. The extra money is the price of silence. Rice produced at the camps is not supplied to the state but is consumed by the MSS personnel on site. The MSS personnel can use as they please any other product of the camps, although only after the state's quota is met. Mr. An said these extra benefits motivate them to "commit horrible things without the slightest pang of conscience."

### **The MSS: Modern-day Landlords**

Examining this information on the camp MSS, it becomes obvious they are to this century what nobles were to feudal times. Their life style is so sumptuous even the camp guards call them "Modern-day Landlords" behind their backs.

"The camps are living hells for the inmates, but they are heaven on earth for the MSS," says An Myong-chol. "They drink booze every night and lead a very happy life. Out in the work zones, they have the inmates wash their hands, wash their feet, trim their fingernails, cut their toenails. They see the inmates as MSS slaves." The Camp Guard force comes in for its own share of perquisites.

Camp guards enjoy guaranteed futures. They can expect to be assigned to attractive civilian jobs. Camp Guard Force noncommissioned officers serve for 10 years, each is allowed to join the Party when he leaves the service, and more than 60% are allowed to attend college. They are assigned to the MSS's Political College when they graduate from the university. When they finish there, they win MSS commissions and return to serve in the Gulag.

Those who complete mandatory military service in the Camp Guard Force but who cannot go on to college or who cannot qualify for a military commission are assigned as laborers at one of the MSS's Pyongyang construction sites. This is a prized assignment because it includes the coveted right to live in Pyongyang.

Camp guards receive superior food rations. The enlisted men call field grade officers "gourmets" because they eat so well. The guards receive a weekly ration of vegetables and meat produced at the camp. They swap coal produced in the forced-labor mine for delicacies like fish and manage to eat high quality food.

The camp guards' food ration, however, is limited in quantity. When North Korea's overall food shortage worsened sharply in 1992, enlisted camp guards were reduced to eating corn porridge and were so hungry they stole from war reserve supplies. Theft of these supplies is a capital crime, which suggests the seriousness of the food shortage.

The MSS and camp guards are heavily armed, both to guard the inmates and to defend the camps against outside attack. MSS personnel and military officers carry pistols, while enlisted camp guards are armed with AK 58 and AK 68 rifles. Camp 22's armory contains 500 pistols, 1,000 AK rifles, eight four-barrel 14.5mm antiaircraft machine-guns, and eight heavy machineguns. The camp guards train heavily in air defense to be prepared against airborne attacks by South Korea's Special Warfare Command(SWC).

Camp 22 possesses 20 jeeps and 50 trucks. As a driver, Mr. An is well informed about vehicles. Some of the vehicles run on charcoal, but he said they lack power. "The charcoal trucks are no good at all. They break down all the time and have very little power. You can walk faster than they can go up a hill. The thing is, you can relax when you drive them because you don't have to worry about fuel all the time. The trucks burn oak, pine cones, and corn cobs."

The wood-burning trucks are used mostly for rear area missions, like hauling provisions to guard posts, while trucks for operational purposes, which burn oil products, are used only in emergencies. As North Korea's general oil shortage worsened, Mr. An said, the camps converted equipment to burn wood rather than petroleum, including machines like the tractors and power cultivators used





bribes from camp guards and MSS personnel and had sex with 70 inmates.

### **Inmates Are Human, Too**

The 7th Bureau headquarters is as corrupt as everywhere else. Its inspection and audit team visits the camp before major holidays, and camp officials refer to these as "materiel procurement" visits, and so they are.

The teams leave the camp with 20 times more baggage than they had when they arrived. Between inspections, the camp maintains a steady stream of gifts to the 7th Bureau inspectors, who are willing to close their eyes to infractions they find during audits and inspections only if they are satisfied with the value of their bribes. Ambitious MSS camp personnel can hope for awards or promotions only if the 7th Bureau personnel view them favorably.

Mr. An believes the strict, hierarchical control mechanism and the system of bribery that pervades the official lives of the MSS and guards at the camps inflames their baser instincts. They cannot change the system, so why not go along? Similarly, MSS personnel and camp guards help exterminate human beings, sharing in the camps' brutality. This quickly convinces them that human nature is debased. Moreover, the guards' training teaches them that inmates are inhuman scum. Mr. An explained the change that occurred in his own psychology. "I saw the inmates as subhuman for my first three years in the camps, and then I became a driver and began to get around. The resulting contacts with the inmates caused me to realize my training was flat wrong."

An Myong-chol was taught during basic training that inmates are "class enemies." He seethed with animosity toward them. He himself was cruel to the inmates, striking or otherwise punishing them for no reason. As the years passed and he accumulated more experience in dealing with the inmates, his animus turned to compassion.

Much of Mr. An's reformation of perception happened at Camp 13. Two inmates named Kim Pok-

nam worked at the camp's motor pool. One, a mechanic, was quite elderly, yet when he dealt with Mr. An about repairing or cleaning a vehicle, Kim never failed to address Mr. An as "Respected Teacher," a signally high form of address for the 19-year-old. Mr. An said it was Kim's courtesy that caused him to realize the inmates are human beings no different from himself.

Mr. An experienced serious mental conflict as he traveled around the camp and contacted an increasing numbers of inmates. His training as a guard told him the inmates were subhuman, but his experience as a driver was teaching him the opposite. Camp guards who serve all their time at guard posts and do not get to know the inmates finish their conscription and leave the service full of hatred for the inmates. Mr An said that for him, however, mental conflict turned to doubt as he contrasted the reality of the camp - the dead were left for wild animals, for example - with Kim Jong-il's idealistic phrases in the Rodong Shinmun - "Let us set our foundations on the people and flourish in our style of socialism."

°I was confused every time I saw in the Rodong shinmun (newspaper) that North Korea demanded that South Korea release a prisoner of conscience or a longtime communist prisoner who refused to be dissuaded from his communist ideology. I couldn't deal with the deceit."

°I was in a North Korean internment camp where as guards we could kill an inmate out of sheer boredom. Yet I'd read in North Korea's biggest newspaper that North Korea "demanded" that South Korea release unrepentant communist inmates or prisoners of conscience. North Korea doesn't release anybody."

In 1993, South Korea repatriated just such a longtime communist inmate, Yi In-mo. Shortly thereafter the camp guards watched a play based on Yi's life, "The People and Fate." Mr. An said he watched the play but had to shake his head in disbelief. "Yi was lucky to survive and lucky to be released.

The play reveals that just before repatriation he presented gifts to his old communist comrades in South Korea. It is a miracle a person put in prison can survive and even be released, but where in hell can a prisoner ever get enough money to give presents to people?" The play showed Yi In-mo in a South Korean prison, where he was reduced to catching and consuming rats, and where he was beaten until he was crippled. Camp guards who had seen Gulag inmates fight for the right to eat a rat found the play to be naive.

They could not take it seriously and laughed and giggled throughout the presentation.

A number of camp guards furtively gave inmates gifts of corn, clothing, or pork porridge (con gruel with flecks of pork in it). In a move to halt such "class deviation," the Camp Guard Force leadership began daily training sessions, the major thrust of which follows. "You must not view the inmates as human beings. You are authorized to strike the inmates, not to talk to them. If you don't kill inmates, you will die. The inmates wait and watch all the time for an opportunity to kill you." The instructors insisted the guards not speak to inmates. "Hey! If you talk to one, you're treating him like a human being. You must remember they are of the animal class. Treat them that way."

### **Training Inflames Hatred for Inmates**

In political ideology training sessions, the guards learned, "The inmates are like time bombs, but you don't know when they will explode. Give them a chance and they will riot. All they think about is murdering MSS personnel and camp guards." In point of fact, some inmates were executed when they were found to be making weapons with which to kill MSS or guard personnel.

During a training session, the Security Section Chief showed the guards artifacts which had been confiscated from inmates, including axes and knives, the South Korean national flag, the United States national flag, medals presented by the Japanese emperor, Japanese swords, and land deeds dating from the pre-communist era.





their work area and, in fact, when conducting any activity. Two of every five are MSS spies. Armed MSS personnel accompany the teams when they go into mountainous areas to get wood or gather wild vegetables for side dishes. The MSS inform the camp guards in advance of such activities, and guards from the nearest guard post increase patrolling, hide along the perimeter fence, and otherwise boost security in the area.

The camp curfew extends from 10pm to 5am, and night monitors check by work group to ensure workers are in bed, although not, of course, in the coal mines. A special patrol of camp guards also checks to be sure no one moves around during curfew hours. Patrol members enter every inmate billet in the camp at least once during curfew hours.

### **Security Is Life**

When an inmate escapes, kills somebody, or otherwise commits a serious infraction of camp regulations, the inmates himself is punished, of course, but so also are those inmate leaders responsible for the offender, including his work group foreman, guide, night monitor, and even the MSS spy or spies assigned to watch him.

The MSS haul them to the detention barracks or reassign them to the coal mine. MSS personnel debrief their spies every day, and if they detect anything strange, they arrest the inmate involved and send him to the detention barracks. Spies who don't maintain a flow of information or who don't exert sufficient influence on the inmates to prevent an escape, a murder, or complaints and discontent are assigned to do disciplinary labor in the deepest tunnels in the coal mine. The MSS, on the other hand, bestow gifts of clothin and relatively easy work assignments on productive spies. The spies live a doubly ugly life, spying and ratting on fellow victims.

The Gulag's surveillance networks are so intricately organized that MSS personnel learn almost immediately from their snitches about a camp guard who tries to obtain a little "freedom."

"Freedom" excursions involve a camp guard's doing things like stealing anything interesting from storage sheds or absenting himself from a guard post to prowl around looking for someone to force into having sex.

Security causes more anxiety among guards and MSS personnel than any other item. The existence of the camps is regarded as North Korea's most important secret because revealing the existence of the North Korean Gulag would undermine the "dignity" of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. Posters cover the walls of every non-inmate building in camp, reminding the MSS and guards alike that, "Security is life." One cannot be too attentive to security.

Security is drilled so incessantly into the MSS and the guards that they guard every conversation. So serious is the security issue that a military officer accompanies everyone who departs the camp on leave or temporary duty. In principle, guard personnel are not allowed to take leave, although leave is granted if one's mother or father dies.

When a Camp Guard Force soldier completes his enlistment and goes on to college, he is required to report to the MSS officer in Charge at the university, thus accepting continued surveillance. The former guard is forbidden even to seal letters. When his enlistment expires, a camp guard must sign a pledge saying he will not reveal what he has seen and heard while assigned at internment camps. He is required to affix his thumb print to this document. Mr. An says there have been cases in which former camp guards do not maintain security when they leave the service. Such men are arrested and shipped as inmates back to an internment camp.

In August 1993 Amnesty International revealed information about Camp 26 at Hwachon-dong, Sungho-ri, Pyongyang. The Rodong Shinmun responded with an editorial that said, "There is no organization and no place in North Korea whatever which violates human rights." Every political camp in North Korea undertook emergency efforts to ensure inmates did not learn the outside world had discovered something about the reality of the camps.

Every three days camp guards conduct a police detail, picking up cigarette butts and bits of paper around the guard posts and the headquarters building. The 7th Bureau sent a security inspection group to the camp to promote the ideological struggle by obtaining security pledges from camp guards and MSS personnel and even students and other dependents. Security tightened until it extended even to cigarette butts.

North Korea ran so short of paper that in April 1994 it had to stop issuing cigarettes to the camp guards and MSS personnel. The cigarettes had been of poor quality in the first place, but as the supply diminished, the guards smoked them carefully and began saving the butts. One could smoke more simply by taking tobacco from a number of butts and rolling a new cigarette out of it. Paper was so scarce, however, that the Rodong Shinmun provided the only available source. Shortly an order came down forbidding the guards from rolling cigarettes. The reason for the strange order soon became apparent. Guards had given butts of cigarettes rolled in the Rodong Shinmun to inmates, who promptly removed the tobacco and picked up snippets of news from the newspaper scraps.

An Myong-chol knew that An Hyok and Kang Chol-hwan escaped from Camp 15.

Our battalion commander Colonel Kang So-nam made an announcement during an inspection around the middle of October 1992. 'Two inmates escaped from Camp 15 and fled to South Korea, where they are revealing camp secrets.' He then ordered us to do our jobs better so no more escapes would occur."

As a result of the escape at Camp 15, the battalion doubled the amount of time guards served on duty, and this, of course, increased pressure on the inmates. Many reacted negatively to the increased harassment and were sent to the detention barracks.

## Who Is Sent to the Gulag?

200,000 Persons Incarcerated in the Camps Mr. An revealed that the MSS's 7th Bureau (Commonly called the "Farm Guidance Bureau") now operates a total of five internment camps. The five are located at the following sites: Camp 14 is in Kaechon, South Pyongan Province; Camp 15, in Yodok, South Hamgyong Province; Camp 16, in Hwasong, North Hamgyong Province; Camp 22, in Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province; and Camp 25, in Chongjin, North Hamgyong Province. Mr An says a total of about 200,000 persons are incarcerated in the camps.

Observers in South Korea believe North Korea operates at least 10 internment camps. Did North Korea cut the number in half in a move to improve its human rights record? I put that question to An Myong-chol, who said no, North Korea merely consolidated the camps as a security move because their North Korea merely consolidated the camps as a security move because their existence had become widely known. He says North Korean has no motivation whatever to improve human rights.

The 7th Bureau operated 10 internment camps until about 1990. The following camps were closed at the indicated times, and the 7th Bureau assigned their inmates to other camps: Camp 11 (Kyongsong, North Hamgyong Province) closed in October 1989; Camp 12 (Onsong and Changpyong, Rodongja-gu, North Hamgyong Province), closed in May 1987; Camp 13 (Chongsong-gu, Onsong-gun, North Hamgyong Province), closed in December 1990; Camp 26 (Hwachon-dong, Sungho-ri, Pyongyang), closed in January 1991; and Camp 27 (Chonma, North Pyongan Province), closed in November 1990.

Mr. An says 20,000 inmates were incarcerated at Camp 13 and about 50,000 at Camp 22 when he was stationed at those camps with the Camp Guard Force. To disguise their identity, the camps are formally designated as units of the Chosun People's Security Unit 2209; Paeksan-gu

MSS;andAdministrative Center Number 22.

The camps are located in remote, mountainous areas in provinces far from the DMZ, Jagang, Yanggang, and North and South Hamgyong. The remoteness of the sites is designed to maintain security, to be safe from the South Korean Special Warfare Command (SWC), and to make escape difficult.

Sources say the MSS 7th Bureau is not the only MSS bureau to operate internment camps for political prisoners. These sources say camps operated by other bureaus exist at the following locationd: Fukdonh snf Fsnvhon in South Hamgyong Province, Bookchang in South Pyongan Province, Chonma in North Pyongan Province and Dongshing in Jagangdo. An Mtibg-chol says he has "no information" about camps operated by MSS bureaus other than the 7th.

### **Three Generations Incarcerated at Once**

Mr. An says North Korea began to build facilities to accommodate groups of political prisoners in the late 1950s. When Kim Il-sung purged competitors in the Yonan Faction, the Soviet Faction, and the Domestic Faction, he had a total of three generations of the victims'immediate families isolated from society. The purges were large in scale, and many people were banished to secluded mountain areas. Mr. An says trains carried away a thousand people at a time during the Yonan Faction purge, when Kim Chang-pong was purged in 1969, and when Kim Pyong-ha was purged.(This reportedly occurred in the early 1980s, and many or most MSS personnel were purged with Kim Pyongha and sent en masse to internment camps.)

Initially, interment camps were situated in mountainous hinterlands and configured as mass camps for "anti-revolutionary elements." The first camps were demarcated by simple wooden fences, and little other effort went into security. Inmates frequently escaped, large-scale rioting occurred, and the regime cracked down, boosting security and tightening control at the camps. Control was

enhanced in the late 1960s by assigning inmates to specific zones. The MSS handled guard duties until 1968, when this function was transferred to the highly-trained Camp Guard Force.

North Korea operates internment camps as a means of population control. The North Korean people know, "If you err only one time in your speech, you kill three generations of your family." Thus, North Korea's camps are not designed as passive facilities to imprison those who are discontented with the regime. They are essential mechanisms of active oppression which contribute to preserving Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il in power.

The Kims deliberately adopted the practices of the absolute monarchs of Korea's dynastic past by punishing three generations of a family for the misdeed of a single person. The Kims rule by fear. (Note: The Korean language expresses this dynastic past by punishing three generations of a family for the misdeed of a single person. The Kims rule by fear. (Note: The Korean language expresses this dynastic practice in a single word, yonjwa, "to be punished because of kinship with an offender.")

The North Korean approach is no different from that of the Nazis in World War II when they strove to eradicate the Jews by sending to the camps entire families - adults, children, the aged, everybody. The North Korean people do not question the practice of incarcerating the family of an offender. An Myong-chol has personally witnessed three generations of one family - a grandfather, father, and son - all confined in a North Korean camp. One example of this practice is Kang Chol-hwan, who escaped from Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area and then defected to South Korea. Kang was sent to the camp because his grandfather deviated. Reports suggest that a camp inmate often has brothers under incarceration, suggesting that North Korean yonjwa may extend beyond lineal kin. Recent cases suggest, however, that North Korea's ironclad yonjwa system of family incarceration may be changing.

We asked An Myong-chol about this. "Not only is yonjwa barbarous," he said, "but it causes a geometric rise in inmate numbers. North Korea, meanwhile, has closed a number of camps and

faces limitations on the number of new inmates who can be accommodated." Mr. An said that Camp 22 is so full there is no space to put more inmates.

Lately, then, if a husband commits an offense but his wife has served the Party energetically, the wife is given a choice of divorcing her husband or following him to an internment camp. If she chooses divorce, only the husband is sent to a camp; his family avoids what is tantamount to a death sentence. Mr. An says some women in this situation do choose divorce, but a majority elect to follow their husbands to the camps.

### **Even a Corpse Cannot Escape From the Camps**

Mr. An says the application of the yonjwa family punishment system to North Korean political prisoners originated from a directive issued by Kim Il-sung to "exterminate three generations" of political criminals. Mr. An says Kim issued this directive to the MSS in 1958 when he purged members of the Yonan, Soviet, and Domestic Factions.

An Myong-chol says Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il issued a number of directives about political criminals while he served in the Camp Guard Force. Guards are required to memorize these directives during a monthly "Know the Directives Hour." Various Kim directives are posted in the offices, and bulletin boards.

A review of two of the Kims' directives makes it abundantly clear what Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il think of political prisoners. "Inmates are class enemies and must be actively exterminated to three generations." Other directives suggest that escapes and riots continue to be problems. "Prevent escapes. Surveil perfectly."

When North Korea condemns an entire family to the Gulag, it sends the offender to one camp and his family forever. Those who commit offenses are incarcerated at Camps 15 and 25, while their family members are sent to Camps 14, 15, 16, and 22. Camp 15 accommodates both offenders and



family members, but they are kept completely separate. Offenders go to the camp's ideological Indoctrination Area. Thus, by any objective measure, only Camps 15 and 25 contain political prisoners. The remaining camps are filled with innocent relatives. It is not accurate to refer to these inmates as criminals or even political criminals.

They may be called accurately "politically incarcerated persons" or "inmates of conscience." (Amnesty International uses these two terms to apply to separate categories of persons imprisoned over a political incident. The organization uses "politically incarcerated persons" to apply to those who support the use of force or who have actually used force in pursuit of their objectives.

Amnesty applies "inmates of conscience" only to those who reject the use of force and in fact have not employed violence. In this article, however, we use "politically incarcerated persons" - or "political prisoners - in the broad sense, not the limited sense used by Amnesty international.)"

### **Who Goes to the Extermination Camps?**

Political prisoners, as distinct from the family members of political prisoners, inhabit single rooms in the Maximum Security Areas of Camps 15 and 25. The security in these areas is much tighter than at other areas, and living conditions are much harsher. Inmates who are family members of political prisoners live in barracks or as family units at other locations.

An Myong-chol says people who came to North Korea in pursuit of the socialist dream usually are incarcerated at Camps 15 or 26 (Sungho-ri, Pyongyang). (Camp 26 inmates were transferred to Camp 25 when the former closed.) Persons kidnapped from other countries are confined at the same two camps. Inmates who are candidates for release are kept in Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area, where they are exposed for a set period to the rigors of camp life. The regime will release eventually only those who show signs they are opposite extreme of the spectrum.

Very, very few inmates return from this "killing field." Once an inmate enters that zone, he must suffer hard labor until the day he dies. The Maximum Security Area is a living hell. "When you die, they don't even release your corpse." No exceptions are permitted.

Mr. An says Camp 15 is the only one which is divided into two zones. The others comprise a single maximum Security Area. Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area is the only place an inmate can cherish a hope to return to society alive. It happens infrequently, but sometimes an inmate is reassigned from a Maximum Security Area to the Ideological Indoctrination Area. Kang Chol-hwan told me a such case.

A political prisoner in Camp 14 (a Maximum Security Area) was transferred to Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area. Kang says he witnessed the inmate's joy:

"I'm going to survive! I must be in heaven!" An Myong-chol also says a very small number of inmates in Maximum Security Areas are transferred to Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area.

He says such inmates have no clear-cut charges against them. Why is Camp 15 the only camp which has an Ideological Indoctrination Area? I put that question to Mr. An and Kang. Their answers are given in the following paragraph.

Most of the people confined at Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area are members of North Korea's elite class, or their family members. Inmates there include people North Korea has spent much money to educate and train: family members of people who repatriated to North Korea from Japan and whose relatives include Chosen soren cadre; and people whose popularity with th North Korean people is such that the regime does not choose to execute them.

North korea sends to the Ideological Indoctrination Area people who irritate the leadership when allowed to live in civilian society, but whose execution the regime would find burdensome. They



have you dragged us here? We've done nothing wrong." Their answer comes in the form of a sharp blow, mute and unheeding. Family members suffer serious psychological shock when they realize the brutal nature of the camps. Some faint, and some begin to lose their minds. Group suicides are common among inmate families. They hang themselves, jump into a lake, or leap from a cliff.

So complete is the initial depression that family member inmates typically cry themselves to sleep at night. As time passes, depression turns to a consuming rage. Eventually, the rage gives way in most inmates to an instinct for survival that causes them to see camp life as ordinary reality. By that time, the camp has stripped away any scrap of human dignity or morality. Indeed, inmates who preserve any human emotion will find it most difficult to cling to life.

The Gulag dehumanizes the inmates, robbing them of any sense of shame. They think nothing of stripping off their clothes and bathing in front of others. They are no longer human beings, in fact, but slaves, wild animals. Mr. An said everything they do is based on wild, aggressive, animalistic instinct.

At Camps 13 and 22 where Mr. An was stationed, most inmates are men and women in their 30s and 40s who had no opportunity to marry. Women outnumber men three to two. Mr. An said he asked why there were more women and was told one reason is that men are forced to work the coal mines, which kills or injures them. The main reason, though, is that the instinct for survival is stronger in women.

Mr. An says that in the extreme conditions prevailing in the camps, the women reveal a greater will to survive and are more adaptable to the bitter environment. "The men," he says, "seem unable to draw sufficient nourishment from the sparse camp rations and grow progressively weaker. The women, on the other hand, display much more energy than do the men."

Kang Cho-hwan defected to South Korea after escaping from Camp 15, and his view accords with





Each camp specializes in certain products to maximize efficiency. An Myong-chol lists these specialties as follows:

**Camp Products**

14 farm products, shoes and uniforms for guard and military forces

15 farm products, logs, livestock

16 potatoes, logs, livestock

22 farm products, livestock, coal

25 bicycles, electrical appliances(refrigerators, fans, washing machines) An Myong-chol composed the following list of Camp 22 production quotas. "Camp 22's annual quotas are 400,000 tons of corn; 50,000 tons of limabeans; 10,000 tons of red pepper; and a total of 100,000 tons of pork, beef, duck, chicken, and mutton. In addition, the MSS issue varying quotas each year for Chinese cabbage, radishes, cucumbers, eggplant, and fruits.

The camp provides coal to the Chongjin Thermal Power Plant, the Chongjin Steel Mill, and the Kimchaek Steel Mill. These plants would face serious operational difficulties if deprived of Camp 22's coal. Without that coal, North Korea's steel and electricity production would all but grind to a halt, dealing the economy a mortal blow."

**Camp Farms Are Top Producers**

Camp 14 and 22 together in a year produce much more than 100,000tons of meat for use in P'yongyang by citizens of that city and by foreigners at hotels and in restaurants there. Camp 22 provides 40% of the cob corn and kernel corn supplied annually to the citizens of North and South Hamgyong Provinces. Important products from Camp 16 include potatoes and mine support pillars.

If Camp 16 stopped producing the pillars, production would suffer at coal mines in South Pyongan Province's Anju region, the coal mine at Camp 22, and all the coal mines in North Hamgyong Province.

Ironically, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il give the refrigerators and Seagull brand bicycles produced at Camp 25 as gratuities to reward special loyalty displayed by North Korean citizens. An Myong-chol gave an interesting explanation for the very serious food shortages now gripping North and South Hamgyong Provinces.

Said Mr. An, "Until 1990, the two Hamgyong Provinces got 60% of their food from the internment camps, corn from Camps 12, 13, and 22; and potatoes from Camps 11 and 16. Due to camp closures since about 1990, however, only Camps 16 and 22 now supply food products to those provinces. This drop in supply started the food shortage in the area, and other factors caused it to worsen."

The camps are not extremely large. They are no bigger than an average South Korean county, so how can they produce so much meat and agricultural products?

Mr. An said, "Until 1990, the two Hamgyong Provinces got 60% of their food from the internment camps, corn from Camps 12, 13, and 22; and potatoes from Camps 11 and 16. Due to camp closures since about 1990, however, only Camps 16 and 22 now supply food products to those provinces. This drop in supply started the food shortage in the area, and other factors caused it to worsen." The camps are not extremely large. They are no bigger than an average South Korean county, so how can they produce so much meat and agricultural products? Mr. An said, "Productivity in the camps is enormously high, much more so than on collective farms or in North Korean work places."

Mr. An explains the difference between farming in the camps and on normal farms. "There is no sense of ownership on an ordinary North Korean farm. A farmer does not view a given field as his.

As a result, the farmers don't even care if the ground hardens or sinks. Who can blame them? They





13 succeeded in altering a diesel tractor so that it ran on charcoal.

Before long all tractors in all camps were switched over to wood, conserving enormous quantities of precious oil. Mr. An says he heard about the tractor fuel switch from Camp 22's Camp Guard Force commander, Colonel Kang so-nam. Kang is a shrewd person, and Mr. An learned Kang headed the work group at Camp 13's Transportation Section where the inmate managed to switch tractors to charcoal.

Kang reported the accomplishment as his own and received a medal for his trouble. Inmates get a total of nine days off per year: 1 and 2 January(New Year's); 16 February(Kim Jong-il's birthday); 15-16 April(Kim Il-sung's birthday); 27 July(Korean War "Victory Day");15 August(Fatherland Liberation Day);9 September(Government Foundation Day); and 10 October(Party Foundation Day). The inmates are also allowed one volleyball match per year. This is justified on the grounds the inmates need to vent frustration to prevent rioting.

The management has discovered two things to divert the inmates' thoughts from riot and rebellion:money and marriage.

Camp inmates cherish only one desire, to marry. Each year the MSS reward spies and top producers by allowing one or two couples in a camp to marry.

To allow so few among so many to marry is sheer propaganda. Inmates are also paid 500 won per year in cash. They have no place to spend this money, so the MSS and guards extort it from them by selling black market items at raptorial prices. MSS personnel and camp guards charge inmates 50,000 won for old shoes with worn out soles; 10,000 won per kilogram for meat or fish; and 20,000 won for an old wristwatch.

**Confused by a Fantasy**

North Korea continues to claim, "In the Juche People's Republic there is no such a thing as an internment camp for political criminals." To the outside observer, indeed, camp inmates appear to have the freedom to marry as they choose and appear not to be slave laborers because they receive wages. The camp's children go to school, and the inmates lead a self-sufficient life. Official North Koreans insist, "These people have stores. They play sports. We have no internment camps!"

These claims tend to be believed by South Korea's liberals, who often blindly believe North Korea lives by its own lights, independently, on a foundation of resistance to the Japanese occupation. It makes not sense, some believe, to induct tje, nu "capitalist standards of human rights."

Even as a debate rages on this issue on this issue in South Korea, however, thousands die each year in North Korea's Gulags. Some starve to death, their bodies left for wild animals to devour. These people are fellow Koreans. These people speak the language we speak; their ancestors are our ancestors.

A South Korean opposition political leader who still dreams of becoming president and who "retired" from politics once invited important figures from around the world to an international forum.

The former politician issued there a statement which, among other things, expressed concern for "the human rights situation in Myanmar" and called for the release of political prisoners in Burma, including North Korean agents who killed South Korean cabinet members in a bomb attack there. He did not mention North Korea's human rights abuses.

The United States has begun delivering 400,000 tons of Bunker C Oil to North Korea, the price Pyongyang wrung from the Americans for entering into talks on its nuclear program. The South Korean government is falling all over itself to build nuclear reactors for North Korea. One of South Korea's largest conglomerates agreed to supply several thousand tons of sugar to Pyongyang

as a bribe for per mission to do business in North Korea.

Is there no danger the U.S. oil will be used in the internment camps to make inmates work harder?

Is there no danger th South Korean nuclear reactors will generate power for the 3,300-volt electric fences that surround the internment camps? Is there no danger the sugar the South Korean conglomerate will give to North Korea will be used as bonuses to stimulate MSS personnel and camp guards to further excesses of loyalty?

The time has come to consider such things. A young defector has rent the veil that hid from our view not only North Korea's internment camps but the formerly impenetrable Maximum Security Areas. We now have clear testimony about the nature of North Korean camps, places where inmates are stripped of humanity and btchered like cattle.

Many a tall mountain and swift river, however, lay between us and our ability to apply this young man's lessons. The reality is that a "North Korean fantasy" grips many in South Korea, and An Myong-chol's account alone will not undermine a fantasy as persistent as this one.

### **People An Myong-chol Met in the Camps**

Kim Song-ho, male, 50, from Pyongyang:Ministry of the People's Armed Forces(MPAF), lieutenant general. Kim was interned during the purge of Kim Chang-pong. Kim worked as head of the Electricity Repair Team in Camp 13's motor pool. He was transferred to Camp 22, where he worked as head of the Repair Team is a camp food factory. Kim was an expert at electrical repair.

Kim Pork-nam, males, 25, from P'yongyang:MSS officer. Kim's father was interned when Kim Pyong-ho was purged. Kim was a vehicle mechanic at Camp 13's motor pool After being transferred to Camp 22, Kim was assigned as a tractor team chief under the direct control of the Raksaeng Zone.

Choe FNU , 28, female, from Pyongyang:Choses father was a cadre in the Central Party, but was interned on suspicion of opposing Kim Jong-il. She was a Work Group Guide in Camp 13's Work Group 19. She became pregnant by the deputy commander of Salbau Guard Post, Camp Guard Force. Her pregnancy became known, and she was executed secretly in 1987.

Pak Kum-nyo, 55, female, from Pyongyang: Pak's husband was a cadre in the Central Party, but was interned on suspicion of being a spy. Pak was a seamstress at Camp 13's motor pool. she was transferred to Camp 16 in December 1990.

Kang FNU, 26, female, from Kosong in Kangwon Province: Kang's father was a MPAF military officer, but was interned after attempting to defect to South Korea. She was a Work Group Guide in Tunnel 5 at Camp 13's coal mine. She attempted to kill a MSS officer in 1989, and was shot dead on the spot.

Jang Sang-chol, male, 30, from Ongjin, Hwanghae Province: Jang's father provided support to South Korean forces entering North Korea during the Korean War. He hid out after war ended, but eventually was arrested and interned with all family members. Jang was an engine mechanic in Camp 22's motor pool.

Kim Sang-chol, male, 27, from Pyongsong, South Pyongan Province: Kim's father was a MPAF military officer, but was interned during the purge of Kim Chang-pong, Kim was a mechanic in Camp 22's motor pool.

Kim Hui-chol, male, 25, from Pyongyang: Kim's father misconstrued a Kim Jongil directive and was interned with all his family. Kim was a mechanic in Camp 22's motor pool.

Om Yong-ok, female, 27, from Sari-won, Hwanghae province: Om's father was accused of being a spy. She was a radiator repair person in Camp 22's motor pool. Kim Sun-hui, female, 33, from Pyongyang:Kim's father was interned. She was a battery repair person in Camp 22's motor pool.

Kim Kil-hwa, female, 29, from Pyongyang: Kim's father was MSS officer, but was interned during the Kim Chang-pong purge. Kim was a vehicle painter in Camp 22's motor pool. She was a spy for the camp's Political Department, and the MSS used her as a sex toy.

Kim Kyong-chan, male, 35, from Kangwon Province: Kim's father was a MPAF general officer but was purged. Kim was chief of the Raksaeng Zone Direct Control Tractor Platoon at Camp 22.

Medical Officer U forced Kim to undergo an unnecessary appendix operation.

Pyon Ok-suk, female, 27: Pyon was chief of the rice wine work team at Camp 22's Food Factory.

Chang Ok-hui, female, 30, from Pyongyang: Chang's father wrote a history of Mansudae, but was interned on charges of surrendering to capitalistic ideas. Chang was a vehicle painter in Camp 22's motor pool. She had a beautiful singing voice and often cried in anger at her father for causing her internment.

Yi FNU, female, 45, from Pyongyang: Yi's husband was a diplomat working for the Central Party. She played on the North Korean national women's volleyball team and competed in international matches. Yi was a Work Group Foreman in Camp 22's Work Group 19. She diligently obeyed the MSS.

Han Chin-tok, female, 26, from Anpyon County in Kangwon Province: Han's father was a veterinarian in Anpyon County, and her uncle was a MPAF Senior colonel, but was interned in 1975. Han had a sexual liaison with Camp Guard Force Sergeant Yang Ki-chol in May 1991. She was assigned to Tunnel 1 in Camp 22's coal mine and lost both legs in a tunnel cart accident.

Kim Kyong-suk, female, 28, from Pyongyang: Kim's father was a MPAF colonel, but was implicated during the Kim Chang-pong purge. Kim was interned at Camp 12 in 1973 and transferred to Camp 22 in May 1987. Kim was a miner in Tunnel 6 at Camp 22's coal mine. An



the MSS took her away and abused her sexually. An Tong-ho, male, 33:An was a driver in Camp 22's motor pool.

Kim Myong-sop, 27, male:Kim was a mechanic in Camp 22's motor pool. Kim was very hot tempered and was beaten every day as a result. He was not executed, however, because he was a superior mechanic.

Om Kwang-ho, male, 25:Om was a driver in Camp 22's Coal Mine motor pool. Om was interned with his father. He was skillful at getting along with people.

Kim Kwang-su, male, 28:Kim was a mechanic at the headquarters motor pool. Kim stuttered.

Yi Song-il, male, 31: Yi was leader of the Electricity Repair Platoon of the Administrative Motor Pool. Yi was an excellent electrician.

Om Tong-kun, male, 35: Om was a mechanic at the headquarters motor pool.

Kim Ho-yong, male, 29: Kim was a driver for the headquarters motor pool.

Kong Chong-won, male, 45: Kong was a Chinese resident of North Korea. He was chief of the Production Team at the headquarters motor pool. Kong was a master mechanic who was so talented he could build his own generator.

Ham Pok-sun, female, 29: She consorted with the MSS and acted as their spy. She was Work Group Guide for Work Group 1 in Camp 22's Saul Region. Ham had big eyes and a beautiful face, but she was a mean-spirited woman.

Kim FNU, female, 35: Kim's grandfather reportedly participated with Kim Hyong-chik in the Chosun. People's Society. She was work group guide for Work Group 3 in Camp 22's Saul Region. Kim was a MSS spy and a sexual toy for the MSS. Kim pestered the MSS to get her a novel called,



"Dawn Path," which was supposed to mention her grandfather and Kim Hyong-chik.

Ài Àü: <a href="#">North Korea's Auschwitz</a> -- the inside story on the No. 14 detention center	so
˘ÜÀ½: <a href="#">A letter from North Korea</a>	oblee

[☰ 목록](#)

 [자료실](#) Source Material

[남북관계](#) | [한국현대사](#) | [강연·연설](#) | [국제관계](#)

[TOP](#) ^

[1월 14일](#) | [1월 15일](#) | [1월 16일](#) | [1월 17일](#) | [1월 18일](#) | [1월 19일](#) | [1월 20일](#) | [1월 21일](#) | [1월 22일](#) | [1월 23일](#) | [1월 24일](#) | [1월 25일](#) | [1월 26일](#) | [1월 27일](#) | [1월 28일](#) | [1월 29일](#) | [1월 30일](#) | [1월 31일](#) | [2월 1일](#) | [2월 2일](#) | [2월 3일](#) | [2월 4일](#) | [2월 5일](#) | [2월 6일](#) | [2월 7일](#) | [2월 8일](#) | [2월 9일](#) | [2월 10일](#) | [2월 11일](#) | [2월 12일](#) | [2월 13일](#) | [2월 14일](#) | [2월 15일](#) | [2월 16일](#) | [2월 17일](#) | [2월 18일](#) | [2월 19일](#) | [2월 20일](#) | [2월 21일](#) | [2월 22일](#) | [2월 23일](#) | [2월 24일](#) | [2월 25일](#) | [2월 26일](#) | [2월 27일](#) | [2월 28일](#) | [2월 29일](#) | [2월 30일](#) | [3월 1일](#) | [3월 2일](#) | [3월 3일](#) | [3월 4일](#) | [3월 5일](#) | [3월 6일](#) | [3월 7일](#) | [3월 8일](#) | [3월 9일](#) | [3월 10일](#) | [3월 11일](#) | [3월 12일](#) | [3월 13일](#) | [3월 14일](#) | [3월 15일](#) | [3월 16일](#) | [3월 17일](#) | [3월 18일](#) | [3월 19일](#) | [3월 20일](#) | [3월 21일](#) | [3월 22일](#) | [3월 23일](#) | [3월 24일](#) | [3월 25일](#) | [3월 26일](#) | [3월 27일](#) | [3월 28일](#) | [3월 29일](#) | [3월 30일](#) | [3월 31일](#) | [4월 1일](#) | [4월 2일](#) | [4월 3일](#) | [4월 4일](#) | [4월 5일](#) | [4월 6일](#) | [4월 7일](#) | [4월 8일](#) | [4월 9일](#) | [4월 10일](#) | [4월 11일](#) | [4월 12일](#) | [4월 13일](#) | [4월 14일](#) | [4월 15일](#) | [4월 16일](#) | [4월 17일](#) | [4월 18일](#) | [4월 19일](#) | [4월 20일](#) | [4월 21일](#) | [4월 22일](#) | [4월 23일](#) | [4월 24일](#) | [4월 25일](#) | [4월 26일](#) | [4월 27일](#) | [4월 28일](#) | [4월 29일](#) | [4월 30일](#) | [5월 1일](#) | [5월 2일](#) | [5월 3일](#) | [5월 4일](#) | [5월 5일](#) | [5월 6일](#) | [5월 7일](#) | [5월 8일](#) | [5월 9일](#) | [5월 10일](#) | [5월 11일](#) | [5월 12일](#) | [5월 13일](#) | [5월 14일](#) | [5월 15일](#) | [5월 16일](#) | [5월 17일](#) | [5월 18일](#) | [5월 19일](#) | [5월 20일](#) | [5월 21일](#) | [5월 22일](#) | [5월 23일](#) | [5월 24일](#) | [5월 25일](#) | [5월 26일](#) | [5월 27일](#) | [5월 28일](#) | [5월 29일](#) | [5월 30일](#) | [5월 31일](#) | [6월 1일](#) | [6월 2일](#) | [6월 3일](#) | [6월 4일](#) | [6월 5일](#) | [6월 6일](#) | [6월 7일](#) | [6월 8일](#) | [6월 9일](#) | [6월 10일](#) | [6월 11일](#) | [6월 12일](#) | [6월 13일](#) | [6월 14일](#) | [6월 15일](#) | [6월 16일](#) | [6월 17일](#) | [6월 18일](#) | [6월 19일](#) | [6월 20일](#) | [6월 21일](#) | [6월 22일](#) | [6월 23일](#) | [6월 24일](#) | [6월 25일](#) | [6월 26일](#) | [6월 27일](#) | [6월 28일](#) | [6월 29일](#) | [6월 30일](#) | [7월 1일](#) | [7월 2일](#) | [7월 3일](#) | [7월 4일](#) | [7월 5일](#) | [7월 6일](#) | [7월 7일](#) | [7월 8일](#) | [7월 9일](#) | [7월 10일](#) | [7월 11일](#) | [7월 12일](#) | [7월 13일](#) | [7월 14일](#) | [7월 15일](#) | [7월 16일](#) | [7월 17일](#) | [7월 18일](#) | [7월 19일](#) | [7월 20일](#) | [7월 21일](#) | [7월 22일](#) | [7월 23일](#) | [7월 24일](#) | [7월 25일](#) | [7월 26일](#) | [7월 27일](#) | [7월 28일](#) | [7월 29일](#) | [7월 30일](#) | [7월 31일](#) | [8월 1일](#) | [8월 2일](#) | [8월 3일](#) | [8월 4일](#) | [8월 5일](#) | [8월 6일](#) | [8월 7일](#) | [8월 8일](#) | [8월 9일](#) | [8월 10일](#) | [8월 11일](#) | [8월 12일](#) | [8월 13일](#) | [8월 14일](#) | [8월 15일](#) | [8월 16일](#) | [8월 17일](#) | [8월 18일](#) | [8월 19일](#) | [8월 20일](#) | [8월 21일](#) | [8월 22일](#) | [8월 23일](#) | [8월 24일](#) | [8월 25일](#) | [8월 26일](#) | [8월 27일](#) | [8월 28일](#) | [8월 29일](#) | [8월 30일](#) | [8월 31일](#) | [9월 1일](#) | [9월 2일](#) | [9월 3일](#) | [9월 4일](#) | [9월 5일](#) | [9월 6일](#) | [9월 7일](#) | [9월 8일](#) | [9월 9일](#) | [9월 10일](#) | [9월 11일](#) | [9월 12일](#) | [9월 13일](#) | [9월 14일](#) | [9월 15일](#) | [9월 16일](#) | [9월 17일](#) | [9월 18일](#) | [9월 19일](#) | [9월 20일](#) | [9월 21일](#) | [9월 22일](#) | [9월 23일](#) | [9월 24일](#) | [9월 25일](#) | [9월 26일](#) | [9월 27일](#) | [9월 28일](#) | [9월 29일](#) | [9월 30일](#) | [10월 1일](#) | [10월 2일](#) | [10월 3일](#) | [10월 4일](#) | [10월 5일](#) | [10월 6일](#) | [10월 7일](#) | [10월 8일](#) | [10월 9일](#) | [10월 10일](#) | [10월 11일](#) | [10월 12일](#) | [10월 13일](#) | [10월 14일](#) | [10월 15일](#) | [10월 16일](#) | [10월 17일](#) | [10월 18일](#) | [10월 19일](#) | [10월 20일](#) | [10월 21일](#) | [10월 22일](#) | [10월 23일](#) | [10월 24일](#) | [10월 25일](#) | [10월 26일](#) | [10월 27일](#) | [10월 28일](#) | [10월 29일](#) | [10월 30일](#) | [10월 31일](#) | [11월 1일](#) | [11월 2일](#) | [11월 3일](#) | [11월 4일](#) | [11월 5일](#) | [11월 6일](#) | [11월 7일](#) | [11월 8일](#) | [11월 9일](#) | [11월 10일](#) | [11월 11일](#) | [11월 12일](#) | [11월 13일](#) | [11월 14일](#) | [11월 15일](#) | [11월 16일](#) | [11월 17일](#) | [11월 18일](#) | [11월 19일](#) | [11월 20일](#) | [11월 21일](#) | [11월 22일](#) | [11월 23일](#) | [11월 24일](#) | [11월 25일](#) | [11월 26일](#) | [11월 27일](#) | [11월 28일](#) | [11월 29일](#) | [11월 30일](#) | [12월 1일](#) | [12월 2일](#) | [12월 3일](#) | [12월 4일](#) | [12월 5일](#) | [12월 6일](#) | [12월 7일](#) | [12월 8일](#) | [12월 9일](#) | [12월 10일](#) | [12월 11일](#) | [12월 12일](#) | [12월 13일](#) | [12월 14일](#) | [12월 15일](#) | [12월 16일](#) | [12월 17일](#) | [12월 18일](#) | [12월 19일](#) | [12월 20일](#) | [12월 21일](#) | [12월 22일](#) | [12월 23일](#) | [12월 24일](#) | [12월 25일](#) | [12월 26일](#) | [12월 27일](#) | [12월 28일](#) | [12월 29일](#) | [12월 30일](#) | [12월 31일](#)

Copyright (c) 2002 MONTHLY CHOSUN All rights reserved.  
Contact [pubmonth@chosun.com](mailto:pubmonth@chosun.com) for more information.



朝 鮮 月 刊

[파카 45 스페셜 만년필(54,000원 상당)]을 선물로 드립니다.

Update : 2003.05.16

기자클럽

통신원클럽

독자마당

자료실

도서쇼핑몰

구독신청

Search

상세기사검색



지난호보기



이달의 전체기사



기사제보

주요기사

편집장의 편지 >>>

시론 >>>

특종 / 심층취재 >>>

정치 >>>

사회 >>>

교양 / 문화 >>>

경제 / 과학 >>>

인물 / 인터뷰 >>>

북한 / 통일 >>>

인기연재물 >>>

만평 >>>

이달의 화보 >>>

>> HOME > ÀÚ ¢¼Ç

A letter from North Korea

ÀÚ ¢¼ ÀÚ oblee

¼¼ ¢¼ ¼¼: 2198

ÀÚ ¢¼ÀÀÀ

A letter from North Korea

A letter from North Korea

Editor's Note: This letter was written by a man living in a city in South Pyongan Province, North Korea.

The letter was forwarded last April to the Monthly Chosun through a channel which cannot be divulged. To protect the writer, Monthly Chosun has removed all reference to cations and names.

A letter from North Korea

What follows is the story of a family devastated by starvation, written by its sole surviving member, a man who lost his mother, younger sister, wife, son and two daughters.

It was on that road that my oldest daughter breathed her last, and after that the body of my youngest



- 사람들 >>
- 별책부록 >>

독자투고 안내 >>

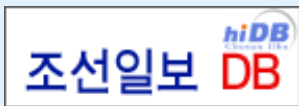
- 월간조선 소개
- 월간조선 지사소개
- 월간조선 해외지사
- 광고문의 02)724-6851-6852



한국의 100대 개인 홈페이지

추천 사이트

탈북 난민을 돕는 단체



daughter was found in the garbage dump at Sunchon station, leaving me in a state of total desolation. My youngest daughter, my revolutionary comrade who remained true to me to the very end, was my last blood relative in a world. When I brought her body home and examined it I found a plastic bag on her chest containing some carefully chosen items -- a pear peel and core, some pollack skin and a pork bone. I cried every time I thought about my daughter, who had probably restrained herself from eating those things so she could share them with me. I buried her on a sunny mountainside, placing the plastic bag over her mouth. This is written with a mixture of blood and tears. I hope it is read with that same understanding. Please forgive my countrymen who have committed so many transgressions quite out of their control. Three million people have starved in silence. They did their best for you, Great Leader! (Kim Il-sung) Now, General (Kim Jong-il), it is your turn to answer!"

**A tragic life**

This is how my life was patterned.

Please help bring an end to this tragedy so that my brothers and sisters will no longer have to die. 000, 00dong, 00 city, South Pyongan Province, Democratic People's Republic of Korea>

I was born in 1952, the second son of 000, my mother and 000, my father, in 00 district, 00-dong, Pyongyang. I began life during the Korean War, lulled to sleep by the sounds of battle. I have walked a thornier road than most, perhaps due to my fate of having experienced the upheaval of war and the frightening sound of guns. By the time I was 40, I had experienced the sorrow of losing my mother, sister, wife, son and daughters to starvation. By some miracle I am still alive today, but I have no guarantee about tomorrow. In North Korea, where it seems starvation is just a matter of time, I couldn't resist the desire to leave some kind of testament to my life.

My brothers and sisters are still walking the treacherous road I have walked. How many more

- World Village 제2호 발간 대특집 Oil Strike! 석유와 전쟁-석유를 지배하면 세계를 지배한다
- 대한민국이 김대중을 고발한다
- 월간朝鮮의 5년 단독 추적 기록
- '근대화 혁명가' 朴正熙의 생애
- 龍의 눈물!!
- 박정희 대통령 인터넷 기념관
- 독립신문 independent.co.kr

people must become victims of starvation before the famine will end? As one of the bereaved, I can't suppress my anger any longer. Screaming at the top of my lungs and waving my fist at the perpetrators of this disaster will not ease my pain. Nor will it bring back my wife, son and daughters, who have all passed on to another world. When I think back on how hard it was to feed and clothe my own small family, I begin to get some understanding of the devotion of our Leader[Kim Il-song] and the Dear General[Kim Jong-il] to feed a huge family of 23 million.

I only wish that the outside door had not been locked, that precious foreign currency had not been squandered on an arms buildup and the perpetuation of a personality cult, so that even one of my family members might have lived to be with me until I die. If God were to ask me: 'What is your wish?' My reply would be: 'It is that the people of North Korea would not have to know what hunger is.' And if God were to ask me: 'What is your second wish?' My answer would be: 'My second wish is that the people of North Korea would not have to know what hunger is.' And if God were to ask me: 'What is your third wish?' I would have to say again: 'My third wish is that the people of North Korea would not have to know what hunger is.'

### **Finding consolation in talking about food**

I wonder how many of my people the three-syllable word "star-va-tion!," has taken to the next world? How many children's smiles it has wiped out? How many tears has it poured into the eyes of mothers in this country? How many criminals has it made?

Surely, there is no one who doesn't realize the importance of food in sustaining life. As the old saying goes: "Eating is the most important thing in life."

But there is a strange philosophical argument people make: "Do we eat to live, or live to eat?" This question is taken up by all kinds of people, and my answer is always the same: "I eat to live." For some reason, I've always felt that as a human with a conscience, not just an animal, it was foolish to

say that one lives purely to eat. The main reason this question comes up so often is that North Koreans have been so restricted by what they can eat for so long that their bodies are weak, and they desperately yearn for something that tastes oily, very oily. My father, who never got to eat much meat or oil, but only vegetables with salt and soy sauce, used to joke that, "if you took out my stomach and held it up to the sun you'd be able to see the next door neighbor's house." In the face of North Korea's food shortages, people are always talking about food, both at work and at home. From a young age, we managed to eat food like meat, oil, eggs, bean curd and bean sprouts only about five times per year. Under the circumstances, getting some comfort by talking about food was one of the few pleasures we enjoyed.

During breaks at work talking about food was standard fare, and we would brag about how we went to so-and-so's house and ate such-and-such.

Being a parent, I found that children, too, talked about food when they were playing. I felt sad that I couldn't fulfill their food fantasies, and it always left me wondering how I could get them enough to eat. I never had much success. I was in a terrible state when I started writing this. Just when I was beginning to forget the past and just when the scars were beginning to heal, I got goosebumps and became frightened of revisiting the past.

### **I'd imagine myself eating until I finally fell asleep exhausted**

I beg the reader's understanding, as I'm writing out of a solemn obligation. There's no doubt that it's very difficult for me, an inexperienced writer, to find the words to describe the lack of food, never mind what it tastes like; to write about shortages of soy sauce, bean-paste sauce and even salt; to describe a place where there's nothing to eat except rotten food. I spent my childhood hungry. My life, which from the start has been overshadowed by hunger, can't be separated from my family history, nor can it be set apart from the history of our people and the history of our country.

We received rations of millet during the 1960s when I was in my teens. Back then the processing was not as advanced as it is now and it was often painful when the rough millet shells would get stuck in my throat. There was never enough, so my mother would add extra water to stretch out enough for the whole family. When I came in at nightfall after running around playing with the neighborhood kids, mom would put out some watery millet porridge and radish kimchi. I remember as if it was yesterday how difficult the winters were, where the days were short and the nights were so very long, how I would gulp down that bowl of millet gruel in a flash.

Our family of five would lie on the floor of a tiny room that was heated by pine needles. I would fantasize about eating with my older brother and fall asleep exhausted. It was a good day when I could gradually fall asleep, otherwise I wouldn't be able to get comfortable because I was too hungry to sleep. Every time my stomach growled a new thought would pop into my head. I even felt bitter towards my parents. Of the three children in our family, the youngest, who was still at the breast, was the luckiest. He didn't have to bear an empty stomach or food fantasies. I was envious of my younger brother for whom my mother's breast was available every time he cried.

After finishing the watery gruel, us kids would eye our parents' bowls hoping they would share some of theirs. I don't know how my mom could find the strength to give up a spoonful to each of us.

The smoke drifting up from the pine tree branches and dad's cigarettes made our small house unbearably gloomy. The sighs of hunger coming from all members of our family made it even more depressing. My brother and I would hold out some vague expectation that if we were restless enough mom might make us a bedtime snack, but those hopes would fade as it got later. In our young minds we got sadder as we realized that if she was going to make a snack, she'd have made it before midnight, not with dawn approaching.

## **Mother and Father**

Mom was as careful as could be, using a small liquor glass to measure food portions. Once my dad got into trouble when he felt sorry for us and told mom: "Dear, make something for the kids to eat!" Mom gave him an icy stare, saying angrily: "What good will that do when I can barely feed them every day?" Dad didn't bother to respond. This made me like my dad better than my mom, who I secretly disliked for being so miserly. Once I got a spanking from my mom for wondering out loud if she was my stepmother. Inside she was crying, but all I could think about was my empty stomach. It was years before I came to understand her good intentions.

Dad was a very strict head of the family, except that he had absolutely no say regarding food management. Instead, my dad would make up for it by sneaking food to me if he came across some outside the house. My father would puff on a cigarette and tell my mom, "Dear, life is sure hard, isn't it?" Mom wouldn't even bother to reply. My dad was a "1945 communist party member," an honest and hardworking man with a steadfast belief in the Great Leader and party. Dad invested a lot of time trying to educate my mom, but mostly to no avail. She had lived during the Japanese colonial era and had experienced the privations of war. She held no illusions about the bright future which was forever being forecast in the state media. She was busy just trying to feed her family, and the sighs of her starving children only made her feel more miserable. The unfolding events in North Korea have only shown that mom's skepticism was justified.

Dad's conviction, that if we just trusted and followed the Great Leader, then OO's generation would prosper, was eventually turned upside down. In the end, I've been the only member of my family who's been left to suffer, but it's too late to demand an explanation from my father who has gone to the afterlife.

## **My memories of a picnic**



One spring day when I was 13 our school went on a picnic. We went to Shimwon Temple at the far end of Cheonyeo Peak in Yontan-kun, Hwanghae Province.

When my teacher announced that we were going on a picnic, my classmates shouted for joy. But with nothing but millet gruel for lunch, it sounded like a death sentence to me. I hadn't bothered to tell my mom about the picnic. I knew there was no use holding out my hand when mom's pockets were empty. Poverty took its toll early.

As always, I left home feeling lousy with only a bottle of gruel in my bag. It was 15 li from our house to school. I wore Mom's pointed rubber shoes to school since I didn't have any shoes. I would normally hide the shoes in a bush near school and go to class barefoot, but on that day I had no choice. There was no way I could walk the 30-something li mountain road on bare feet, but I had to because group activities were considered obligatory. I reluctantly set off with my classmates but I felt like I was walking on eggshells, embarrassed by my lunch of millet gruel in a cider bottle. I felt terrible knowing that I'd be the laughing stock of my class come lunchtime when the rest of the kids would bring out their carefully prepared lunches and share them with the teacher and their friends, as was customary on picnics.

I announced that I was going to the toilet and quietly slipped out behind the temple toward the viewpoint. Against the awesome scenery of the fantastically-shaped cliff, my lunch was embarrassingly humble. "Ah, shoot! What do you have to worry about anyway? Did I ask you to eat this?", I mumbled as I poured the gruel into my mouth. It was better than nothing, but even now the pain of that day is carved indelibly on my heart.

### **Leaving my mom to join the army**

That evening when mom went out into the neighborhood, a passing woman asked: "So what did you





the food cabinet to make sure we ate at the right time, even though there was barely sufficient food. Somehow we came through that period and then it was time for me to leave to join the army. Things are different now, but back then it was a great honour to become a party member before returning to one's hometown. As I left home for the first time, I too aspired to defend the fatherland and join the party.

I didn't know how to comfort mom that day. She cried so hard when I went for the physical exam and passed. Then she couldn't stop crying, sending off her son not knowing if he would ever come back, feeling terrible that she'd never once been able to fill his stomach. Mom held up the bus as it was about to depart, crying out over and over. It was only after I became a father that I understood why she was crying so uncontrollably. Even when I joined the Korean People's Army, with mom's sorrow that she had never been able to fill our stomachs engraved in my mind, the pall of hunger was never lifted.

### **"3774 calories"**

There was a variety of colours on the "nutritional tables" posted in front of the army restaurant. On one of the cards, inside a circle, the words "3774 calories" stood out. The information was completely new to me. In all my 18 years and mandatory education I had never been taught anything about calories. There on the chart were the computed number of calories that were present in x-number grams of rice, pork, eggs, beef, fruit, vegetables, sugar etc., along with the precise number of calories provided to soldiers on a daily basis. However, unlike the information on the chart, all we got to eat was 200 grams of corn rice, seaweed soup seasoned with salt and a few pieces of radish. For me, having grown up on skimpy portions of millet gruel, it was a bonus to have rice at every meal. On the other hand, the training was too harsh, the group living and discipline was nerve-wracking, making army life seem worse than having a bowl of my mom's gruel and then sitting peacefully at home.

When there was a lull in our training, my food would not go down properly as I thought of my siblings eating gruel at home. The calorie chart that was posted in the canteen was complete nonsense. Although I served in the army for 10 years, not once did I ever eat according to the chart. It was always salt soup and that was never posted on the chart.

**"When it comes to eating you have to be as quick as a dog."**

Whenever they had supposedly caught a pig, we never got to see any of it. Those of us soldiers only got two or three pieces of meat and some broth. The fact that the meat had been boiled in water was enough to make us hold out our bowls and ask for more. My pride kept me from asking for any broth at all. The old soldiers who liked to joke would get some soup and say: "The butcher must have just walked through this soup in his rubber boots." This remark made fun of the fact that there was no meat in the soup. Getting enough to eat in the army was always a problem, often resulting in corruption. No means or methods were off limits in trying to get enough to eat. We used to say: "When it comes to eating, you have to be as quick as a dog." You had to be calculating as well. Once we were enjoying a "theoretical meal" as we sat around cleaning our cap badges, when suddenly the squad leader awoke. "What are you eating?" he demanded to know, grabbing a chunk of shoe polish, sticking it in his mouth and chomping down on it, and then gagging and spitting it out. Being so hungry he must have been dreaming about eating. We couldn't possibly laugh about it in front of him, but instead we exchanged knowing glances while laughing uproariously on the inside.

Every morning at the army base, the senior soldiers and non-commissioned officers went to the mess hall and ordered the soldiers working in the kitchen to give them some rice. Come dawn, when breakfast was ready, the commanding officers would also make their way to the canteen, help themselves to some rice and then take off. The kitchen workers, too, would hide a portion for



surprising, given that 400 grams of oil fed 150 people and all we basically ever got was salty cabbage soup.

We were fed meat on special days five times a year; on January 1, February 16, April 15, April 25 and September 9. We were given bean-curd about twice during my entire time in the army. The situation I described during my time in the army is now a thing of the past. Today, soldiers are forced to sell military gear on the black market so that they can feed themselves. We were much better off in my day.

### **Catching cats to supplement our diet**

I heard about an incident that occurred in 1998, in a village called Namdaechon, Yangsujin, China. Around 3 a.m. one morning in February, two North Korean border guards went into a Chinese farmer's house and accosted him at gunpoint. The farmer was terrified, but the demands weren't that harsh in comparison to the fear they created. They only wanted a decent meal and some Chinese cigarettes, if there were any in the house. Their basic demands simply bespoke the state of their health and diet. These days, soldiers sneak into civilians' homes to plunder anything of value, they steal military equipment to sell on the black market, they lay in wait at night to overpower military authorities and steal their clothes to sell on the black market so they can buy food. When I was in the army, I received surgery to have my appendix taken out. To provide me with extra nutrition, my friend Kim 00 stole the cat that always sat by food storage depot and boiled it up for me to eat. There was a fellow named Kim 00 who had a harder time than anyone in getting enough to eat. Maybe it was because he was so big. He volunteered to take on the task of looking after the kitchen fire, a job no one else wanted to do. The job required bringing in a load of coal for each meal and sleeping beside the fire to make sure it didn't go out. Although he spent all his time in the military tending the fire, he comforted himself in the belief that it was better than hearing his stomach growl.

Even though his stomach didn't growl, when it came time for him to go back to his hometown, all he had to show for it was the backpack he was given on discharge. Even though he had dreamed of returning home a proud party member, he had sat beside the stove for 10 years and the honour of party membership still eluded him. I still have vivid memories of taking 000 all teary-eyed to the 00 station to send him off. I remember how reluctant he was to board the train. Basic hunger had erased any promise for this young man's future.

**Look with your mouth and speak with your eyes!**

Winter came early in 1974. One day when we had been hard at work on defense construction, the commanding officer came to the site, gathered the soldiers together and berated us for falling behind schedule. Choi 00, the son of a well-known cadre who was hoping something might change, stood up and said: "If we weren't so hungry, the work would proceed according to plan." The commanding officer spat out: "You rotten bastard!" We were all taken aback.

It was clear we were expected to obey party orders unequivocally, regardless of the circumstances, if we hoped to survive the oppression. Unfortunately Choi 00, who had had the temerity to suggest that we should work only if we had enough to eat, disappeared the next day and nothing was ever heard about him again.

From that incident I learned that if you speak out loud what's on your mind, you die! I learned that if you have something to say, it is much wiser to say it with your eyes. I learned to see with my lips and speak with my eyes! Having gleaned that one morsel of wisdom while I was still a young soldier, I have been able to survive this far without any major misfortune. Although millions of people have died of starvation in North Korea, no one has ever said anyone died of hunger. Every one of them is considered to have died of an illness. In this society, where "food is politics," you have to keep your mouth shut in order to survive. Thanks to having been able to control the hunger I









fingernails and then awakened me. "Dad, you have to eat this and get up if we are going to live." I felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility, and holding her tightly I shed endless tears. My daughter, at such a young age, was thinking far ahead of her thickheaded father. I told her to share the rice with her older sister, but the children were taking charge. If I didn't at least pretend to eat some, they weren't going to have any either.

### **The plastic bag that I found on my daughter's body**

That night I felt overwhelmed by a moral obligation to keep my children alive. Instead of waiting in resignation for death, I decided it was up to me to do everything possible for my children until either they or I died.

As I lay thinking, I remembered having seen some kernels of corn on the first floor of a neighboring apartment. I went out and after looking down several alleys, eventually found the house. When I touched the window, I was relieved to find it wasn't glass but vinyl. My legs shook from fatigue, but I was filled with optimism out of relief that I had found some food. I cut the vinyl with the knife I had brought, reached in and gathered the kernels of corn. My whole body shook with the excitement of having food in my possession. I wish I knew how to express the joy I felt. Although my steps were faltering, I felt light-footed. This was the first time I had ever stolen anything. And having pulled it off, I felt confident that if I tried hard I could succeed again. From then on, I became a thief, taking any and every opportunity to steal food to feed my kids.

That night we had a feast at our house. Things were starting to look up. The simple law of survival, that what's alive is alive and what's dead is dead, had forced us to stand on our own two feet again. While I was cooking the corn for my daughters, I gave them some kernels to chew, which they did with gusto. For the first time in a long time they were happy to be alive.

From that time on the three of us begged, stole or scrounged food to feed ourselves, wandering from

Shinsonchon to Kowon and Wonsan to Danchon. We experienced many hardships and saw many people dying, even as we kept up our own fly-like existence. However, during this period my oldest daughter died in Kowon, and then later my youngest daughter's body was found in a garbage dump in Soonchon. This latter experience devastated me. My youngest daughter had remained devoted to me until the very end, my revolutionary comrade, and the one who turned me into an orphan, my last blood relative. When I retrieved her body, I found a plastic bag tucked in her clothing. In it were items she was likely going to share with me -- some peels of pear and a discarded pear core, as well as a pork bone. I couldn't stop crying as I thought about my daughter saving those bits of food to share with me. I buried my daughter on a sunny mountainside and put the plastic bag over her mouth. She was only 12 years old.

### **A knife in my heart**

This is how, one by one, my loved ones died after desperately struggling to survive. I didn't want to live any longer. I had nothing to live for. I would rather be dead than live like an animal. Besides, where was the honour in living when everyone else in my family had passed on to the next world!

I became so despondent I stuck a knife in my chest!

I felt no reason to carry on. I didn't have control over my life. Full of bitterness I jabbed a knife into my chest. The tip of the blade ended up 0.5 mm short of my heart and once again I was forced to climb back on the road of life. I was diagnosed with open pneumothorax and received treatment in Room 7 at the 00 city hospital. With no heat, no medicine, no meals, it was a hospital ward in name only. Again I was confronted with enormous difficulties. As for food, I was able to get by on the bits of food other patients' visitors gave me. I suffered tremendous pain from my festering incision, for which I never received a single shot of penicillin. With nothing to live for, I loathed my life.

One day a friend who had brought me two pieces of cold kimchi (fermented cabbage) told me to put

them on the sore. Strangely, the constant pain from the wound was soothed. But then, as the cabbage warmed up, the pain started again. I alternated the two leaves on my sore over and over as I struggled for survival. Then one day those kimchi leaves that had seemingly saved my life were gone. I thought perhaps they'd fallen on the floor but I couldn't find them anywhere. I asked one of my roommates if he had seen them, and pointing to the person in the next bed, he said he'd seen him chewing on something a little earlier. When I looked at him he smiled sheepishly, embarrassed. I felt anger rising up inside me. I would have liked to use my fist on him, but then I realized that we were living in a world where even two leaves of kimchi were precious, so instead I stifled my resentment and sat back down on my bed with a huff.

For us North Koreans, we can't get hospital treatment unless we have food to give the doctors. They only dole out medicine according to how much they've been given to eat.

When a patient goes to a hospital, the doctor does a medical history, a check-up and writes a prescription, telling the patient, "You can buy such-and-such a drug on the black market. If you take such-and-such a dose for a month you will get better." But no one in their right mind would go to the hospital if they could afford to buy medicine on the black market! The only reason people go to the hospital is because there is supposed to be some semblance of a free treatment system. One patient who came to the hospital with a broken leg was told to go and buy 3-4 kilograms of plaster and bandages on the black market and then to get a carpenter to plane two boards and bring everything back so the doctor could set the fracture. The terrible situation arising in the medical field is directly related to the food shortage. Getting a diagnosis, medicine and treatment in the hospital only goes to those with food to offer.

### **A society that revolves around eating**

It is not uncommon for teachers to go and sit at the back of the classroom, to tell the children to

study on their own without even checking their homework. Some women who are teachers have told me they don't have the energy to teach. They just go into the classroom and tell the students what subject to study. And if a student wants to be the class representative, he or she must come from a family that has access to rice. They won't get to be class rep if they come from a family that eats gruel, whereas even idiots can become class rep if they come from families that have rice to offer. Teachers put kids from families that have rice on center stage and then appeal to their parents for food. Children from homes that eat gruel are frequently missing some textbooks or they don't have any at all, while the kids from better-off homes always seem to have a complete set of textbooks in the best condition,

During the farm support period, the teachers get the children to plant, glean and to shell peas. In spring they get them to prepare the fields and to weed.

It is even hard for party members to get a travel permit, but if you have 10 kilograms of rice to offer as a bribe you can get one the next day. Everyone in North Korean society knows how prized party membership is and how valuable it is. Our parents give us physical life, but party membership is a badge of recognition that the Dear Leader (Kim Jong-il) has given us eternal political life. The front page of the party membership booklet has a picture of Kim Il-sung on it, so storing it improperly can result in problems or outright expulsion from the party if it gets lost, burned or otherwise defaced. On occasion, the punishment can result in being sent to a detention camp, and it can have implications for family members. I've even seen party membership booklets being used as collateral for borrowing money or buying rice. When you see such things, which were previously unheard of, being traded so openly, you get some idea what the food situation is like, what desperation there is. The following statistics give some indication of the situation at Kowon station, South Hamgyong province on April 20, 1999.

The situation at Kowon Station, South Hamgyong province, April 20, 1999

Total number of people at the station: 1,896

Number of people boarding trains: 136 Wanderers (adults): 840 Wanderers (children aged 4-17): 896 People who have eaten 3 meals: 204 People who have eaten 2 meals: 192 People who have eaten 1 meal: 640 People who have had no meal: 742

As this data shows, apart from the 136 travellers, the main waiting hall at the train station was home to the homeless. The fact that there are more children than adults, reveals that many families have just dissolved. And the fact that there are more people who have not eaten than those who have eaten, indicates that starvation is ever at hand and serves as a dire warning that the food problem is ongoing.

### Scary times

There is something I always request from my like-minded brothers and sisters. I ask that they respect their neighbors and keep in mind that although they may be warm and well fed, they could just as easily be cold and hungry. I am one of the people who has experienced the pain of the class struggle that obtaining food involves. I once went to prison for leading a ring that stole from those wealthy people who ignored the plight of the starving poor to buy food on the black market to give to the unfortunate, mostly children and the elderly. On the morning of the lunar new year, I was beaten to a pulp in the security department torture room. I experienced first hand North Korea's jail system. Although I was bleeding profusely as a result of my beating, when I realized it was the lunar new year I felt uplifted. It almost seemed as if the spirit of those times when our family gathered together was present in the jail and I thought that my family was better off having departed this cruel world. I was also curious to see what kind of food I would be served for new year's, somehow feeling excited for no reason. "Hey, eat up!", bellowed one of the jailors, to which no one paid any attention but peered through the bars in anticipation. The new year's food consisted of 38

kernels of corn boiled in salt water and 3 beans. The older inmates seemed satisfied that there were beans. But there were no side dishes and they didn't give us spoons, so I guess we were supposed to lap it up like dogs. Inexperienced people like me ate with their hands. I wiped my blood-stained hands on my pants and picked up each kernel, each bean, one by one.

People who had been to prison called it hell -- and it was. The amazing thing about it, however, was that at least we were fed about 40 kernels of corn, three times a day, at the appointed time. Still, I think prisons are representative of North Korea.

In our cell, prisoner No. 8 was laid out from malnutrition. He eventually died but prisoner No. 3, who was charged with taking care of him, didn't report that he was dead for three days so that he could eat his food. When this was discovered, No. 3 was beaten so badly that he, too, died. He was brutally struck with a pickax. When he moaned in pain the head jailor demanded: "So how does it taste?". With tear-filled eyes he said: "I'm getting a beating, but it's better than being hungry." He was living to eat.

There was a father and son in our jail who were apprehended for having used the writings of Kim Il-sung as wallpaper. No. 23, the father, was reported by a jailor for whispering to the inmate next to him. He had to stick his legs out of the cell to be punished with 20 whacks from an oak club on the bottom of his feet. It was a scary punishment whereby they increased the number of whacks by five for every scream. No. 23 couldn't help but let out some excruciating yells for which he got many, many more whacks. And because he kept yelling, despite the extra whacks, the jailor imposed the scariest punishment of all, saying: "You reactionary bastard, there's no dinner for you tonight," I thought for sure he'd get to eat, but the jailor put a stop on his food as he said he would. The jailor brought everyone their food that night and shouted, "Hey, No. 22!"

No. 22 replied, "Yes."

"You take care of No. 23's food!" "Thank you sir, I will be good." This was the answer all inmates had to give when concessions were made on their behalf. Everyone in the cell was envious of No. 22's sudden good fortune. I looked to discover who No. 22 was, only to see it was No. 23's son. The 25-year-old brat took the dish his father was holding and poured it into his own in front of everyone. The moment the 40 kernels belonging to the son and the 40 kernels from the father were put together it appeared there was still a faint look of hope in the father's eyes. It appeared he was still hoping that his son would slip him his share.

But the son opened his mouth wide without so much as a glance at his father. The father looked pitiful. He watched his son's lips, and then unable to contain himself he tapped his son's side.

"Hey, just leave a bit!"

It wrenched my heart to hear the son's curt reply to his father's plea: "Dad, this is a jail. Please hang on, eat when you get out." We were living in scary times -- at least if it hadn't been his father, it wouldn't have sounded so bad.

### **"He ate before he died"**

Every day I was in jail there were on average 6-7 people dying of malnutrition. Now whose turn was it? The saying, "If you're going to die, at least make sure you get a meal before you do!" was very popular in the jail. Occasionally someone would die during mealtime, and if they appeared to be slipping away, inmates would whisk their bowls away from them. And then they'd lick their fingers. Those who didn't get a turn would grab the empty bowls away and start licking them. People would lose their reason, acting like animals. When someone died at mealtime, it was common for the inmates to finish off their food and then report to the jailor, "he finished his meal before he died," thereby avoiding any accusations.



With people dying everyday, the Political Bureau ordered a food inspection. They called us in one at a time to ask how much food we were getting. They wanted to know how long we hadn't been getting beans. It appeared there was corruption involving the food allotted to the jail, knowing that the prisoners had nowhere to appeal. When outsiders came to visit, the jailors only allowed those who brought food to have a visit; and for those whose offering was inadequate, they said visits were not allowed and said they would pass on the food. Although I didn't find out about it until after I got out of prison, apparently I had caused a lot of trouble for people. The provincial detention camp was in 00 city, South Pyongan province. It is notorious throughout North Korea. Human rights violations there are outrageous, mostly in the interest of extracting confessions from inmates. The story of one confession goes that a man stole a locomotive from Shinsongchon, South Pyongan province and took it to the rail yard in South Hamgyong province, Danchon, where he sold it. The mandatory detention period at the provincial camp was one month, after which inmates were either released or sent to prison.

I was also dragged off to the 00 provincial detention center. I worked at turning human excrement into dried clumps to burn as coals in the kitchen. At the end of the day when we were collecting ashes, there would be some radish ends or cabbage roots mixed in with the soot. Whenever a cabbage root would appear, we would have a dog fight to pick it up first. Some people would even try to pry it out of your hand. There was no time to wipe it off, it had to go straight into your mouth. Even raw beans tasted delicious there. When it was time to plant the potatoes, only seven out of 100-odd inmates were chosen to do the planting. A monitor with a leather whip was assigned to each inmate. The monitors walked backwards in the furrows and we put the seeds in as we followed them. Then someone was caught putting some potato seeds in his mouth. The monitor ordered him to stop work and asked him to open his mouth. The monitor tried to remove the potato seeds from the inmate's mouth, but realizing that he was already in trouble the inmate kept chewing and trying to swallow them. The fight lasted about five minutes in which the monitor tried to get his finger into

the inmate's mouth and the inmate struggled to swallow the seeds. When the monitor realized he couldn't retrieve the seeds, he sat on the inmate stuffing dirt into his mouth, screaming: "You bastard, stuff this down your throat." The inmate wouldn't consider spitting out the dirt, but swallowed it along with the seeds.

I was 43 kilograms when I got out of prison, a cripple, a shadow of my former self. Just as I had gained strength by eating the cat my friend had caught for me after my surgery while I was in the army, I was now able to gain strength by eating rats.

### **Cooking dead rats to eat**

Walking the streets of Pyongyang at dawn, one can find dead rats that have eaten the rat poison laid out for them outside apartments. I was able to pick up quite a few. With no other way to tide over my hunger, I had an uncontrollable urge to eat those rats. I couldn't resist eating the rats, despite realizing that I might meet their fate. I took the rats I had collected to the banks of the Daedong River, removing their insides from the head to the abdomen. I built a fire with some scrap paper and roasted the rats. Although they looked scary, the meat tasted good. It made me feel pretty smart to be roasting rats in the middle of the capital. Behind Namsan hill I could see the Party Central Committee building. My hands and mouth were black as I chewed on the rat meat, and in my heart I asked General Kim Jong-il:

"General! My grandfather died before he ever saw the white rice with meat soup, the silk clothes and the tile-roofed house that the Great Leader had promised. Father and mother also departed. Now my children have left, too, and isn't it time the General made good on the Great Leader's promises?" This is the truth. No one said anything as three million North Koreans starved to death. We believed our Great Leader would make good on his promises, remaining dutiful even unto death. Now it is your turn General. Your loyal people do not think that you would deny us, but we

believe that you will carry through on your promises. I speak as a bereaved family member, as an ordinary citizen. I am sure you will give us these things, but I want to say, don't ask us to wait any longer! This is because I have given up 54 years waiting for white rice with meat soup, silk clothes and a tile-roofed house . . .

My life is only the tip of the iceberg compared to the desperate situation of my brothers and sisters in the North. As I conclude, there is something that I must emphasize. We have lost too much. But if I only lament what I have lost, then what would the fate of our fatherland be? Although I'm not certain how many people have died, it seems plain more of our people are dying than are being born. I have travelled all over the country for years as a begger, but I have only ever seen three women who looked pregnant. Never did I hear any word of a newborn baby anywhere. According to recent research data, young men and women are no longer interested in marriage.

Parents oppose marriages in 23% of cases; in 47% the man does not feel confident enough to marry; only 6% feel that they could get by if they were married; 17% are waiting to see how things develop; and 8% prefer to remain single.

It is also a disgrace that there are so many broken families in the DPRK, and that there are women who haven't become pregnant even after 5-6 years of marriage. Moreover, the number of women seeking abortions is sky-high, which should make us stop and wonder how this will affect our future. Who will be left to pass on the customs and traditions of our ancestors?

I cannot help but lament. What about the reality in which the chastity of Choson [Korean] women is being traded for a 10-won bowl of corn noodles (3 cents US) on the black market. I beg my readers to do anything they can to help North Korea!

There are 12,613 people in this country whom I am thankful to for comfort and compassion when I experienced misfortune. To help those people alone, even if it were to be used only as medicine, I

would need 60 tons of corn, 6 tons of rice, 2 tons of salt, 500 kilograms of parasite medicine and 500 kilograms of lice medicine. One hundred dollars will buy 180 kilograms of corn, or about 85 kilograms of rice. Just as you can't use the rafters to replace rotten beams in a house, everything so far is makeshift, just games. As the saying goes, even a king cannot save someone from poverty, so amidst the ups and downs I have felt it was paradoxical to talk about ordinary citizens doing anything. I want to do whatever it takes to live. I want to live out the years for my wife and my three children who starved to death. My final wish is to live with my brother and sisters in a world in which starvation is unknown. I could die happy if the innocent smiles could return to the faces of our children, if the mothers' tears could only dry up. April 23, 1999.

Ài Äü: <a href="#">[SHOCKING REPORT ] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea</a>	so
ÜÄ½: <a href="#">HEARING OF THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE</a>	° ü ® ÄÚ

[☰ 목록](#)

 **자료실** Source Material

[남북관계](#) | [한국현대사](#) | [강연·연설](#) | [국제관계](#)

[TOP](#) 

[한반도](#) | [북한](#) | [남한](#) | [통일](#) | [DB](#) | [검색](#) | [3월](#) | [4월](#) | [5월](#)

Copyright (c) 2002 MONTHLY CHOSUN All rights reserved.  
Contact [pubmonth@chosun.com](mailto:pubmonth@chosun.com) for more information.



- 사람들 >>
- 별책부록 >>

독자투고 안내

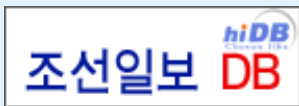
- 월간조선 소개
- 월간조선 지사소개
- 월간조선 해외지사
- 광고문의 02)724-6851~6852



한국의 100대 개인 홈페이지

추천 사이트

탈북 난민을 돕는 단체



unfamiliar with our situation will probably have difficulty understanding how in Yanji, a city with a high concentration of ethnic Koreans, we feel a close connection to the homeland.

When we see South Korean business operators in the Yanji area who put their trust in Korean-Chinese people or when we see North Koreans who come to visit their relatives in China, we regard them all as the faces of our homeland.

When I meet South Korean tourists or business investors who come to Yanji, I am proud to be Korean. And when I see poverty-stricken North Koreans who come to China to find relief, I always feel deep compassion for the dire situation in my native country. Many Korean-Chinese are originally from North Korea and most have been to visit their relatives who still live there. I have also taken provisions to North Korea on several occasions to visit my father's siblings and their children. I have taken so many clothes and so much food that you would think I was moving there. Five years ago, when the extreme food shortages started, our relatives began sending a steady stream of desperate letters asking for help. My parents and siblings in China began making repeated visits carrying food to keep our relatives from starving.

In the summer of 1999, as in the past, we received some five letters asking for help. The restaurant that my siblings and I ran was not doing very well. Still, having been back and forth to North Korea, we knew all too well about the food shortages and felt obliged to apply to go there once again.

**A plea to check on a POW**

It was in early October when word began to spread that we had applied to go to North Korea. One day a woman who lived nearby and who was a regular customer at our restaurant dropped by our house.

She had worked in South Korea for two years and had recently returned to China. She came to ask a favour, to look for someone who might be living near the Kogonwon mine in Saebyeul-kun, North

The image shows a vertical stack of several news and magazine covers. From top to bottom:
 

- World Village** magazine cover, issue 2, featuring 'Oil Strike!' and '대특집 Oil Strike!'.
- A cover for '대한민국이 김대중을 고발한다' (The Republic of Korea accuses Kim Dae-jung), with a photo of Kim Dae-jung and the text '대한민국이 김대중을 고발한다'.
- A cover for '月刊朝鮮의 5년 단독 추적 기록' (5-year solo tracking record of the monthly Chosun).
- A cover for '근대화 혁명가' (Modernization revolutionary) featuring '朴正熙의 생애' (The life of Park Chung-hee).
- A cover for '龍의 눈물!!' (The dragon's tears!!) with a dragon illustration.
- A cover for '박정희 대통령 인터넷 기념관' (President Park Chung-hee Internet Memorial Hall) with a photo of Park Chung-hee.
- A large blue banner for '독립신문 independent.co.kr'.

Hamkyung province in North Korea. One of the woman's relatives who lived in South Kyungsang province in South Korea had asked her to try to find out whether another relative thought to be held in North Korea as a POW during the Korean War was dead or alive. I didn't think it was an unreasonable request, having been to the Saebyul-kun area many times. I thought I could ask around when I got there and then check to see if the facts matched up. I felt obliged since the South Korean relative was elderly and because the woman had made such a sincere request, handing me 500 yuan for my trouble. I assured her that I would do my best to find her relative and not to worry. Little did I know that this request was later to cause me endless grief. The world is full of brutality, but the more I think about my experience the more galling I find it.

With our travel documents in hand, my wife and I began preparing for our trip to North Korea. We planned to travel together since there was so much luggage to carry. When people travelled from China to South Korea, their friends were envious and congratulations were in order, as if they were heading for some exotic destination. As for me, I was ashamed to be going to North Korea and people felt sorry for me. People were concerned that we might have a rough trip, given the deplorable living conditions and the fact that the trains kept no schedule. No doubt going to South Korea has its difficulties as well when people go to work there, but they can at least look forward to getting paid for their work, so everyone prefers going there. By contrast, travelling to North Korea was only about spending money, not making it, and so it was considered an exercise in hardship. My wife felt embarrassed and complained about having to go to such an undesirable destination. My siblings contributed 1,000 yuan to buy five sacks of rice, five sacks of flour, 50 kilograms of cookies and candies and a big bag of clothes.

### **Going to South Korea compared to North Korea**

Having been to North Korea several times, I knew my first priority was to have some food for my North Korean relatives who would come to meet us. So I bought a box of rice cakes, a box of



cooking oil, a box of alcohol, and a box of cigarettes. Altogether there were enough boxes to fill half a pickup truck. Even though I gave away lots of things each year, by the time it was divided among all my relatives it didn't seem like much. They seemed to be forever asking for more. Just thinking about it always got me depressed on my way to North Korea.

After advising our relatives that we would be arriving through Tomun-Saebiyul customs, we set out on October 15, 1999. It was smooth sailing from Yanji to Tomun customs since all we had to do was hire a truck to take us the distance. Just as we had expected as we approached Saebiyul, there were my aunts and other relatives standing outside the fence at the border crossing.

I shouted and waved to greet them, but they waved back in silence. Only the year before we had all waved and shouted greetings to each other across the Tumen River. I thought their silence was so strange that I asked the Chinese customs officer about it. He laughed and said: "See over there. Those people doing forced labor were all caught shouting greetings across the border. All you have to do is shout something to the Chinese side and the authorities will accuse you of entertaining fantasies about China. They have to do forced labor and eat corn gruel." How pathetic! It is only natural to shout greetings to relatives you haven't seen in a long time. After completing simple customs procedures in China we loaded our goods onto a cart and proceeded toward North Korean customs. Even before we got there we could feel the eyes of the guards and customs officers upon us, like vultures looking for food.

Their attitude was cold, as if I was some Chinese liberation army soldier trying to bring in a bomb or something.

"What's in the bags?"

"Food and rice cakes, alcohol, candies and things like that."

"Bring it in. I want to inspect it."



Anxiously, my wife and I took everything inside. They opened and rummaged through all our goods, putting them on some inspection machine. Then they did a body check, searched our clothes and even unravelled my wife's bun to inspect it, as if there might be a hidden letter or something. After the inspection was over they gave us an unmistakable message: "Don't you think you should have a little something for us, too?"

From past experience, we knew how proficient they were at extracting something for themselves. Korean-Chinese visitors knew to offer customs officers a gift or they would drive you nuts by citing this or that regulation to hold you up all day. Since we anticipated it, we had prepared a box full of rice cake, some alcohol, cigarettes and bread, which we presented to them. Suddenly their attitude changed. Now satisfied, the customs officers smiled, and even wished us good luck on our trip. As usual, our relatives gathered around after patiently waiting for us to come out. They looked gaunt and pale. Knowing how hungry they were, we immediately brought out some rice cakes and alcohol for them. Watching the seven people who had come to meet us standing there ravenously devouring everything in sight filled me with great pity. I was glad that we had come to help out.

### **The "Victory 58," a clunker that passes for a transport vehicle**

It was about 100 li from Saebyul-kun customs to the Kogonwon mine. Given the depressed situation in North Korea, not a single bus was running in the area and because of all the goods we had brought, my relatives had somehow borrowed a vehicle. The North Korean "Victory 58" was a real old clunker in terms of its design and engine. It would be considered a rust-bucket even in the most remote countryside in China. It hardly had any power. With no gasoline available, it was steam powered, fired by dried corn cobs and charcoal. At the slightest incline, the engine would conk out and we'd get out and fan the fire to get it going. Then, puffing steam, it would start moving again. Any normal vehicle would have been able to travel the 100 li distance in an hour, but we left at 11 a.m. and didn't arrive until 9 p.m.. As we chugged along, it occurred to me that we were

moving about the speed of the North Korean economy. My wife got a laugh by describing it as going at the speed of a lazy cow. The dimly lit village was silent due to shortages of electricity but people had heard that we were coming and many came out to greet us.

It was obvious that they were all envious of my relatives and I could clearly see them hungrily swallow their saliva. In the past the trip had been a pleasure because it felt like a coronation ceremony of bygone days. Since then however, my perception had changed and I felt sorry for the bystanders. No sooner did we unload everything than the so called "cadres" in the mining village and the local police began arriving, all smiles, at my cousin's small house. No doubt they had come for a taste of Chinese alcohol. My cousin flattered them. I knew my cousin had to do it or else her whole family would be labelled ideologically unsound. But to my wife and I it was incomprehensible. My cousin laid out some white kimchi and a few pieces of rice cake on the table. The visitors were all big drinkers. Our jaws dropped at the sight of the mine "cadres," who claimed they hadn't had a drink in ages, all draining one shot after another and popping candies into their mouths in between each drink. In China, you couldn't pay someone to mix alcohol and sweets like that.

### **"Why are Chinese so stingy?"**

The night we arrived we went to register with the head of the People`s Unit, which coordinated the village security network. We were supposed to register our address at the office, but when we arrived the security officer said we couldn't register until the following day. I asked why not and he said we would have to come back when the head of the branch station was in. We had had similar trouble registering with the branch office every time we visited North Korea. We had learned that when the bribe was too small they would tell us that we couldn't stay -- that is until they got what they wanted. We had trouble sleeping that night and went back early next morning with our "gift" for the head of the People's unit.

We took a bottle of alcohol, cigarettes and bread, knowing that once on North Korean soil you have to offer a bribe if you want to get anything done. The head man, who had received word of our arrival, was a short, cantankerous-looking middle-aged fellow. He said nothing as he disagreeably looked us up and down. He caught sight of our offering and curtly declared: "Why are Chinese so stingy?" Quite bluntly, he was telling us that our bribe was too small. And here we thought we were being generous. He immediately gave us the cold shoulder and disappeared into another room. I knew only too well that without increasing our bribe he would order us to leave the country and then go about harassing my cousin. My wife suggested we leave right away, but I didn't want to just take off like that. I returned to my cousin's house and picked up three pairs of nice warm underwear and three pairs of running shoes, and then took them back as an additional bribe. After looking over the enhanced box of bribes, the duty officer went straight to the chief, who soon showed up with a puzzled expression as if he was looking for something. He saw the box we had put out and began speaking pleasantly, obviously having calmed down.

"Please understand, it's all in the nature of the work we do," he told us. "Not to worry, you will be well taken care of next time you come as well. Have a good visit."

I was boiling inside, but said, "OK." It stunk, but it was the system that you had to put up with.

We still had one more procedure to complete before we could stay and this entailed a visit to the Kun [county] Security Department. My wife thought it was a waste, but we prepared a whole box of bribes to avoid any problems from the outset. The next morning we set out by car from the mining village to Saebyoil-kun, a distance of about 100 li. The driver gave us a ride for 200 North Korean won. We arrived in the early afternoon and went straight to the Foreigners' Registration Office at the Kun Security Department. We already knew the thirtyish man with the title of guidance officer of foreign affairs. "Are you back again?" he asked.

Instead of responding, we just pushed forward the bribe box. True to form, he started digging

through the items one by one. "Why are there so few cigarettes," he asked?

We explained that we hadn't brought that many with us. Furrowing his brow, he said: "I want you to leave within 3 days." So, he wasn't happy with the bribe. Promptly, my wife took 500 won out of her pocket and dumped it on the desk. "Will that do?"

"I suppose."

It was only then that he stamped "15-day permit" in our travel document. It was as if we were some kind of criminals.

**"What's this, you Chinese reactionary?"**

That night when we arrived back at my cousin's house, there, sitting inside, was yet another security officer. We were looking nonplussed when my cousin said he was a People's Group security officer. He introduced himself and said that it was his duty to inspect our goods. I told him that everything had already been inspected by customs and asked why it needed to be done again. I also said that we had only brought food and clothes and that none of it was for sale. He said he would have to see what we had to determine that, adding that he would also have to check for "non-socialist goods". I was getting exasperated.

"What do you mean by non-socialist goods?"

He grinned sarcastically, as if he couldn't believe I would dare to ask such a question, replying that "non-socialist goods are clothes that contradict DPRK-style socialism." I was feeling down after having been harassed by security personnel all day. I continued arguing: "I don't understand what you're getting at. So what are socialist clothes and what is capitalist bread anyway?" He raised his voice too, not wanting to appear to back down: "I'm telling you that jeans or short pants are capitalist."

"China is a socialist country. Can't we wear the same things?"

"China is not a true socialist country, it's only semi-socialist. In other words it's a fake socialist country."

"A prosperous country is a socialist country, you call this a socialist country?"

"What? Why you Chinese reactionary?"

"You North Korean thief!"

He pulled out his gun and pointed it at me. I didn't back down, standing poised to fight him with my fists. "Go ahead. Shoot me if you like. I'm a Chinese citizen!"

Breathing heavily, he sat down as if unable to resist my cousin's pleading for calm. Meanwhile, my wife couldn't contain herself, blurring out her own indignation: "Do you think for one second we came to sponge off our relatives? We are here because they are facing starvation." He suppressed his anger, hanging his head as if he had nothing to say. There was silence. My cousin and her daughter quickly put some liquor on a tray. Having a drink without any snacks to go with it wasn't at all appealing to me, but as the man of the house, I invited him to have a drink. Given his recent fury, I didn't think he would agree to a drink, but he smiled and quickly sat down.

"Please try to understand if I went a bit too far," he offered. "It's the nature of our work."

I didn't feel like continuing my argument with him and spoke some empty words: "I understand, it's alright, I know how things are here."

Watching him guzzle the alcohol, it was as if he'd never had a drink in his life. I felt pity for him.

When he staggered drunkenly to his feet, I handed him some of our children's old clothes for his kids. He was very appreciative and left saying thanks. It was very dark outside. The black clouds made me feel eerie. I had the feeling I was in a country that did not welcome its own people to live or visit.



Review." The authorities dug up anything, even if it was something people had done wrong in the bathroom. People were forced to be self-critical or to denounce others, and it had to done with a vengeance.

I vividly recall what my cousin's neighbor said as he mimicked a review session: "Last night, comrade Kim Myung-sik stole a sack of the state's valuable coal to take home, which is a serious crime. "By not uplifting the Great General, we cause him anxiety because it is an anti-party, anti-revolutionary act. No doubt comrade Myung-sik's house is cold, but he is giving no thought to our faltering socialism and what he did was an ominous act without the slightest consideration of protecting socialism." At the life review session, which followed a strict party line, Myong-sik was ultimately punished with the loss of 10 days food rations.

It was all tragi-comic. It seemed that North Korea was following directly in China's footsteps of 30 years before when the Cultural Revolution victimized millions of innocent people. Everyone who visited my cousin's house said the same thing. During the years when North Koreans were suffering from extreme food shortages and dying of starvation, the state didn't have the nerve to order people to adhere to strict socialist dogma, but now they had gotten tough again. The Workers Party of Korea had introduced a new goal for society: "Root out the capitalist lie which insists that food is of the utmost importance and focus on revolution with an indomitable spirit." One visitor said: "No one who has suffered like us, staring death in the face, is persuaded by this new line of thought."

**"The Great General saved the DPRK [Choson]"**

Everyone was complaining that the government was once again cracking down on the slightest signs of dissent, while barely giving people subsistence levels of food so that they had the strength to work. Workers were required to study political dogma three hours a day, for an hour prior to work and for two hours after work. I was curious as to what they were learning and mentioned that

it must be pretty advanced. The reply I got from my cousin's children and other relatives was simply some Marxist gibberish. One of them gave the following example:

"The world is still faltering under food shortages, leading to starvation, but the Great General was the first to carry out an extraordinary plan to save the DPRK.

"The treacherous sanctions of capitalist countries have at last bowed to the Parent General's campaign."

The Korean language is either richly expressive or truly scary, but each of these sayings was enough to give me goose-bumps. Even the slogans pasted everywhere in the mining village screamed out: "The great leader, comrade Kim Jong-il, is the sun in the 21st century;" "Long live the ideologically-sound state;" "Long live the strong state!" "Long live our own brand of socialism!" It was all pompous bluster. I had thought from watching and listening that my homeland was full of boisterous glorification, but a closer inspection revealed that it was nothing more than the noisy clatter of empty cans.

I vividly recall a scene from "Flower Girl," a moving North Korean film of several decades ago. "In a world where airplanes are flying in the sky and trains moving on land, our ancestors are still wearing horse-hair hats and riding donkeys. No wonder we are worn down and haven't made any progress!" I remember how affected people were when we saw this film in China. We were gullibly taken in by the declaration of the truth of social development. But North Korea had forgotten the truth of its proclamation and was instead headed back to the past.

### **The story of two youths who went back after escaping from North Korea**

One day two young men came to visit, having heard that we had come from China. They fidgeted a bit and asked if they could have a Chinese cigarette to smoke. When I immediately offered them each a cigarette, they confided that they had escaped from North Korea a year before and spent a



month in China. I was curious to know why they had returned and asked them about it. This is what they said: "We escaped to China and stayed in a place called Longjing county where we repaired roads for a month and earned 500 yuan. That's the equivalent of about 10,000 won in North Korean currency. We had never had so much money in our lives and tried to take it back to our starving parents and siblings who we missed. Instead, we got caught trying to cross the Tumen River. They confiscated all our money and dragged us off to the county jail. "They beat us and tortured us with sleep deprivation for a month and then transferred us to the provincial concentration camp.

"The concentration camp deals with ideological offenders caught escaping to China or those who question North Korean ideology. "We went through all sorts of ordeals, barely escaping death for the six months we spent at the concentration camp in the Chongam area of Chongjin. We did forced labor building apartments where we had to run carrying loads of bricks and concrete blocks on our backs. "To eat, they gave us what they all called 'goat droppings,' a powdered food the size of a bean made from ground bean shells mixed with corn flour.

"Having to work all day on a handful of 'goat droppings,' it was little wonder that lots of people collapsed from exhaustion. There were approximately 350 people doing forced labor with us and every day many collapsed and many didn't make it. Life was so unbearable that 10 or more people killed themselves and another 10 died from beatings. "We were so miserable that we swallowed nails, but we got caught, underwent forced surgery and barely survived. We were accused of listening to South Korean broadcasts and of having met with South Koreans during our one-month stay in China. But quite honestly, we didn't have a radio, never listened to South Korean broadcasts and we never saw a South Korean. And even though we consistently maintained we never did any such things, they still made us do forced labor. "After we got out and came home, we pined for our life in China where we had a full stomach. We vowed countless times that we would try to escape again.

"But we both have a hard time getting around because our backs hurt so much from the wounds we

received while we were in the jail and concentration camp. It's likely we'll be disabled for the rest of our lives. "The basic method the Security Department uses on minor offenders is to make them immobile so that after they're released they can't go and do anything again. Their crime prevention methods are very primitive. "We constantly think of dragging our crippled bodies to China, even if just for a few months, so that we can eat and live like human beings and see something of the world before we die.

"But since the beginning of 1999 Kim Jong-il has been giving North Koreans half the monthly rations and has issued orders to "punish escapees to China harshly."

"In accordance with this order, the provincial security department is supposed to give five-year prison sentences to anyone, regardless of the reason, who is caught trying to escape into China. As a new emergency measure, the family members of escapees are to be sent to the newly-built provincial concentration camp in Onsong-kun, North Hamkyung province. "The provincial concentration camp is run similarly to the concentration camp for political prisoners. Families are kept indefinitely to do forced labor, causing lots of people to take their lives.

"If you are sent to the concentration camp you die there. There is no such thing as family life. Men and women live separately. They say the sentence is for five years or more, but it is no different from the security department's prisons and 100% of the prisoners will die. "No one dares to leave North Korea right now because they are afraid of Kim Jong-il's new orders, which get not just you but your whole family into trouble.

"That is why the number of North Korean escapees has dropped dramatically recently. It was true in the past as well, but you now put your life on the line trying to escape the North." As I listened to what they said I realized why the number of North Korean escapees, whose numbers had been increasing, had suddenly dropped since the summer of 1999.

Everywhere I went I saw the slogan "a powerful state," but to me the underlying message was "a state empowered to punish"

How surprising to see the type of primitive punishment you might expect to find in deepest, darkest Africa happening right here on the Korean peninsula.

### **The story of 3 POWs**

A few days after arriving I started working on the request I had received from the family in the South to check on the whereabouts of the missing relative. I was told that up until 1980 there were several South Korean POWs from the Korean War still living in the Kogonwon mining village. But apparently they had all been sent to the Juwon mine in Onsung-kun or the Ahoji mine in Eundok-kun in North Hamkyung province. In order to move around North Korea you must have a travel pass for each kun. Even Chinese-Koreans are not allowed to travel to Onsung-kun or Eundok-kun if the travel pass was just for Saebyul-kun.

After making my request in confidence, one day a villager brought over someone from Eundok-kun. I asked if there were any South Korean POWs at the Aohji mine in Eundok-kun and he said he wasn't positive, but he thought there were more than 10. So I asked him if he could put me in touch with someone who would know more about it. He readily agreed to help me meet a Korean POW or at least one of their family members. I pulled out a 100 won North Korean note and handed it to him for his effort. He told me to wait and that he would definitely bring someone. Within two days of making his promise he showed up with an old lady.

She was Cho, an elderly woman of 72 and she introduced herself as living in Haksongri, Eundok-kun. She said her husband's name was Kim. She said he had passed away six years before at 77 years of age and that he had been captured by North Korean soldiers in the area of Haeju in Hwanghae province during the Korean War. He had been from Kyunggi province and his parents

and brothers were there. At around age 30 he married Cho and had a son and daughter in North Korea. Their son was a teacher and their daughter was married. However, Kim was not the person the woman in Yanji was looking for. Cho also talked about Park, a good friend of her husband's. Park was born in Cholla province and had become a POW just like her husband. Park was about 76 years old and he had worked at the Aoji mine with her husband until he retired and moved to Sangnongkyung, Eundok-kun. Cho said she envied Park who had a 34-year-old daughter living in Eundok-kun who made a good living as a welfare guidance officer and kept him alive. She said Park lived near the Haksong People's School. However, he was not the right person either.

### **Cho's Account of the Fate of the POWs**

Cho said that her husband and other POWs who were captured with him worked at the Aoji mine until 1970 when a group of about 20 of them were moved to the Juwon mine in Onsung-kun. She said that most of her husband's friends were at the Juwon mine in Onsung-kun and that last year Chung, one of the POWs had come to Eundok and stopped by her house. According to Chung, there were still about five POWs at the Juwon mine. I felt discouraged. No matter how hard I tried I was having no success in finding the relative of the woman in Yanji. I apologized to Cho for going out of her way and gave her 100 won, telling her to put it towards her living expenses.

While I was wondering whether or not I should sneak into the Juwon mining area in Onsung-kun or try to get someone to do it for me, something completely unexpected happened. The day after the old woman's visit, around lunch time on October 23, three strange men came to the house. They identified themselves as being security agents and they told me they were taking me to the Undok Security Department. I asked them why they were taking me and they told me it was an important matter of state which had to be discussed at their office.

They made my wife come as well. We had no choice but to get into their jeep. As soon as we got in they handcuffed us. When I asked why they were doing this they were stone silent, which upset me.

However, I knew we hadn't done anything wrong and took a stoic approach, believing everything would work out. It was about 200 li from Kogonwon to Eundok-kun, and because the road was so rough it took over three hours to get there. When we arrived at Eundok-kun security bureau headquarters we were taken to a room where an elderly man, the vice-director of the counter-intelligence department was sitting behind a desk. He asked if I had ever made inquiries about Korean POWs. I said I had and he asked my purpose in doing so.

I briefly explained the request I had received in Yanji. He asked my wife about it as well but she knew nothing about the request and there was nothing further to question her about. The vice-director asked me how I knew the woman in Yanji and my relationship to her. I said we were neighbors and that she was an honest lady who with her husband worked hard to make ends meet. At this he pounded his hand on the desk and demanded that I tell the truth. I stood up to him and told him there was nothing more to tell.

At that point he grinned cruelly and told his men to take me away. Two bulky security men put my wife in a security department jail cell and then they took me to a room with no sign on it. The room had chains dangling from the ceiling with wrist clasps, and apart from a heater there were some buckets. There were also about 10 canes hanging on the wall, a desk and a chair, all of which gave it away as a torture room. The door had thick sound-proofing. No sooner did I enter the room than the two men began beating me with the wooden canes.

### **Tell the truth, you are a South Korean spy aren't you?**

I didn't have a chance to get a word in edge-wise. They were beating me everywhere but on my face. It was very painful. I had never been beaten like that before. I kept screaming. My clothes tore apart at the seams. They beat me to a pulp and then made a surprising accusation: "Tell the truth, you're spying for the South aren't you?"

"Spying? I am a Chinese citizen."

"Look, we know you are Chinese. But you are working for the South, aren't you?"

"No, I am not!"

They beat me again until I lost consciousness. I don't recall what happened after that but when I opened my eyes again I was lying alone in solitary confinement. The concrete floor was damp. My whole body shivered from the end-of-October chill. A little later I heard the cell door opening. The same two men came in and dragged me like an animal back to the same chair I had been seated in before. Then the vice-director came in. He offered me one of his Chinese cigarettes and said he wanted me to level with him. With trembling hands I sucked furiously on the cigarette. Then, my voice shaking I said, "You accuse me of being a spy because the North and South are divided, but really I am not. I am not a spy!" The vice-director sneered and said he would send someone to China to investigate my identity. I held my ground, shouting that I was legitimate and that all I had done was to make inquiries on behalf of a separated family.

The vice-director stood up and started kicking me indiscriminately. The two men standing by joined in and hit me with a leather belt. I collapsed on the floor in pain and had no strength to lift my head, no strength to speak. "Tell the truth" What is your assignment?"

"How much were you promised to check on POWs?"

They sounded like mosquitoes buzzing in my ears, as in a dream. "I don't know! I am not a spy!" I repeated it over and over. Even after the extended beating I kept saying the same thing, so they put me back in solitary. A day had passed. The next evening a man brought in two bowls. It was my meal. There were about two spoonfuls of boiled corn in one and salty water in the other. My mouth was so dry I drank a bit, but I left the corn untouched. A little later the man came to get the bowls. He looked at them and jeered, "Ha, not good enough for someone who's used to eating well is it?"

## Two days in a water torture cell

The more I thought about it the more atrocious it seemed. There I was trying to provide food aid and look what had happened! While others were having a good time working hard to make money, there I was in my so-called homeland accused of being a spy. The more I thought about it the more I hated the North Koreans and I started resenting that woman in Yanji. I was worried about my wife's fate, not to mention my own. I regained some assurance remembering that I was a Chinese citizen and that they wouldn't do anything to me if they knew what was good for diplomatic relations.

The next morning when they called me in I asked them a question before they could ask me one.

"Where is my wife? She has done nothing wrong!"

The vice-director smiled coldly and said, "We know. She was released. You are the one with the problem!"

I sighed with relief. They started questioning me again about my assignment. I gave the same answer as before. They were livid. Obviously they wanted to extract a bogus confession from me.

I was beaten and dragged away to a strange cell with a tub full of water. The walls were tiled and there were bars. They put me in the water and locked the bars. It was a water torture cell where I could neither sit nor sleep. I had to stand for two full days completely deprived of sleep. My skin became bloated and my entire body ached.

The first day I gritted my teeth and somehow made it through, but it was excruciating to hold sleep at bay. When I did doze off and lose my footing, I would slip under water and then jerk to my senses again. I even entertained thoughts of suicide, but I didn't want to die under such humiliating circumstances. Besides, there were men guarding me, so death wasn't even an option. The second day my eyes were bloodshot and everything looked blurry. The vice-director and his men stood

outside the bars, continuing to demand to know what my assignment was, but I was not the type to start confessing to something I had not done. After that my knees buckled and I lost consciousness. When I opened my eyes I was rolling around on the cold concrete floor. They had moved me and smeared some kind of sticky ointment on my body. I presumed it was for my bloated skin.

Later, they brought me some boiled corn kernels and salty water again.

I ate the corn, something I had never eaten in my life. It tasted sweet and good. I mindlessly chomped down a few kernels, but then I suddenly made a resolution resolved to begin fasting. I thought they might let me out on sick call if I stopped eating. Three days later they summoned me again and I gave the same answers to the same questions. Then, for some reason, instead of beating me they handed me a piece of paper and asked me to write about my reason for coming to North Korea and everything I had done since arriving. I agreed to do it. I put the paper on a small board they gave me to write on and started writing everything, just as it had transpired, my hands in handcuffs. It took the whole day. I had had nothing to eat and fainted. I later opened my eyes when I felt something going into my mouth and saw my wife feeding me gruel, my head resting on her arm. When I opened my eyes she began sobbing. I smiled as I barely managed to speak: "Everything's alright". After eating the gruel my thinking cleared up and I felt less lethargic. My wife was sent out and did not appear again for several days.

### **A ten thousand yuan fine**

In the meantime I spent my time doing nothing except writing and re-writing my statement at the behest of the security department. After spending exactly a week in jail I was called in to meet with the vice-director. His menacing look suddenly transformed into a smile and then he was apologizing to me. "I am sorry. You see the issue of South Korean POWs is an important matter of state for us. We believe you are not guilty of spying and we're releasing you."



He undid my handcuffs, handed me a piece of paper to read and told me to stamp my fingerprints on it. Reading the typewritten account I saw that my arrest was related to a matter of national security. Then it went on to say that in accordance with the law governing foreigners I would be deported after paying a fine of 10,000 yuan. I protested: "I don't have that much money and I won't pay the fine." Then he told me that my wife had already gone to China to get the money and not to worry about it. He suggested that if we did not conclude the matter amicably, I may have trouble returning to China. It was totally unjust but what could I do. The money was one thing, the indignity of it all was even worse. I wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible. The statement concluded with a declaration that I would never divulge any information about what had happened while at the security department.

I thought they were trying to cover their actions and felt a burning desire to expose them when I returned to China. I glanced over the statement, put red ink on all 10 fingers and pressed each one down as hard as I could. My wife came in a bit later and looked at me with tear-filled eyes. With her help I walked out of the security department, some security people trailing behind. Outside a truck was waiting and they told us they had asked the driver to take us back to the Kogonwon mining village. Then, in a menacing tone, they ordered me to go back to China the very next day.

We ignored what they told us as we pulled out. I cursed them with a bitter resentment that will scar me till the day I die. Then I looked up to the sky and let out a cry of fury.

As we travelled back to the village my wife told me what had finally transpired. She said she had adamantly protested their interrogation from the start. She told them that the elderly Cho had talked to me and not her, and so she knew nothing about what was going on. It seemed the security department had already questioned those involved, ascertained that my wife was not involved and released her because they had nothing to charge her with. After she spent the night and was leaving the next day, a security department person tipped her off, saying, "Don't you have any money or

anything from China? Even rice will do. If you can get it here your husband will be released soon."

My wife picked up on that right away and discussed it with my cousin as soon as she got back to Kogonwon. She took two sacks of rice, two bags of flour, as well as liquor and Chinese cigarettes which they purchased at the market. The next day she presented it to the vice-director. He was so happy that he grinned from ear to ear, saying: "Just wait, your husband's case will come to a good conclusion, but you are going to have to pay a 10,000 yuan fine." My wife pleaded with him, explaining that our restaurant was not doing well in China, but he was adamant.

### **Turned in by the son of the POW**

He said my "spy case" could not be settled without paying the 10,000 yuan fine because the Security Department of North Hamkyung province had been notified. My wife had no choice but to request a border pass with the security department seal and to return to Yanji for the money. When my brothers heard that I had been arrested they notified the Yanji Public Security Bureau and asked them to do what they could. But when the Yanji authorities contacted their North Korean counterparts they were told I had to pay a fine because I had violated the law. All my brothers got for their trouble was hostility. They began to focus on working to collect the money. Of course my wife went to our neighbor who had put me up to all this, advised her of what had happened and demanded compensation. She pitched in 5,000 yuan. When my wife arrived at the Eundok-kun Security Department with money, liquor, cigarettes, and bread in tow, they went crazy over the cigarettes and stuffed them in their pockets. Then I was released.

What I had gone through seemed like a movie plot. My back hurt so much I grimaced in pain. I felt as if I had been through some tremendous, but pointless, ordeal. It was strange how I felt the futility of life but at the same time was relieved to be alive, remembering that as I was being tortured I thought I might never see the light of day again. When I arrived at my cousin's house in Kogonwon, everyone met me with tears. They were feeling responsible for what I had been through. I tried to

reassure them that it was OK and asked what had happened.

My cousin said the incident started when Cho's son notified the Security Department.

When I was taken into custody, my cousin's daughter was furious and went running to Eundok-kun. When she met with Cho, the elderly woman said that she had told her son about my request because she trusted him. Then her son got all worked up, claiming that I could be a South Korean spy and demanding that she go with him to report me. Cho tried to convince her son that I didn't seem like a spy and that he shouldn't get involved in consideration of his father who died without ever returning home. Regardless, Cho's son was afraid of being punished and reported the incident without his mother's knowledge.

Cho said she didn't realize what her son had done until she was called in to the Security Department, slapped on the cheek and investigated.

I was dumbfounded. They were all crazy. Things being as they were, how would South and North ever reconcile and families reunite? It all struck me as hopeless. I poured out my anger on my relatives. "So how is national security at stake when separated families try to find each other? Why would you report someone for trying to find your own relatives?" I shouted at them: "No wonder you are so poverty-stricken. Instead of working hard and studying hard, you go on and on about ideology and rhetoric. No wonder your prospects are so hopeless."

### **Nausea**

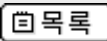
I was so angry I swore I would never set foot in North Korea again until things had changed. There is a saying that you kick your dog when you are down. No matter how much I poured out my feelings on my relatives, I didn't feel any better and later I felt so sorry about what I had said. The next day my wife and I bid my cousin goodbye and returned to China. Looking back at North Korea

I felt nauseous. I wanted to grab them all by the scruff of their collars and bring them to China to show them how well-off China is and tell them to get a life. I wanted to get a loudspeaker and shout: "You should be living like the Chinese do. You will not prosper making ridiculous claims and denouncing each other. Never mind that you are on the same peninsula, there is a world of difference between North and South." I also wanted to expose the pathetic nature of the North Korean state, where ethnic Koreans from another country get charged with spying and North Korean escapees are accused of being traitors in a last-ditch effort to maintain the power of the dictatorship.

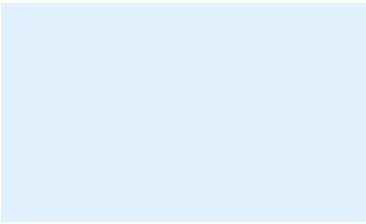
As a Chinese citizen, I was able to flee North Korea, but the people of North Korea are still in chains groaning under a system which champions a repressive, ideologically-strong state. They know nothing of the basic freedoms and rights of human beings. They are caught up in their chains, eating what is given them, working collectively, sleeping collectively, not knowing what to do.

Koreans know who has to loose those chains. It is not only the desire of the North Korean people, but of Koreans everywhere, that the chains be severed and that North Korea join the company of prosperous and civilized nations.

Àì Àü: <a href="#">Dialogue between Richard V. Allen and Lee Dong Bok</a>	° ü ® ÀÚ
˘ ÜÀ½: <a href="#">The Tragic Stories of North Korean Refugees</a>	so

 **목 록**





Á¶¼ÄÏ ° | ÄÖ £Á¶¼ | ½° ÆÛ-Á¶¼ | ÀáöDB | xç Á° È»ö | °³ Âî Á¶¼ ° È£Á¶¼

Copyright (c) 2002 MONTHLY CHOSUN All rights reserved.  
Contact [pubmonth@chosun.com](mailto:pubmonth@chosun.com) for more information.