

**Review: Paul Estabrooks, *Escape From North Korea: A Desperate Quest for Food, Love, and Life*, Open Doors International, Santa Ana, CA, 2006**

Pages: 195

**Maximum Christian Persecution**

A riveting account made so because of the extreme brutality of the socialist North Korean regime. Christians are discriminated, ‘reeducated’ in Juche (North Korean Marxism-Leninism), tortured, shot, and steamrollered. It is yet another blaring warning what atheism-inspired socialism means in the real world, not in Marxist propaganda.

The central character is Pil Soo Kim and his family.

The book testimonials are true, that reading escapee accounts should drive one to prayer for persecuted Christians in North Korea, and what might be done to help them materially.

It also gives inside information on what North Koreans really think of their ‘Great Leader’ Kim Il Sung, and ‘Dear Leader’ Kim Jong-il; liars who have made their country a living hell. Daily life of National Security Agency informers, starvation, and general economic malaise paint a hopeless picture.

The Western mind can hardly fathom how such a political system can exist in 2024, much less why it should lift a finger to help while caught up in a post-truth hedonism lifestyle.

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**Introduction (pp. 7-10)**

On 15/6/1985, North Korea invaded the South to “reunite the Fatherland”, strongly backed by China and Russia.

In May 1997, guards broke the jaws of seven imprisoned Christians in Hambruk, then shot them. In March and July 1998, four Christians were shot.

In December 1999, two Christian ladies were shot in Haesan city.

North Korea's GDP is only six percent of the South.

### **I) Is Food Worth Dying For? (pp. 11-13)**

### **II) Special Food Day (pp. 14-18)**

April 15 is "Sun Day", celebrating Kim Il Sung's birthday celebration. Student dancers practice till midnight days beforehand.

In 1994, everyone had a new uniform with short sleeves which were made in prison factories. Speeches were very long and boring and the people hated them.

### **III) All About Food (pp. 19-24)**

After Kim Il Sung's death in 1994, billboards were posted around: "KIM IL SUNG IS WITH YOU ALWAYS".

None of the "Great Leader's" robust promises of prosperity and plates full of food ever came true. [p19]

Pil Soo Kim's (who changed his name to "Peter" after becoming a Christian) house floor was yellow paper over cement since they couldn't afford vinyl tiles. He was a carpenter being paid fifty won a month (USD6); some days workers didn't show up, and Pil Soo only worked about ten days.

Two of his neighbour's sons had starved to death.

Photos of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il looked down from their prominent place on the largest wall in Pil Soo's home. They were a constant reminder to him of the source of North Korea's food problems. [p21]

Grandma would pick mountainside grass and bark to make soup.

Private business was forbidden in North Korea.

Someone was always informing.

The neighbourhood committee of the Communist Party held a criticism meeting against Pil Soo' capitalistic ventures and penalised him with a stiff fine. He felt they were motivated by jealousy more than ideology. [p23]

#### **IV) My Decision Is Made (pp. 25-28)**

From early childhood, North Koreans are taught their lifestyle is the best on earth. Malnutrition is rampant, so that the minimum height of males to enter the army was lowered from 5'5" to 5'2. Kim Jong-il repeatedly promised jobs, fine homes and happiness were all on the horizon. [p25]

In November, Pil Soo crossed the Tumen River in the north at a place only forty yards wide, when it would be unbearably cold. He could only wear underwear and had to carry clothing overhead so as not to look like a wet river-crosser in China.

Payment to guides were one-third of all food and money Pil Soo would acquire. There was also payment to safe house owners.

Pil Soo: "My decision is made. My decision is made".

#### **V) Unbelievable Food (pp. 29-37)**

Pil Soo was going to entrust his life to two people he had known for just two hours.

After crossing into China, he had a two-hour walk to the safe house.

China employs bounty hunters to catch North Koreans and return them. Bus stations are a favourite place to search.

Religious activities – even conversations – are banned in North Korea; anyone caught faces harsh penalties. [p34]

#### **VI) On Bananas, Oranges and More (pp. 38-47)**

“In North Korea, we eat chicken only at wedding receptions”. [p39]

Ten-years’ military service in mandatory.

North Korean soviet had small dormitories housing over a hundred with sanitary problems; fleas and lice.

“We were supposed to work an average of eight hours a day, but most of the time we worked longer”.

There were many accidents and injuries on rainy days.

“We were *always* hungry”. [p44]

After a full month of hard labour, you could buy only one pound of rice. [p45]

## **VII) Questions (pp. 48-57)**

Pill Soo: “Our government leaders, who have made many promises to the people, promises that have not been kept. As a result, nobody believes them or what they say.” [p50]

North Korean women after marriage become stay-at-home wives and mothers.

Tuberculosis incidence is ~5% of the population.

Most books in North Korea have red or orange covers.

Fortune telling and palm reading is ubiquitous in the country.

## **VIII) Heading Home With Food (pp. 58-64)**

North Koreans do not have soap or shampoo.

Some Chinese pretend to help escapees, but instead enslave them, even sell their blood on the black market.

## **IX) Food for the Family (pp. 65-68)**

In North Korea, “walls have ears”.

### **X) Back Again (pp. 69-77)**

Within six months of his first trip, Pil Soo went back to China.

“When I was in school and in the army, they sort of brainwashed me with socialist ideology . Everybody is fed this nonsense, but in the army it was more intense.” [p70]

From 1996 to 1998, 2M died of starvation. This was traced back to Kim Il Sung over-extending aid to the South after a devastating typhoon.

Kim IL Sung had promised one day everyone would be living in mansions and eating beef soup. [p71]

In the 1980s, an adult ration was 650g of grain per diem. Enthusiastic communists got 600g plus 60 won. However, in the 1990s, rations were cut by a third, and by 1995 by 83%.

Kim Jong-il invested over 90% of GDP in military defense, yet soldiers were starving so they would eat motor oil, also, operate a black food market, steal from farms and even kill civilians. There is great hatred between army and civilians.

Kim Jong-il thought he only needed his army so cared little for the people.

Only childhood officials are allowed to study at Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang, and get to live in choice neighbourhoods.

Juche means “self-reliance” (“be independent, be your own king”).

An estimated 200K Christians are in the six North Korean labour camps. There they are constantly forced to bend over and stare at the ground.

### **XI) More Questions (pp. 78-85)**

Pil Soo’s third trip was a year after the second.

“We’re not permitted to talk about God, who, according to our government doesn’t exist anyway”. [p85]

## **XII) On the Run (pp. 86-90)**

Upon being discovered, Pil Soo refused to report to the NSA, and decided to flee to South Korea, “If we die, we die together. If we make it, we make it together.”

## **XIII) The Open Door (pp. 91-97)**

Pil Soo got captured at the border crossing and was then beaten with a baseball bat stick. He and his wife were to be sent to headquarters prison in Pyongyang to “rebuild ideology through high-intensity labour. This is the demand of the party.” [p94]

They somehow managed to escape through their unlocked cell door.

## **XIV) The Children (pp. 98-107)**

Retrieving their three family members from North Korea was their top priority.

## **XV) Food That Endures (pp. 108-115)**

Far Eastern Broadcasting Corporation (FEBC) has been broadcasted on the AM into North Korea from Jeju Island since 1973.

## **XVI) Hiding (pp. 116-122)**

## **XVII) Guides and Divine Guidance (pp. 123-129)**

Unsuspecting North Korean escapees were sometimes sold as slaves to poppy farmers in the golden triangle region between Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Burma and China.

Pil Soo’s family spent a night in the Laotian jungle. He crossed the Thai border and reached a safe house in Bangkok.

### **XVIII) Up, Up and Away (pp. 130-136)**

Pil Soo's journey continued to Cambodia and Phnom Penh, where one safe house had twenty-eight North Koreans (Cambodia has an extradition treaty with North Korea).

Sixty percent of North Korean refugees receive Christian aid.

Since they have been told all their lives Christianity is evil, many find it impossible to think otherwise. What North Koreans want more than anything else is freedom. [p132]

### **XIX) Life in Freedom (pp. 137-141)**

After reaching Seoul, Pil Soo was interrogated by officials who wanted most of all to know whether he was a North Korean spy.

North Koreans are automatically considered South Korean citizens, and upon arrival are given government housing for one year, after which they must find a way to survive.

Pil Soo, "I'd rather live in North Korea as a Christian than live here in South Korea as a godless millionaire." [p141]

### **XX) Today, Tomorrow, and Beyond (pp. 142-145)**

#### **Conclusion: Action Steps (pp. 146-153)**

Reported number of deaths from starvation since 1995 range from 1-5M.

China labels North Korean refugees as illegal economic migrants.