

대리주방

GROWING UP IN NORTH KOREA

In the U.S. you have a choice of whether or not to serve in the military, but in North Korea there is no choice. The military grants your citizenship. When you are born, you get a birth certificate; when you go into the army, you become a citizen. They require 10 years of service for men. By the time you finish, you are 30 years old. You just have to marry someone right away; there's not much time for anything else. Ten years for each citizen is a waste of life; it means that North Koreans aren't allowed to dream. Wealthy kids can pay for a higher or easier position in the military, and it's possible for parents to pay to have their son avoid service completely. When I received an enlistment statement from the police, I left the country three days later. So I was never a citizen of North Korea. I'm a citizen of nowhere. ● One of my earliest childhood memories is playing hide and seek or jump rope with my friends in my apartment complex. We played a kind of Korean hopscotch called Mangchagi where you hop on one foot and kick a stone at the same time. In North Korea, there aren't many places like karaoke cafes or coffee shops to hang out, so people play at home. My father's friends used to come to my house and play poker. Everyone would bring something to eat. Someone would bring noodles, someone would bring pumpkin or tofu and they would boil it in one pot and eat it together. My father's friends would sing, let the children sing and tap the table with chopsticks. The songs were mostly about Kim Il Sung, saying that he would never stop working on the revolution, that we would guard the happiness he brought forever. These were lyrics that everyone believed in wholeheartedly. We cried when we sang because we believed in it. ● When we were growing up, my mother would give my father the best food we had, and she would prepare flower bouquets for us kids. She would tell me, "I can only serve you these simple foods, but this is not how I feel." Then she would hand me fresh picked flowers from the field and say, "This is how I feel." ● I made the decision to leave North Korea because of a book that I read as a teenager. It was a philosophy book describing the metaphor of Plato's cave. The book described the shadows reflected on the wall of the cave, and this seemed to me a reflection of North Korean society. North Koreans are educated with only the knowledge that the North Korean government allows; so they think that North Korea is the most beautiful country in the world. Many people, including me, were forced to believe that this shadow was all there is to reality. But the North Korean government constructs this shadow for us.

DATING

In North Korean society, dating is considered a morally bad thing. I was very pro-government, and I took the rules kind of seriously so dating was something I never did. When I would catch a boy and girl acting suspicious, I would spit at them to let them know that they weren't supposed to be together like that. I kind of regret it now. When I returned to North Korea in 2004 to get my mother and siblings out, there were a lot of young couples holding hands and wearing make up. But it was only in the evening, not in the daytime. ● A businessman from China once stayed with my family when he came to negotiate trade with North Korea. He was 26 years old. He wanted to get close to my father who, as a government news broadcaster and spy, could help him secure his business. I believe he paid my father black money. Since I worked for my father, I had to stay with this man all the time to keep an eye on him. Today, when he describes his first experience in our house, he says we had a different lifestyle than other North Korean families he had visited. For example, other families' white socks had turned black with use and dirt—ours remained white. And other families' food was inedible, made from mountain grass or something, but our family ate well. Because our family had four daughters and no sons, he became like a son. And he fell in love with me. He says that it was love at first sight. He eventually had to return to China but would regularly send men to my family to try to convince me to come to China. And one day without any plan, I just decided to go with him. ● I'll tell you the very private story of my first love. There is a culture in North Korea called "hunting." If you find someone you're interested in, you'd just follow her or wait for her in front of her house. When you get the chance to talk to this woman, you ask her for a date directly. North Korean society is somewhat conservative, and many people believe they have to keep their purity until marriage. Because of this idea, I didn't have any physical relationship with my first girlfriend for a year. She actually got mad at me for this. She even asked me whether or not I was a man. ● When I came to South Korea, the culture of dating was different. I found out that South Koreans are more free to express their affection in public places. Couples go to see movies, go to dinner and just walk around. So I started out by following that pattern, but I found it kind of boring and didn't get the point of it. I realized dating should not only be about spending time together but should also aim for some larger purpose. When I starting dating my current wife, we spent productive time together by reading books, going to the mountain, studying and having discussions about what we were studying. We had something in common because she was also from North Korea, and she went through similar experiences. She could understand me better than anybody else.

REUNIFICATION

Korean reunification is in the hands of the North Korean people, not its leaders. When Kim Il-sung died, my generation expected that this would trigger some kind of change. But that didn't happen. Kim Jong-il was, in fact, much more of a dictator than his father was, and things got much worse. I hear that, today, with Kim Jong-un, things are much better economically. I'm also hoping that this new regime will somehow bring some changes. I think that the whole North Korean regime will have to change in order to be reunified with South Korea. It has to collapse from the inside. ● I think that reunification is difficult because all the high officers in North Korea have much more wealth and power than those in South Korea. They will not be willing to just give this up. Of course, the Kim family will also not want to let go of their power. I just don't think it is possible. ● Only North and South Koreans have the power to bring reunification. We have to do it by ourselves. I think Americans may be able to act as a third-party moderators but only if they act as advisors. America should not dictate these decisions or our policy. When Germany was reunified, it was very surprising. It wasn't on the news in North Korea, but the professors knew. Everyone was secretly talking about it in the university saying, "Germany is now one. There is no divide." German reunification can be a model for us. ● Of course I agree with reunification, but I think we need a lot of preparation beforehand. Otherwise, reunification will have more of a negative effect than a positive one because both North and South Korea are very immature. In South Korea for example, I see too many ideological struggles. There is a story about a North Korean defector who became a government officer in Seoul. The media portrayed him as a spy, and the South Korean people reacted in a very extreme way. They said, "Send him back to North Korea! He is a Communist," and so on. These kinds of extreme and immature responses disappointed me. These opinions make it difficult for North Korean defectors to be accepted into South Korea society. I also wanted reunification when I was in North Korea. The problem is South Koreans often determine the value of others by what they own or which school they go to. It's very capitalist. If we achieved reunification, North Koreans would have a lower status in society, creating a new class conflict. ● A lot of North Koreans think that Korea is still divided because of the U.S. forces stationed in South Korea. I think it's better if America is not involved in the reunification. I kindly say that America is a very nice country, and you guys are very nice people. But I don't understand why the American army is in South Korea. I was very shocked to hear this. Some people told me that if the Americans were not here, we would be at war again with North Korea. I think that reunification is impossible. I don't think that it will happen.

CONFLICT KITCHEN

Conflict Kitchen is a take-out restaurant that only serves cuisine from countries with which the United States is in conflict. Our current version focuses on the food, culture and politics of North Korea. The restaurant rotates identities in response to current geopolitical events.

The text on this wrapper is taken directly from interviews we conducted with North Korean defectors. Each section highlights perspectives of multiple people.

www.conflict-kitchen.org

FOOD

Everything in North Korea is organic because we don't use pesticides. We mostly eat chicken and pork. There's no beef—maybe a little bit of seafood, but it's very expensive. North Korean noodles, called manyoung, are made from potatoes and are very chewy. It was not something my mom would make at home because it was so expensive. Overall, the food tastes much better than South Korean food because there is less MSG. And the toppings are prettier. ● We grow a lot of beans in North Korea and everyone makes their own tofu at home. North Korean tofu has more flavor and is softer than South Korean tofu. In the South, they just use salt water, but we put the soup broth in kimchi or we let the stock sit for one day to get more flavor. We would use this tofu for a simple snack called dubu bap (tofu pockets stuffed with rice) that we'd eat at picnics. ● When I think of my childhood in North Korea, I have so many good memories about food. I grew up in a rural area surrounded by mountains. There are a lot of different kinds of leaves and grasses growing there and lots of recipes for cooking them. My mother used to make lots of different kinds of salads and other grass-based foods. I was always healthy and happy. Now, living in the urban area of Seoul, I get ill quite often. I think the modernized food isn't very good for my health, and I often think of the food my mom cooked for me. I never realized how precious it was. ● One of the most memorable foods is a kind of dumpling called hundoon, a dish native to China. It's a small dumpling, and you make it in the shape of a butterfly. My mother made it quite often, especially for holidays. She also made it as a soup. Another memorable food was a frozen radish. People would often throw it away, but my mother could cook with it. She was a kind of magician in the kitchen, using frozen radish in white kimchi or other dishes. ● In North Korea, I had to be a vegetarian because there was no meat at all. Usually I ate corn, sometimes rice and mostly vegetables. Many North Koreans suffer from imbalanced nutrition because it's hard to get fat or protein from food. That's why you see photographs of North Korean children who are very thin with "bulky stone necks." It is a symptom of starvation. When I came to South Korea, there was so much food to eat. But I had limited cooking skills and found that much of the restaurant food wasn't satisfying. ● I lived in Pyongyang for six months, and all the city officers really liked to eat nokdu jeon (mung bean pancakes). They are especially popular because they are considered a healthy food. They are supposed to be very good for your body. In the countryside, they would eat sorghum pancakes instead of mung bean pancakes. My mother used a lot of sorghum for cooking, and sometimes she would make fifteen different kinds of sorghum pancakes topped with apples or pears. For holidays, she would make them into flower shapes. ● We used to make a thing called tadpole noodles. We'd make a paste from corn and pour it over a net. It would drop into cold water, like German spaetzle. We would eat the "tadpole" pieces with soy sauce. ● The dumplings in North Korea vary because the stuffing is different from region to region. And every household has their own special recipe. We only eat meat two or three times a year. If you have a lot of kimchi or radish left, you can use those for the stuffing. For the holidays, we use meat with basic ingredients like garlic, carrots, onions and spring onions.

DEFECTING

I first left North Korea in 1998, when the famine was at its most extreme. My first plan was just to go to China for a month to work and feed my family. The thing is, North Koreans treat people differently when they leave and come back. It's not that they treat you like a traitor, but rather they worry you are a spy. I was scared to return to this, so I stayed in China longer than expected. After six years, I started dreaming of my family. In my dreams, I was visited by a friend of my mother's who passed away long ago. She said to me, "Don't you miss your family? How can you betray them like this?" So I decided to risk my life and return to North Korea myself instead of paying a broker to do it for me. I gave my family some money, my Chinese address, and one-by-one, I brought them out of North Korea. ● My grandfather was born in 1930 and was the oldest of eight brothers. He was from the northernmost part of North Korea. He and his younger brother decided to leave North Korea during the Korean war in 1951. He left his other brothers and his mother and father behind because it was too dangerous to bring them along. He traveled south until he met up with the U.S. army. The U.S. army thought they were communist soldiers because he and his brother were very healthy guys. So they were put in prison. My grandfather could speak English because he had been a teacher, so he kept saying "I am not a communist. I want to be free." He and his brother were the only two people freed from that prison. When he got out of North Korea, he kept going to the southernmost part of South Korea. He became a policeman there and met my grandmother. And the funny thing is that a guy from the very north fell in love with a girl from the very south. ● In 1996, the situation in North Korea was getting worse. There was no food that came from the government, and there was even less medicine. My husband had some health problems with his liver and really needed medical care, but the government couldn't provide that. We crossed the border into China to get medical treatment. I thought it would take a couple weeks to cure his illness, but it took two months. After that we were too scared to go back. In China, it was also very difficult to live because there were always raids and searches to deport North Koreans. So we had to flee to South Korea. ● My father had the opportunity to meet all kinds of foreigners, and he would say things like, "There's a whole different world out there. This is not everything, you know." I always wanted to know what it would be like to live in this other world. It's hard to make a clear distinction between escaping and defecting. You have to remember that nobody wants to abandon their hometown. I went to China even though I knew it would harm my family if the state found out. My mother made up a story that we were traveling in a different region for a while. After months, when I didn't return, my mother made up another story that I had died. There had been a really big bus accident with many casualties, and they claimed that I was on the bus when it drove off the mountain. They had a fake funeral for me.

MAKING A LIFE IN SOUTH KOREA

When I first came to South Korea, I worked as a housekeeper in a very rich area of Seoul. At first I thought I should be careful and not tell people who I was. So I told them I was a Chinese-Korean. I'd never used refrigerators, washing machines or microwaves, but I had to use all this stuff to manage the housekeeping. The owner of the house said that there was no Chinese-Korean who didn't know how to use these kinds of machines and eventually, I got kicked out. I never expected that I couldn't even do these kinds of jobs in South Korea because of our cultural differences. ● Even though I've defected to South Korea, I can send money back to North Korea through brokers. We wanted to bring our children, too. We actually got them to China through a broker. But they refused to come to South Korea and returned to the North. They were educated according to the North Korean philosophy, and they were willing to follow it. So, my kids stayed in North Korea. We sometimes also talk using a phone near the Chinese border. They are doing fine. My son is a trumpet player in the army orchestra. I think my daughter is a housewife now. We sent a lot of wedding presents, and they recently had a child. I just received news that I am a grandmother! Clearly, I miss all of those things. But there's more to being a parent than just being with them physically. I always care for my daughter no matter where I am. But, of course, I want to see my grandchild. For him, I want reunification. I want him to have the freedom to do what he wants. ● In my experience, South Koreans are hostile to refugees. There are different dialects between North and South Koreans, and when I first went to university, I couldn't make friends. I really wanted to hide my accent, so I tried to not speak a lot and instead used a lot of gestures, like talking with my eyes and smiling. There is also a lot of competition between refugees due to limited funding sources. ● When I first came to South Korea, I just wanted to spend my career earning a lot of money and becoming rich because I had been so poor before. Then one day my friend said to me, "We can't deny who we are. We are North Korean defectors, and we have certain things that we have to do for our children and for the other people like us." Now I'm trying to figure out how I can both earn money to live and also to help these people.