

Refugees: the sad case of Kan-Su and Young-Hee

Hiding underground

In the mountains of late 1990's northeastern China, about an hour's walk into the forest, a family hides under the earth. This North Korean family, the Kims, are hiding from the police, knowing that to be caught and sent back south will mean being labeled as traitors, or being tortured or even being executed.

Kim Kan-su, his wife Kim Young-Hee, and 5-year-old son Kim Young-Shin, strangely small for his age, are branded by two governments as criminals. North Korea and China designate them as law-breakers and are bound to punish them if they can catch them.

What is their crime, you ask? What have they stolen? Nothing. Whom have they murdered? Oh, no one. Kan-Su and Young-Hee are hungry. In response to their hunger they leave famine-stricken North Korea and walk into relatively prosperous China looking for food.

That's it.

For this they must become refugees, outlaws, fugitives moving from holes in the ground, to caves in the sides of mountains, to other outdoor homes. At least, they're not so hungry anymore. They have rice, which can be in short supply even for well-off families in their home country.

The Chinese police will receive a handsome bonus if they capture these pitiful Korean citizens and return them to Kim's paradise on the other side of the Euphrates (the Tumen to us). So the family hides.

Dad says, "Everything else is fine, except for the fear and distress." A pretty big exception.

At least *some* normalcy

What do you do in a forest to have a normal family life? Can westerners who live in a world of comfort and ease even begin to understand the ordeal of the Kims?

Can a dad be a good dad living in a hole in the ground? Yes. Kan-su teaches his 5-year-old all about animals, shows him how to set traps, catch rabbits, and birds. He takes some of his trapped animals and trades them for rice and veggies, always under cover of course.

Dad is even able to find work at a tobacco farm, just an hour away on foot. It's illegal employment, so the employer can abuse his employee, and he does. He pays him only a little rice for his work.

How is Mom doing? Most moms' lives revolve around their children and Young-Hee is no different. When the family first comes to China, she is a mother of three and is expecting their 4th child.

The children must go

But it is too much. They cannot feed this many. They cannot educate this many. The children must go. Moms present here might cry out, I would have found a way! But none of us can second-guess a North Korean. None of us can sit in judgment on people who have suffered this much until we have suffered the same. And after that much suffering I have to believe there is no desire to sit in judgment.

When the baby is born, they give him away to a childless Chinese family. Then the two girls. They are given to an orphanage. And one of the final scenes of the video from which I extracted this story, a year 2000 documentary known as "Shadows and Whispers", is of a scared little boy, little Young-Shin, screaming at the top of his little lungs for Mom and Dad not to go away as they push him into a waiting automobile.

And they do go away. And the car with the wailing child in it drives off without Mom and Dad.

How can it be?

Something in me dies when I recollect that picture. I died a little like that in Haiti when I saw a skin and bones child and was told he had no idea where his next meal would be. It happened in Romania when I prayed for a little blind girl, whose parents lived in a mud hut. She has since passed from this life.

But Young-Shin takes me to new depths of pain. I cannot comprehend a situation in which hunger divides families. I cannot comprehend a government that starves its people, then punishes them for looking for food. I cannot comprehend it. I suppose that if I ever went to North Korea I'd be in trouble with the government my first day.

My heart cries out, Oh God! Arise! and end this North Korean nightmare!

Is any sorrow like the sorrow of a bereaved parent or an abandoned child? Makes us appreciate all the more what our Heavenly Father did for us when He freely gave away His Son to be exiled, to be a refugee, a fugitive criminal, tortured and executed. "In this the love of God was manifested to us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world... In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son." (I John 4:9-10)

Refugees abound

The Kim story is true but is not in any way unique. The International Rescue Committee reports that up to 60,000 North Koreans, fugitives from Kim's justice, are in China as we speak. Sometimes you hear numbers into the 6-figure range. No one knows for sure. What we do know is that China refuses to help these victims of Kim's rule because it is assumed that most of them come for food, not political refuge from a mad dictator. They are "food migrants" to the Chinese government.

But it is the mad dictator's policy of feeding the military and the elite around Pyongyang and letting the rest of the country make it on its own, that has led these people to be hungry. And it is common knowledge that being sent back to North Korea can mean death. So China's blind protective love of North Korea is simply sending many to the grave or to a life of despair.

In all fairness, the report is that, number one, the famine is not as severe now, and number two, there has been some alleviation of the punishment for leaving the country. But malnutrition is still very widespread and not worthy of any punishment at all.

Would North Koreans leave their land if food were not an issue? That's a loaded question that politicians in the concerned countries like to ask, and the answer is a tragic one. The answer is no, for the most part. But if you had been taught from the cradle that the Kims are to be worshiped and followed at all costs; that neighboring countries, even those providing multiple tons of aid to you are all evil; that your land is a paradise even though it's going through some rough times now... what would you do?

Let no one believe that the people of North Korea love their leader and stay in their land because of his merits or because they love the mountains of their homeland. They are there because they are lied to. When the truth about him and all his lies is brought to the light, there will be an even greater refugee problem. And I wonder how long China will be able to defend the indefensible?

Our job is to keep praying that light will penetrate the darkness. Kim has thrown a virtual tarp over the country. Not much light gets in, not yet. Rumors are, though, that there are cuts in the tarp. Glimmers of light are seeping through. People are waking up from their drugged sleep. What a glorious day is coming when the bright Sunshine of God's Word floods North Korea. There's a Sunshine Policy we can all live with!

The Kims today

So whatever happened to Kim Young-Shin, the little boy with the fugitive parents? I wanted to know, so I wrote the author of the story, the

Korean lady who had done the original interview. Her response was not all that comforting...

Eight months after the painful tearing away, Young-shin is re-united with his parents. I'd like to think it is a gloriously happy event, this reunification. But the video shows the Kims visiting their girls, the ones they gave away, in the orphanage. And that reunion is definitely not a glad one. Children don't always know what it means when a parent abandons them.

So, happily ever after now? Not quite. While the family is hiding out in a small farming town in China, someone sees them and reports them to the police. They are sent back to North Korea.

The email reads here: "Fortunately they are together (all?) today though they went through a lot to get to this point." I can only imagine what she means by that. She tells me that she simply cannot release all the details... But we've already discussed what happens when North Koreans are returned to their prison-land. What did they have to go through to be "re-educated"?

Last report is that they are living in a small town in North Korea, barely making a living, but somehow there is enough to keep the family together.

Why don't we go to North Korea in the Spirit right now, and pray for this family.

Visit <http://chosunhouse.com> for more stories from North Korea.
For a transcript of the original video,
or to purchase the video "Shadows and Whispers" (Oct 2000),
Go to <http://www.journeyman.tv> .