대립주방
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 are 30, you’ve either earned your citizenship or you’re about to be sent down to prison. We didn’t have that luxury. We had to take our chances in Chongnyon. By the time we were 18, there wasn’t 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, for fear of being arrested, and I was never allowed to return. So I was a citizen of nowhere. I was 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 would say things like, “This is how I feel.” Then she would hand me fresh picked flowers from the field and say, “Let’s spend the day 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 was a lot of red tape and even couples holding hands and wearing make up. It was only in the evening, not in the daytime. I was a businessman from China once stayed with my family when he came to negotiate trade with North Korea. He was 25 years old. He wanted to get closer to my father who, as a government news broadcaster and spy, could help him secure his business. I believe he paid my father a lot of money. Since I was a kid, I wanted my father for myself, not for my family. I had to make sure that my father would not lose face in front of my friends. We fleshed out 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.

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 am 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 will have to collapse from the inside. I think that reunification is difficult because all the high officers in North Korea have too much 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 mediators but only if they act as advisors. America should not dictate these decisions in 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 Korean society. I also wanted reunification when I was in North Korea. The problem is South Korea often determine the value of others by what they own or which school they went 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.conflictkitchen.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 manyong, 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 (taco 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. I learned to play the trumpet in the army orchestra. I think my daughter is a housewife by now. I ate a lot of dumplings, and they were even better when made by my mother at home. She made them with all kinds of ingredients, such as garlic, carrots, onions and spring onions.