

## My Story and Our Treasure - A North Korean Christian Refugee's Story

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Chanyang YU is a young mother and devout Christian living in Seoul. With her family she escaped from North Korea. Most refugees that I met were motivated by hunger to cross the river into China and South Korea. Chanyang was a little different. She dreamed of being free. Based on media reports she longed for the freedom to worship God and live her life in freedom. She also determined to help others. This is her story given in a speech. I was honored moved to help her as a coach.



Everyone, please raise your right hand. Within your right hand, you hold a treasure. Do you know what that treasure is? It is the key for unlocking the prison door. That key is freedom! This key will tell the truth!

The Dutch poet and human rights activist Job Degenaar once said, "The doors to prison must be open from the outside."

Hello. My name is Chanyang JU. I was born in Chongjin North Hamgyong province

When I was born, the Soviet Union had collapsed after spending many years supporting North Korea's communist government. Three years later, Kim Il Sung died as well. The public distribution of rice, which my parents' generation had relied on, also collapsed, and many people starved to death. In that year, my grandfather told us to move to the

countryside.

So my parents and I moved to a rural town near the Chinese border. My mother then gave birth to my sister and my brother.

We survived in the countryside, doing agricultural work and doing private business. Since the mid-1990s, our parents' generation began to work in the market despite government regulations. People began trading all sorts of goods and formed small markets. These markets, created by our parents' generation, are now everywhere and are leading the changes within North Korea. I am from this generation that has always relied on the markets. In short we are the "Marketplace Generation." Today, they have a saying in North Korea: 'You won't survive by relying on the Workers' Party of Korea, but you will survive by relying on the markets or black markets!'

One day, my father brought a radio on the black market. We hid our radio and began listening to it illegally. I was nine years old then. The voice of the South Korean anchor from KBS was so different and her wicked voice melted my heart. You all know what a North Korean anchor sounds like, right? 'Our Glorious Leader Kim Jong-il blah blah blah...' But the South Korean anchor is like... "Reporting from Seoul, South Korea. KBS." It's so much more wicked.

In any case, our entire family illegally listened to foreign radio, such as the Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, and FEBC Christian channel. Our family realized that the Kim dictatorship had lied to us our entire lives.

I also watched Korean TV dramas like 'Winter Sonata,' 'Dae Jang Geum,' and 'Boys Over Flowers,' and American movies like 'James Bond' and 'Charlie's Angels.' You have no idea how much I loved them. I also began imitating South Korean accents with my friends. I wanted to put on fancy makeup like the women in South Korea. So I even bought smuggled South Korean makeup products from the markets.

Listening to the radio our five-member family began to plan our escape from North Korea. Despite many challenges, my father successfully escaped in 2007. My mother and my two siblings followed. With the generous help of South Korean missionaries, they all made it safely to South Korea.

As for me, I stayed behind. As the oldest daughter and a member of the Marketplace Generation, I could survive on my own, so I was tasked with looking after our house. But I was deeply worried about my family, and I constantly prayed for their safety.

Then, three years later, I crossed the Tumen river and escaped from North Korea. North Korean soldiers actually helped me when I crossed over to China. Why? Because I had bribed them. Under Kim Jong-un's orders, they were supposed to shoot me. But they helped me instead because of the bribe I paid them. They too had starving family members to feed.

Then I stayed at a broker's house in China. There, I was able to freely speak to my family on the phone. I looked forward to the day I would join my family in Seoul. But then, the Chinese police showed up. I was arrested and sent to a Chinese prison where we faced the threat of forced repatriation to North Korea. Seven days later, a car came to take us back to North Korea. But then, the driver asked me, "Do you know where you are going?" I replied, "Are we not being sent back to North Korea?" But the driver said, "I'm your father's hometown friend. You are going to Seoul to meet with your family."

It was a miracle!

I later found out that my family had reached out to international organizations, missionary groups, and churches for help. They were able to raise enough money to bribe the Chinese police, miraculously saving me.

I don't think I was lucky. Rather, it was thanks to the support and prayers of other people that I was saved from a certain death. It is that sense of gratitude that led me to stand before you today to share my story.

Although I had to spend many more dangerous months traveling through Laos to Thailand, I remained grateful. Grateful toward people who are saving others, helping other people. I looked up to them, and I also began to dream of following their footsteps.

So now, I am engaging in various activities. First, based on my own life-changing experience through the media, I decided to major in media studies at Korea University. At the same time, I felt the need to immediately send outside information into North Korea. So I set up an organization which sends outside information into North Korea by land, by sea, and by air. I also help rescue North Korean refugees. Thankfully, I met so many good people here in South Korea. Thanks to these precious people, I was able to adapt well with so much energy.

One of them is TNKR's Director KC. He is the first American I exchanged phone numbers with after coming to South Korea. Even though he was our worst enemy back in North Korea, I thought KC's heart for helping others was so beautiful. He was like an angel. So I called him a Pretty Flower Man. That would make Director Eunkoo a Pretty Flower Woman, right?

Finally, thank you, everyone, for listening to my story. Because you have chosen to stand with me, I can stand here today. But even now, my relatives, friends, and neighbors in North Korea remain cut off from the outside world, their lives fully controlled by the state. We must send in outside information, maintain our focus on the people, and stand with the people of North Korea. We must help those who had their human rights stolen, not the thieves who took those human rights away.

Together, we shall open the doors to this huge prison called North Korea, bringing freedom to its 24 million souls.

Thank you for listening and thank you to Shin and Kim Law Firm for hosting this event.