

Father's Life in His Own Words - Part 44

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December 2, 1950, Pyongyang residents prepare for evacuation a day after planes bombed the city's airfield. UN Forces hoped to prevent an exodus. Many left before Father did.

Taking the Refugee Trail to Begin Anew

Immediately after getting out of the Hungnam labor camp, Father had travelled to Pyongyang to look for any remaining followers after his almost 3-year absence. He invested himself for many weeks, but then he reluctantly decided he must move on, and go south where there might be the opportunity to make a new start even though his country was still embroiled in the terrible civil war, that ironically had rescued him from the death camp. Now that he had survived almost certain death in prison, Father was determined that he would succeed in his mission.

I left the city of Pyongyang only after all other refugees had gone. Also, I took with me a crippled person, physically impaired by a broken leg.^[1] I put him on a bicycle and pulled it all the way to the south. We started on our way as the North Korean and the Chinese troops were approaching; they were just twelve kilometers behind us. Even amid this life-or-death danger, I can stand tall in front of God. I have never betrayed a promise to Him.

I left North Korea in the winter of 1950. By January of 1951, I had travelled all the way down to Busan on the south coast. I was wearing odd clothes when I left the north. I had on an overcoat that was part of a middle-school uniform. It had buttons all the way down the front. You don't have the luxury of choosing what to wear when you're a refugee. I wish my arms had been shorter. It was frigid, and I had to pull my arms into the sleeves to stay warm. I must have looked really smart in that outfit. Everybody stared at me when I walked down the street. In a situation like that, I always thought that though other people might complain about their fate and bear a grudge toward God amid all of this suffering, I would not be like that.

From Pyongyang to Cheongdan

The Chinese Red Army was approaching from behind. When the three of us started out, we soon realized that long lines of trucks loaded with soldiers and military equipment were clogging all roads leading south. Since the disabled man was bigger than I was, I could not imagine carrying him on my back. I decided to put him on a bicycle and transport him that way. It was an extremely hard job. Under the circumstances, with our way forward blocked, death seemed imminent, but I could not afford to die. I was prepared to die, though. I was determined to become the most miserable refugee during that time. If God were to give His blessing to the most miserable Korean in the midst of all of the suffering that had befallen our country, He would have no choice but to give it to me. I felt that kind of determination on the way from North Korea.



Since all the main roads were blocked by the retreating troops and military equipment, civilians had no other option but to travel by narrow paths or across barren rice fields. Words cannot express how hard this journey was. At some point, Chung Hwa Pak [also spelled Jeong-hwa Park] said to me, "I love you but if we continue like this, we will all die." He tried to commit suicide but I caught him just in time and chastised him. We continued walking, taking shortcuts through forests and down obscure mountain paths known only to local villagers. Like this, we were able to make headway. God was watching over us and guiding our steps all the way.

Refugee cuisine

I could tell many stories from that period. The biggest problem throughout our journey was finding food. Since we could not afford to carry any baggage or supplies with us, we could either starve or steal. So, we would go into abandoned houses and look for food. In fact, if we hadn't, the Chinese soldiers would have emptied those houses of supplies anyway.



A woeful, uprooted child in frigid temperatures

We would go into houses in the early evening. Going from house to house in search of food, we'd usually find something. I told the others to take only the first food they came across. If we were to pick and choose, then we would be really become thieves. And if heaven and earth could see what we were doing, they should be able to look at us with sympathy, as if to say those rascals steal other people's rice, but there is something different about them.

I told the other men to bring out whatever they first discovered in the rice jar^[2] - be it hulled millet or corn. I would not allow them to exchange it for anything else found afterward. They would enter a house and chant "rice jar, rice jar" as they looked for food.

Whenever we cooked, we would always prepare as much food as we could. The problem was that we had only one enamel cooking dish. Could refugees travel with cooking equipment banging and rattling along the way? Since we could always break tree twigs to use as

chopsticks, the only thing we needed to carry with us was one enamel dish. So, when the three of us would sit around this small dish filled with rice, I would think about the value of hardships in my life. Under those circumstances, we could eat anything with great pleasure. Hardships teach us to long for and

appreciate even simple things.... With our stomachs growling, we longed for humble food as if it were a delicious treat. A rice-cake made of rough barley would taste better than exquisite cuisine from a royal dinner table. Could someone in our situation be fussy?

Warm reception after receiving a revelation

Sometimes, my yearning for food was indescribable. It was part of our wandering life at that time. Nevertheless, I never prayed, "Heavenly Father, I don't have anything to eat today, so please provide me with something." Instead, I used to comfort Him until I fell asleep.

Sometimes I would think, Tomorrow a beautiful woman will definitely give us something on the roadside, and the next day a woman dressed in white would be standing on the roadside waiting for us, just as I'd anticipated. She would say, "Yesterday I was told to prepare everything and wait. I've been waiting for you. Please have something to eat." This kind of thing happened on many occasions.

If you could only feel my heart at the time, you could not help crying. The same is true for God. No one on earth knows the sorrow God and I shared as we held each other and wept. The depth of my feelings for God cannot be measured. When I recall it, I feel as if all the cells in my body are aching.

Mastering the desire to eat

Even today, my philosophy is to start eating after everyone else and to put down my chopsticks first. I'm always the last to pick them up and the first to put them down. Also, when there are different things to eat, I always start with the least delicious food. I acquired this habit during my refugee life. For the sake of my hungry followers, I would always stop eating first even though I would still be hungry.

When the three of us were escaping from the north, we would become equally hungry and crave food, especially when we had food in front of us. We were all equally hungry. I would hear the other two men would determine, "Even though our teacher always finishes eating first, I should try, at least once, to put my chopsticks down first," but once they started to eat, they could never beat me. Who can put down his chopsticks while the rice bowl has still food in it? Such person naturally assumes the leadership position in the group. The one who can put down the chopsticks first is the master.

Six kilometers on the tidal flats

When I got out of the prison in North Korea and headed for the thirty-eighth parallel, my thoughts were that I needed to get across the thirty-eighth parallel without fail. Based on this state of affairs, I had been consulting my intuition and had realized that the situation was rather unfavorable. In my heart I wanted to cross the border and go south.

We walked out to Yongmae Island on the tidal flats and were the first ones to get on a boat moored there, but a crowd came and there was a ruckus. What happened was that those who were not the relatives of those soldiers or policemen were all taken off.

All the military were in retreat;^[3] how then, could ordinary people have been permitted on the boat? So, because there was no boat for us, we had to go back to the mainland. We went back and went south across the thirty-eighth parallel.

While we were crossing tidal flats to Yongmae Island, I thought to myself that if I could not make it Heaven would perish. You should love with the thought in your head that "If I fall by the wayside, where will that leave Heavenly Father?"

Where, then, could you not go?

[1] Chung Hwa Pak, who had been a prison trustee in the Hungnam labor camp, who had come to understand Father's mission

[2] This probably refers to a ceramic storage jar, which might hold several kilograms of rice.

[3] Fearing that the allied forces would reach the Chinese border and even beyond, in the later part of 1950 Chairman Mao Tse-tung sent tens of thousands of Chinese troops to enter the war, and the tide had turned against the allies once again.