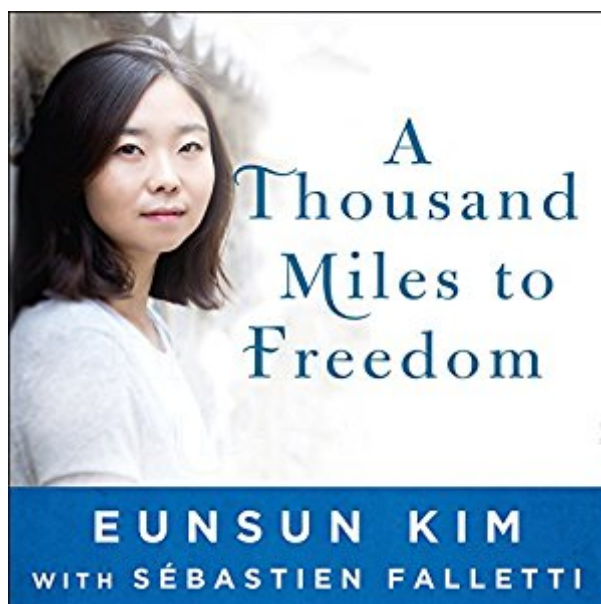


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A Thousand Miles To Freedom: My Escape From North Korea



Synopsis

Eunsun Kim was born in North Korea, one of the most secretive and oppressive countries in the modern world. As a child, Eunsun loved her country...despite her school field trips to public executions, daily self-criticism sessions, and the increasing gnaw of hunger as the countrywide famine escalated. By the time she was 11 years old, Eunsun's father and grandparents had died of starvation, and Eunsun too was in danger of starving. Finally her mother decided to escape North Korea with Eunsun and her sister, not knowing that they were embarking on a journey that would take them nine long years to complete. Told with grace and courage, her memoir is a riveting exposé of North Korea's totalitarian regime and, ultimately, a testament to the strength and resilience of the human spirit.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Eunsun Kim's tale of her escape from North Korea, along with her mother and her older sister is remarkably easy to read, remarkable engrossing and just a remarkable tale in general. When Eunsun Kim was 11 years old her mother determined that they could no longer live in North Korea. Eunsun's grandparents were dead, her father was dead, almost everything in the house was sold for money to buy food but there was almost no food to be had because North Korea was in the middle of its Great Famine (1994-1998). Depending on whose statistics you use, the estimates range anywhere from 250,000 to 3,500,000 people starved to death or died from starvation-related causes. Of course, it is hard to say for sure because North Korea is such a closed off society. Eunsun Kim and her family lived in the northernmost part of North Korea and they decided

to cross the Tumen River into China and live as illegal aliens. They would have no promise of safety, no guarantee of work and risked being shot by the border guards on both sides of the border. But, at least they would have chance to eat. She details several botched attempts at escape and I was pleased to see that at least one border guard was a decent human being. He could see they were starving and desperate and he took pity on them and let them go with a warning - twice! But, he couldn't feed them because there was no food to be had so this small family eventually makes it to China. The family tries to stay together but when Eunsun Kim's mother is sold into sexual slavery (she calls it an unofficial marriage, but the entire purpose of the marriage was to produce a son for her "husband" and no one recognized the marriage as legitimate) the family splits up. The daughters have a better time of it, but it is not easy.

This story at first reads like it's written for young readers, in a very simplistic style. The entire book can be read in a few hours. Eunsum Kim was only 11 years old and already writing her last will and testament. A year before her own father had starved to death. Both parents had had decent jobs that were subsidized by the Soviet regime. When the Soviet Empire collapsed in the early 1990s, North Korea lost all its support and food became harder to find. By the mid 1990s, North Koreans were starving. Kim's mother was headstrong and determined to get out of the tyrannical regime. This was not easy. Kim, along with her older sister and mother, fled to China by crossing the Tuman river in winter. They then endured what many refugee women experience: they were taken in by human smugglers and sold as sex slaves. While Kim leaves many of the personal details out, she gives readers enough stories about what her mother endured, just to stay away from North Korea. These women no doubt lived through hellish times. This part of China, the far northwestern part of the country, seems to be ignored by the Chinese government due to its proximity with North Korea and its citizens live in poverty, too. The fear of getting caught as an illegal haunted them for their entire time. This is a story of courage by these three women. It also illustrates the poverty and social class of these refugees in both China, Mongolia and South Korea. Kim's mother never gave up hope for a better life. I'm not sure if the simplistic style is the true style of the author, or from the translator. The childish view of the world never leaves this narrative, even though Kim retells the story from when it began 18 years ago, in 1997.

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