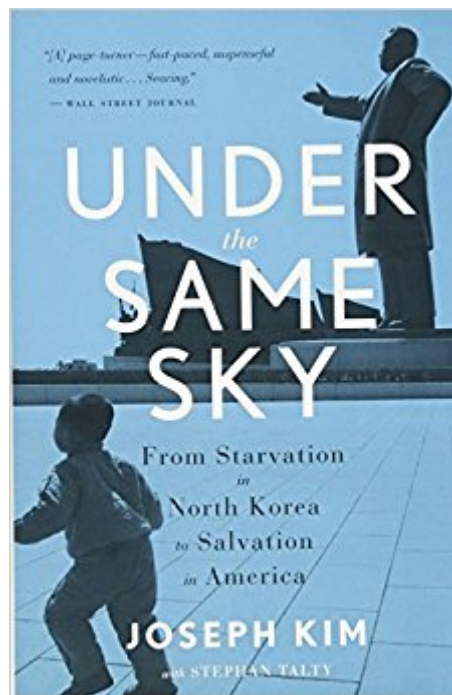




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Under The Same Sky: From Starvation In North Korea To Salvation In America



Synopsis

A searing story of starvation and survival in North Korea, followed by a dramatic escape, rescue by activists and Christian missionaries, and success in the United States thanks to newfound faith and courage. Inside the hidden and mysterious world of North Korea, Joseph Kim lived a young boy's normal life until he was five. Then disaster struck: the first wave of the Great Famine, a long, terrible ordeal that killed millions, including his father, and sent others, like his mother and only sister, on desperate escape routes into China. Alone on the streets, Joseph learned to beg and steal. He had nothing but a street-hardened survival instinct. Finally, in desperation, he too crossed a frozen river to escape to China. There a kindly Christian woman took him in, kept him hidden from the authorities, and gave him hope. Soon, through an underground network of activists, he was spirited to the American consulate, and became one of just a handful of North Koreans to be brought to the U.S. as refugees. Joseph knew no English and had never been a good student. Yet the kindness of his foster family changed his life. He turned a new leaf, became a dedicated student, mastered English, and made it to college, where he is now thriving thanks to his faith and inner strength. *Under the Same Sky* is an unforgettable story of suffering and redemption.

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"[A] page-turner that's fast-paced, suspenseful and novelistic. . . Searing." —Wall

Street Journal "Vital to our understanding of life in North

Korea." —Washington Post "There's something riveting about his honesty; he portrays the bleak conditions, dwindling resources, eternal uncertainty, and loss of dignity with an

unashamed matter-of-factness almost at odds with the desperate circumstances...Kim's tale is a vital insight into a little-understood country and a modern day tragedy." — Publishers Weekly, starred review "This short, brutish book with chapter-ending cliffhangers presaging the next hard twist will enlighten readers as to the devastating hardships facing those living in North Korea during the 'great famine.'" — Booklist "Told with poise and dignity, Kim's story provides vivid documentation of a remarkable life. It also offers an important account of atrocities committed within North Korea that have been hidden from the West and indeed, most of the rest of the world. A courageous and inspiring memoir." — Kirkus Reviews

A searing story of starvation and survival in North Korea, followed by a dramatic escape, rescue by international activists, and success in the United States thanks to newfound faith and courage

Inside the hidden and mysterious world of North Korea, Joseph Kim lived a young boy's normal life until he was five. Then disaster struck: the first wave of the Great Famine, a long, terrible ordeal that killed millions, including his father, and sent others, like his mother and only sister, on desperate escape routes into China. Alone on the streets, Joseph learned to beg and steal. He had nothing but a street-hardened survival instinct. Finally, in desperation, he too crossed a frozen river to escape to China. There a kindly Christian woman took him in, kept him hidden from the authorities, and gave him hope. Soon, through an underground network of activists, he was spirited to the American consulate and became one of just a handful of North Koreans to be brought to the United States as refugees. Joseph knew no English and had never been a good student. Yet the kindness of his foster family changed his life. Determined to succeed, he became a dedicated student, mastered English, and made it to college, where he is now thriving thanks to his faith and inner strength. "Under the Same Sky" is an unforgettable story of suffering and redemption." --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This is a hard book to put down despite the suffering involved. The reason for this is Joseph Kim tells his tale in a simple straight forward manner which made me care about what happened to him. This is not a book with a political agenda but one where the only agenda seem to be telling what happened to him and his family. When Joseph was about 13 years old he was homeless because his father died in the great famine and his mother, after selling his sister as a "bride slave" in China, abandoned him because she was a "burden." Homeless, Joseph went from begging to stealing to

survive. He explains, “I became a different person when I became homeless. For one thing I was shocked to learn I was a better thief than I was a beggar. He then explains how this happened naturally as if his body knew what to do when hunger reached a certain point. He says, “I don’t remember any moral debate about whether stealing was wrong. Joseph is a good man driven to steal to survive in a world where death was all too common. He is much kinder to his mother than I would have been. I was happy when he found his way to freedom. I recently read and reviewed another book called “A Thousand Miles To Freedom” written by Eunsun Kim who escaped North Korea with her mother and sister. While both books have some similarities and both are recommended I found Joseph Kim’s book more informative about what life was like for the average North Korean before, during and after the great famine. His time homeless and stealing to survive and his time in a forced labor camp tells a lot about Joseph and the conditions people faced. This is an important book considering the lack of information about life in North Korea. It is also an important record of what Joseph Kim, a good man, had to do to survive.

Under the Same Sky is a harrowing but beautiful memoir of growing up in North Korea during the famine that began in the early 90s. Joseph Kim’s voice shines through the simple but erudite and often poetic prose. I could recommend this as a starting point for anyone interested in reading about North Korea. The story is centred on Joseph and his family and rich in detail on average life for down and out North Koreans (not everyone was starving - as you soon see) during a brutal chapter in the country’s history. I couldn’t put the book down and found myself mentally cheering for him and sighing in relief as he detailed his escape. With all the jokes about North Korea, I think it’s most important for people to see the humanity there - not only the very real and pressing human suffering, but the plain humanity - the older sisters who sacrifice their own comfort for the sake of a younger sibling, the anger of a little boy at losing his precious TV, the yearnings of a young teen to look and feel cool. That is the real triumph of this book. I fell in love with Joseph’s humanity and clear love for his country and people. I do feel inspired to take action and become more aware of the current state of affairs in North Korea - as well as to reduce my own food wasting habits.

I heard Kwang Jin (Joseph) talk on NPR and was fascinated by his philosophy about what it takes to beg. It’s similar to Tim O’Brien’s, “The Things They Carried” in where our protagonist doesn’t have the guts to dodge the war draft by fleeing to Canada. We may see that begging is an easy way out but these stories contradict that mentality. Moreover, we may find the motives for beggars and

thieves to be economical gain, but as Kwang Jin recounts, it was survival. I'd argue these philosophies translate into our modern world. We bend the natural and moral to accommodate and stay afloat. As hinted when Kwang Jin visits China, he is shocked by the way people dressed. Adrian was sensitive to this and helped the refugees dress accordingly. His survival was increased by what he wore, not just by where he was. Now onto the book. This book left mixed feelings. It's not difficult to read, there are unhinged recounts of what life can be like for someone who grew up in North Korea written concisely and in a story telling way that's engaging. Feelings are mixed because it was co-written. There were a few spots that don't quite meld well with the overall theme of the story. These moments happen particularly toward the end of the book. Kwang Jin is in China and just starting to learn about Christianity and it's mentioned, "A voice inside my head said, you can't go back, you won't make it, you'll be caught and it will be another miserable chapter in your life." (page 232 second paragraph). Any other time this would be Kwang Jin simply thinking to himself. However, when he is just beginning to learn about Christianity he starts "hearing voices" opposed to thinking to himself. I found this to have an evangelistic feel to it. Not long after in the Epilogue an entire paragraph seems misplaced. In context, Kwang Jin is reflecting on his accounts with depression and his desire to help those in North Korea. A seemingly random and unnecessary paragraph ensues, "Only together can we bring justice and freedom to North Koreans. This is their right as human beings. And I hope to see the day where they enjoy the same justice and freedom that I do." (page 266 third paragraph). This paragraph seems to be a call for activism. For a book that comes off as so genuine and engaging to include small, seemingly thrown-in references is highly disappointing. In such a case the book should have been longer and include more detail on activism and Christian efforts for North Koreans to inform readers more deeply on the topics. The book is so rich with information and ideas that I'm sure will stick with me the rest of my life. My review is based solely on the book in its entirety. I'm not giving Kwang Jin's life four stars, and encourage readers to watch his TED talk after the book. I hope the other North Korean refugees are doing well, and I have high hopes for Bong Sook.

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