

Riding piggyback on the shoulders of a long-lost cousin, Han Park arrived at the house where he had been raised. He didn't have any boots, so one of the relatives he had come searching for in Northeast China carried him. They had been reunited less than a day.

The trip was not a homecoming, more of a middle-aged reckoning. Han Park had just turned 40, and for years he had chosen not to remember. Now the land and its fragrance grew familiar, triggering memories that wrapped around him like a silk cocoon. He remembered the massive sunflowers that grew taller than the house. As a boy he played hide and seek in those mysterious shoots that revolve east to west each day.

A season of rain had turned the countryside lush, the roads into a pig's pit of mud stickier than Korean rice. He remembered sledding these roads when they iced over in winter—roads drained by ditches, where he and his sister later hid from bullets, roads once walked by Korean

refugees who fled Japanese colonization of their country, only to find themselves caught in the crossfire of a Chinese civil war.

The house still looked the same: Simple clay walls and a straw roof, the dirt floor in the kitchen. A Chinese man now lived there. He knew its history. "Many years ago, yes, a man named Park, a Korean, a farmer."

Park's parents used to grow rice and corn, but with four brothers and sisters everyone went hungry. As a boy, he watched people die from starvation, disease, and opium—not to mention war. The fighting became incessant. One dark night in 1947, the family left China on foot, crossing the Yalu River in a small boat, and trekking into what had become the newly liberated country of North Korea. They left behind dozens of relatives who they promised to come back for.

They arrived out of the mountains and into a refugee camp in Pyongyang, welcomed by the

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PHOTO BY TERRY ALLEN

STARVING FOR

THE BACK STORY OF AMERICA'S LEADING NORTH KOREAN EXPERT

PEACE



Han Park's first-hand knowledge of war continues to inform his work as a political science professor at UGA and a peace activist.

THEY ARRIVED OUT OF THE MOUNTAINS AND INTO A REFUGEE CAMP

stench of death and Russian soldiers marching with big guns. They lived in tents beside other refugees, thousands of them. People shook and sweated and wasted away from hunger. Some of Park's playmates starved to death.

Later the family moved into the abandoned homes of expelled Japanese colonists, who fled when they lost World War II. There was little to eat in the mountainous North. The Russian occupiers fed them horse feed. For an entire year, they didn't eat a single grain of rice.

One day they decided to illegally cross that arbitrary line drawn on a map, the 38th Parallel, into South Korea, to go home. They were not alone. At the train stations, people sold their every possession, from sewing machines to jewelry. They caught moving trains. Like flocks of migrating black birds, people swarmed the tracks and latched on. People clung to all sides. Some climbed on top and died passing under tunnels.

They settled for good in his parents' home village of Taegu. Peace did not follow. The North Koreans invaded the South and the Korean War began. The family spent much of their time hiding in tunnels.

Fires attracted gunfire and mortars, so they ate uncooked grain and drank creek water. Abandoned by their owners, cows, horses, sheep, and dogs roamed freely—nomads of war. Park would chase them down and wait for the grownups to commence the slaughter. What they killed, they ate.

On rare occasions, the American soldiers would stop and hand out chocolate and Wrigley's chewing gum. Park found the rations strikingly delicious, so foreign and unbelievable, like millions of other Korean boys and girls who had spent the unbearable days and bitter nights of their youth hungry—hunger so severe it stunted their growth.

The Americans occupied the school buildings during the war, so the children learned eagerly in makeshift tents by candlelight from displaced professors, those angels, those ironic blessings of war. He worked before and after class selling apples and sweet potatoes from the orchard. He sold them on the street. His parents sold shoes and other commodities to supplement the farm and feed their children.

Over time life slowly improved, the war ended, and opportunities

emerged. Han Park went to college in Seoul.

In 1979, Chinese Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-p'ing arrived at the 73-story Peachtree Plaza Hotel in Atlanta with great historical fanfare. No high-ranking member of the Communist Party—winner of the Chinese civil war that Park's family fled—had ever stepped foot on American soil. President Jimmy Carter invited 1,500 people, mostly businessmen, to the \$20 luncheon. Also in attendance was a 39-year-old political science professor named Han Park.

Park had come a long way. In 1965, the young man from Korea immigrated to continue his studies, first to American University in Washington and later to the University of Minnesota, where he earned a doctorate. In 1970, the University of Georgia hired him as an assistant professor. He specialized in political philosophy and began to publish articles and later books. He taught a variety of classes over the years and earned tenure. In 1975, one of his graduate students, Howard Bucknell, caught the ear of Gov. Jimmy Carter, who

IN PYONGYANG.

was crafting a foreign policy for his upcoming presidential bid.

Bucknell, the governor's former Naval Academy classmate, influenced Carter's approach to U.S. policy in East Asia. Many of his ideas actually came from Park. Carter took note. The young professor crafted powerful policy. He wrote a position paper on the need to draw down U.S. troops from South Korea in hopes of defusing the long-standing cold war between North and South. Carter adopted Park's position.

So on that day in the Peachtree Plaza, the Korean refugee immigrant turned American professor diplomat walked into a room full of some of the world's most powerful leaders. Undaunted, he approached the Chinese vice premier. There were a million intellectual questions to ask, but he had a promise to keep. He asked the premier, "Can you help me find my family in China?"

The premier agreed to help, and weeks later Park received directions. In the summer of 1981, he rode piggyback on his long-lost relative's shoulders to the house where he was born. That day, remembering the sunflowers and reuniting with his family, he also realized that



Jason Crosby

1910

1910: Japan annexes Korea and makes it a colony. Koreans begin fleeing to Northeast China to escape persecution.

1939: Han Park born in the village of San Cha He, Northeast China

1939

1911

1911: Han Park's grandparents flee North Korea.

Aug. 15, 1945: Japan surrenders and forfeits its imperial possessions. Fearing a Soviet Union takeover in Korea, President Harry S. Truman proposes dividing the peninsula at the 38th parallel. Georgia's Dean Rusk, then a young military officer, drew the line and later regretted the decision.

1945

Aug. 8, 1945: The Soviet Union declares war on Japan and invades Korea.

1946

June 1946: Failed negotiations lead to civil war in China. The U.S.-backed Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) would ultimately lose to the Soviet-backed Chinese Communist Party (CPC).



1947

1947: Park's family illegally flees the fighting in China for their liberated homeland of North Korea, now ruled by a Soviet provisional government. Later that year, the U.S. and Soviet provisional governments seed power, thus officially dividing Korea for the first time in over a millennium.

1948

1948: Starving for food, Park's family flees North Korea by illegally crossing the 38th parallel for his parents' hometown of Taegu, South Korea.

hundreds of thousands of Koreans in China had also been separated from their families.

He lost sleep over it.

For a decade thereafter, Park made summer trips to China. Because he was now an American citizen, he could freely cross the closed border between China and South Korea. He rode cows and carts and carried a heavy Beta Max camera with a big microphone box and filmed interviews in China that were later aired on a nationwide station in South Korea. Park hosted the show in hopes that people would recognize their lost relatives.

One of his guests, an 80-year-old Korean man, wanted to find someone. Park walked into a dark room and set up the camera. He began filming, and in Korean asked, "Okay, when did you come out of Korea? Who do you want to find?"

"My mother and father," the old man replied.

Park almost dropped the camera. The man was clearly dying of old age. "Your parents must have already died," Park exclaimed.

"It would be enough to see their graves."

Those episodes created a sensation in South Korea. Hundreds

of families were reunited, but in 1985 Park ran out of money. He didn't know what to do, but he would not quit. He wanted to sleep at night.

So he went looking for the colonel who had drawn that arbitrary, longitudinal line at the 38th parallel. He didn't have to walk far, just over to the UGA law school. There sat a legend named Dean Rusk, the nation's second longest-serving secretary of state. Rusk felt bad about what had become of Korea. He helped Park incorporate a nonprofit organization that would provide him with a fundraising vehicle to continue his project.

Park named the organization in the active tense: Uniting Families. He went back to China that summer and reunited hundreds of families. On the air, mothers, fathers, siblings, and cousins, in tears, thanked him.

His work ended in the early 1990s. China and South Korea finally established diplomatic relations, so Koreans no longer needed Han Park to ride the cows and carts and carry his camera and microphone all over Northeast China, finding the loved ones of people he did not know. Now Koreans were free to search for themselves.

Park's trip to China in 1981 inspired him to confront his past in North Korea. He traveled there with an otherwise Caucasian delegation of academics to study the country's strange political philosophy.

When they arrived at the airport, everyone else rode to the hotel in a crowded bus; the North Koreans put him in a Mercedes-Benz with a chauffeur. Everyone else shared a room and got little sleep; the North Koreans gave him a suite. He asked them why.

"You are a part of a superior race," they answered.

That disturbed and fascinated him. He kept returning to study the political ideology of self-reliance. He built a relationship with the country's scholars, who all worked for the government. Behind the scenes he became a player in U.S. foreign policy. He brokered the controversial deal that sent Jimmy Carter to Pyongyang in 1994. Many believe that trip averted a second Korean War. Others say it bought North Korea time to build the nuclear weapon it detonated in 2006.

For one trip he took out a life insurance policy worth millions. His main contact, the party secretary,

had defected while on a trip to China. U.S. intelligence officials warned him to never return. They will almost certainly kill you. They think you're involved.

He went anyway, scared to death. That first night at dinner he ate with powerful members of the government. He decided to just lay it all on the table. "People have told me I should be worried for my safety. That something might happen to me while I'm here. I just want to ask you: Will I be safe in your country? Will something happen to me if I go out on the streets?"

Astonished by the false intelligence, everyone at the table laughed.

Today Park walks the streets of Pyongyang without a bodyguard. Soldiers line every block, and gigantic posters of the country's leaders are ubiquitous. The government takes him everywhere he asks to go. They trust him because he refuses interviews with South Korean journalists and speaks his mind constructively. He also steers as much aid to North Korea as possible. While the U.S. government considers North Korea a grave international threat, Park describes the country as a "sick brother."

He visits many schools and observes their students. Often he chats with ordinary North Korean shopkeepers about their lives. He holds noninvasive conversations, telling everyone he's a Chinese businessman. He takes these risks with the naive hope that he can prevent a second Korean war. Sometimes he cannot sleep, knowing the people of North Korea have nothing to eat.

One day, on a recent trip, he asked to visit an orphanage. His hosts were hesitant. They knew what he would find. They didn't want anyone to see that side of their country. While the government refuses to admit it, for decades North Koreans have been dependent on foreign nations to feed them. Park has done his best to help. So his hosts agreed to take him.

At the orphanage, someone placed a starving child in his hands like a gift. So this must be the reward, for all his flights to Pyongyang, for all the ostracism his pacifism has drawn in America. This child, the future of Korea, starving in the same outstretched palms he begged with 60 years earlier, back when there was a chance for peace between North and South, before

the partition and the war.

Holding that child, he suddenly realized nothing had changed. Men continue to beat their chests, threaten war, and pursue bombs, while this child goes unfed. Even with this hopeless knowledge, with his idealism crushed, he knew he could not lose faith in peace.

He lost it.

In Korean he yelled, "You bandits, you holy, holy gods."

Then he struck his host with a fist, breaking with pacifism. The man fell to the ground, ashamed of himself, ashamed of his country, and wept.

Park collapsed on top of the man and wept too. Everyone in the room wept.■

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1950
June 25, 1950: Korean War begins. American troops arrive days after the invasion. Han Park studies under American professors.

1953
July 27, 1953: Korean War armistice goes into effect. To this day, no treaty has been signed. The war, in theory, continues.

1965
1965: Park and his fiancé, Wonie, (now wife of 43 years) immigrate to the U.S.



1994
1994: Park brokers the controversial deal that sends Jimmy Carter to North Korea—a trip some believe averted a second Korean War. Park briefed Carter before the trip.

1970
1970: Park becomes an assistant professor at the University of Georgia.

1981
1981: Park makes his first of almost 50 trips back to North Korea.

2005
2005-2007: Park persuaded the North Korean government to let ABC News broadcast several times from inside the reclusive country.

2007
2007: Park visits the North Korean orphanage and holds a starving baby.

2008
March 2008: Parks makes his 47th visit to North Korea.