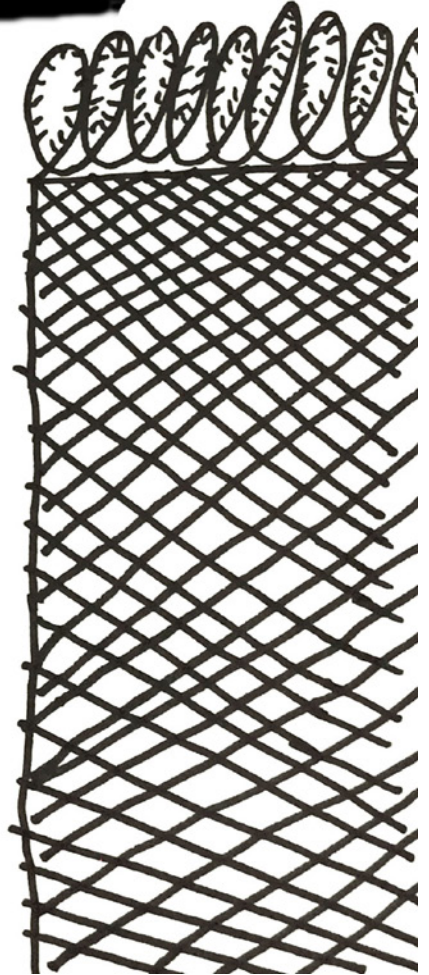
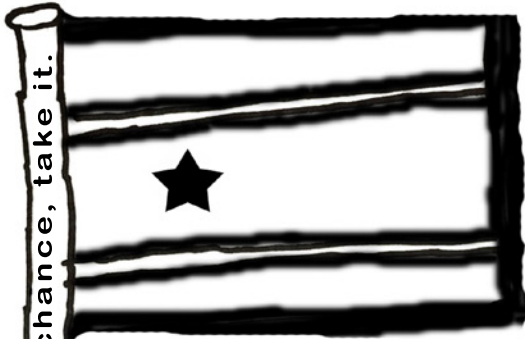
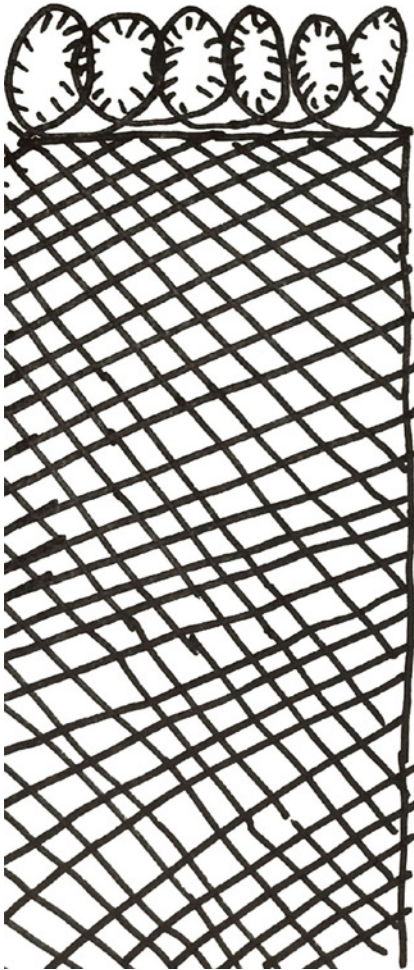


FREEDOM

LIFE

OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities don't come often. If you get the chance, take it.



Opportunity

-- Josh Rosen --

As a North Korean citizen, I'm proud to work under and serve the Supreme Leader. At least, that's what I thought. My whole childhood I was taught songs, stories, everything about our Supreme Leader. I was brainwashed, forced to give my own life for my leader. In my whole life, I've only seen him as a person on T.V. Besides that I see his face everywhere. Propaganda billboards, tall art sculptures made to replicate him, and in every house, school classroom, and library two paintings hang - one of Kim Jong Un and one of his father Kim Il-Sung. How can someone be such a role model if he never shows himself? I've decided, my life is worth more than just dirt ready to be stomped on by an amateur leader who's still a kid with too much power. We, the people, should be free from the dictatorship. This...this experiment has gone on for far too long. How can anyone want to live under a dictator, a man with all the control? I just...don't understand.

As of last year, I was able to find a South Korean smuggler who got his hands on some goods. "Movies." That's what he calls them. Life seems... So much different in South Korea. People seem to be happy, enjoying life to the fullest. I live in the capital Pyongyang, the most heavily guarded city. I face a difficult challenge ahead of me. For the past year, I've headed into the heart of the city and met with a man who lives in an apartment made for loyal teachers and scientists. My man was on the 4th floor in the nicest apartment I've ever seen: 2 bedrooms, a dining room, a family room, and a kitchen. He escorts me to the dining room table where 2 other families are waiting. I can only assume they're here for the same thing: to re-capture their lives. We talk for hours, going over our plan and making sure everyone understands what they have to pack, be prepared for, and have to do. If one person gets caught, it's off to the internment camps. To hell with me if I'm caught and end up getting sent to Hoeryong, where I'm forced to participate in human experiments and excruciating physical labor. The next few days are filled with anxiety and anxiousness. My blood is just pumping, and when asked if I'm ok, I have to hide my intentions and lie. Working for construction is pointless. The government spends funds on supermarkets for propaganda. They don't actually sell anything. Shelves stacked with food and clothes racks hung with clothes, but just for show. I've had this job for 4 years and I've made enough to barely sustain myself, buying all my goods from a farm about 2 hours away by bike.

Two more days until I can finally be free from this unruly country. Once I leave, I plan on trying to start up my own family in a place where I can raise a child without the brainwashing and constant struggle of acknowledging and praising some leader. When I know my child will be learning something meaningful and walk away with a future that he or she wants, that's when I can sleep peacefully at night. One more day, I go out and find a coworker's family. I understand their situation, and I know they don't get to live in a nice apartment like mine, so when I arrive I give them my key, and they are ever grateful. I take my bike to the specified meeting spot. Since I have some time, I decide to ride around the nearest city, Kaesong. On the outskirts of the city, I find a child, a homeless one. Unfortunately, I understand that whatever I do won't help him get his life back. But I do what I can and give him some money and my bike. As I walk back to the designated meeting spot, I reflect, reflect back at what my life used to be and how I never really felt I belonged. Feeling that tug of fate keeping us restrained, forcing me in place, having us individuals longing for that which we all want, "Freedom." Others feel like they have freedom, but they're wrong. The shackles on our feet have us crawling on the ground, having it feel like we're forced to abide by rules set in place by a dictator. By the time I'm done reflecting on my previous life, I start to think about my new one that's about to start. I hear a truck down the road. I quickly leap into the bushes and wait for further notice. Once the truck stops, I see people emerge. I step out from behind the bush and am blinded by a light. Was this a trap or does this light represent a new life, a new beginning?