



DATE: August 28, 2017

SUBJECT: Jinhye Jo Speaks At TEDxLakeArtemesia

MAIN POINTS:

- Jinhye Jo shares her daunting story to freedom in addition to raising awareness concerning human rights in North Korea and the plight of North Korean defectors.

EVENT OVERVIEW

Date: August 6, 2017

Time: 2 p.m-5 p.m.

Location: The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, 8270 Alumni Dr., University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742-1625

Attendees:

- **Jinhye Jo**, North Korean Refugee Rescue Program + Journey, NKinUSA
- **Erika J. Kendrick**, Combating Depression
- **Michael Mitchell**, Spreading Gamer Music
- **Tianyi Dance Team**, Keeping Chinese Traditional Dance Alive
- **Sabrina He**, HRNK, Reporter

SUMMARY

OPENING REMARKS: While you know that autocrats and dictators are bad, luckily many of us have never had to deal with such a problem. For us, it is a nightmare and this means that unless the person impacts us, we do not have to deal with it. Ms. Jo, unfortunately, lived through one

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such nightmare. However, she has a story to share with us about perseverance and family. It is an inspiring story that tells a lot about the human spirit and endurance. Please join me in welcoming Ms. Jo.

JINHYE JO: Hello, I am North Korean American Jinhye Jo. I heard about TED and I am honored to be here today. I was born in North Korea in 1987. My father was a party member and he had to do whatever the government asked him to do. He worked long hours and came home late every day without much time to spend with me. When I was seven years old, my father stopped working for the government and as it stopped providing for us, he had to start looking for food. But because he was a party member, he was not allowed to conduct business and in looking for food, my father was sentenced to jail.

When my father got out of prison a few months later, he asked the party what could he do, given that he would not receive money and food by working for the government while he had to provide for five children. He said “if I go look for food, you will put me in prison,” and the government’s response was: “find out for yourself”. So finally, my father decided to work and find food in China once a month at the risk of his life. This way, he could work for the government while accounting for food. However, the third time he went, he and my mother got caught by the border police. After accusing them of seeing the Internet, going to church, and meeting with South Koreans, the government tortured them non-stop.

Since my mother was three months pregnant, my father confessed to crimes he never committed to enable her to go home. When she returned, she cried and screamed in fear while visions of our father being tortured constantly recurred in her dreams. Five months later, we received a letter from the government, informing us that our father had tried to escape from the train so they shot him to death. The truth is though, due to his infections post torture, he died in the train in lack of food and water for 10 days. When my mother found out the truth, she was so sad that she delivered her baby in the house. We did not have a car or money to bring her to the hospital, so my seventy-six-year-old grandma and I helped her deliver the baby.

My older sister was sixteen years old. During this time, she was the only one in the family who went out to look for food. One day, she did not come back. We later learned that she was sexually trafficked to China. Seven days after delivering my baby brother, my mother walked two hundred miles to China in seek of my sister. In her absence, I took care of my baby brothers and tried to feed them milk and food. But because my father was killed by the government, no one wanted to help me, so I found some corn on the ground near the trash and made it into powder to feed to my baby brother. When he had a few bites, my baby brother smiled at me and thought that I was his mother.

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Meanwhile, my grandma got ill and could not move at all. I was alone in taking care of my two brothers, sister, and my grandma. My newborn baby brother slowly died in my arms two months later due to starvation. Three days after he passed away, my mother returned with food and powder for milk. After she found out that the baby was not in the house, she started yelling and crying, cursing the government. Some people heard and reported her to the police, who came and used a stick to heat my mother's head and body. As my mother bled, they took her with them along with the food she garnered.

Afterwards, we did not have any hope of survival. I remember my family stayed in bed while giving up on our lives, but just then, my mother returned. She had escaped in the knowledge that we would give up otherwise. When I saw my mother, her head was infected, she had a fever and she could not walk well. But my mother was a strong woman and she never gave up after she escaped from prison. We hid in the mountains for a few days, during which time we ate grass and bark to survive. My grandma did not make it. Her last hope was to eat a potato. She asked us to survive and go to China. I was ten years old but had to take care of her dead body. With her last strand of hope, our mother asked that I take my brother and younger sister and leave for China.

We walked a hundred miles without shoes and when I was too tired, I sat and cried. My mother found some neighbors, and asked them to take care of my brother for five days. She told them that she would return with food if they watched him. When we walked away, my brother held our pants and started crying. He asked why the youngest sister could go. We answered, the youngest sister will bring back candies and cookies and we will bring rice for him. We told him to be strong and wait for five days, before we come back and get him. But after we crossed the the Tumen River border to China, we could not return on time because there was too much rain. Two months later, we sent a broker to North Korea to bring my brother to China, but instead he found that the neighbors had difficulty surviving so they abandoned my brother, who became a homeless child. Later, we discovered that he died due to starvation in the streets.

In China, we hid and tried to survive for ten years. We were caught and sent back to North Korea four times. I prayed a lot and we met a lot of nice people, and it is thanks to them that we could survive to this day. I can still feel pain in my body due to torture, but I survived and now I am in the United States, where I have found freedom. Still, I cannot forget my family. I am sorry to my brother that I could not take him with me. I explain my past life not just to share how difficult it was, but for the world to know about what happens inside North Korea. Because like me, there are three hundred thousand North Korean defectors and people who lost their families or died from starvation. In 2005, I tried to rescue a North Korean defector from China to Mongolia, but I got caught and China put me in prison for one year and three months. From that day on, I never gave up on helping North Korean people, but I am also trying to survive today.

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I ask you for three ways to help North Korean defectors. Do not send food, money, or medication to North Korea. It never goes to the people but stays with the government. Pressure the Chinese government to stop sending North Korean defectors back to North Korea. They will die. There are more than two hundred North Korean defectors here in America, and thirty thousand North Korean defectors live in South Korea. Help them and rescue their families. Send information back to North Korea through radio or USB. Through them, make the North Korea regime collapse. If you can, please rescue orphans, North Korean women, and children in China being sexually trafficked. My organization has rescued almost a hundred North Korean defectors from China to America. I also want to take a moment to introduce my sister. Grace, can you stand up? I am very happy because I am in heaven here in America and I hope that people here will know about North Korea and rescue North Korean defectors. Please continue to pray for them.

EDITED FOR CLARITY AND BREVITY.

Report by Sabrina He, Research Intern, HRNK.