[“Good Friends” desires to help the North Korean people through humanistic point of view, and publishes “North Korea Today” describing the way the North Korean people live as real as possible. We at Good Friends also hope to be a bridge between the North Korean people and the world.]

[Hot Topics]
Outcry Raised By Residents Unable To Earn a Living from Peddling
Tight Control Resumes After 3/8 Elections

[Food]
Pyongyang Issued an Advance Notice about Cutting Food Ration in Half Beginning April
Hoeryong Distributed 7.2 kg of Corn in Early March
Kimchaek Steel Enterprise, No Ration for March
Residents at Chungju Mountainous Region Subsist on Sweet Potatoes

[Economy]
Women Under 40 Years with Living Hardships Are Allowed to Do Business in Markets

[Politics]
Internal Situation at Unease with Anticipated Missile Launch
The Country Should Make a Model of Hoeryong City
A Fishing Boat in Chungdan County Faced With Hardships on the Suspicion of Escape to the South
Laborers at Aquiculture Enterprise of Chungjin, Flee from Baekdoo Mountain Construction Shock Troop Brigade
[Society]
Elders Waiting to Die
A Whole Family Becomes Homeless at a Train Station
Family Destroyed from Mistakenly Spoken Words

[Women/Children/Education]
They Say that "Kimkisong First Junior High School in Hoeryong City, Named the Role Model School Nationwide"
Her Mother Left Home, Her Father Died, and Her Brother Left Home as well
Three Devoted Kkotjebi Brothers Take Care of Their Mentally Ill Father

[Accidents]
Goldmine of Hoeryong, Inmates of the Discipline Center of the National Security Agency Involved in Safety Accident One After Another

[Commentary]
To Help the Residents Make a Living by Themselves

[Investigative Report]
Tale of a Woman’s Relocation To A Rural Village; “The empty grain sacks were collected with the promise of being filled with rations, but that promise was a lie.”

[Hot Topics]
Outcry Raised By Residents Unable To Earn a Living from Peddling
Throughout the nation, residents have begun to protest the new obstacles to making a living from peddling. Drastic restrictions have been placed on which items can be peddled. Peddlers who cannot earn enough money are not buying any essential grain items, such as rice and corn. Consequently, many markets have been brought to a standstill. “We cannot make living peddling. All the items are inspected. Even the items manufactured in China are prohibited from being sold. There are no items we can sell. Even though grain prices have not gone up much recently, we cannot afford rice,” said Jang Yung-sook (age 40), a peddler of footwear at Nampo market in South Pyongan Province. Throughout the nation, the price of rice hovers at 1,700 NK won and corn is around 700 NK won. Jung Man-ho (40s) said, “Most residents have forgotten the word ‘ration’. And yet, party leaders can purchase grain at official prices. Rice costs 1,700 NK won per kilogram at market and party leaders pay only 45 NK won. The price of corn is 750 NK won at the market and party leaders pay only 28 NK won. Moreover, they sell what is bought cheaply at the market price, which makes them rich. In the meantime, ordinary people cannot afford a solid monthly meal of corn.”
Tight Control Resumes After 3/8 Elections
Tight control of activities at markets throughout the nation has resumed immediately after the March 8 election of delegates to the Supreme People’s Assembly. Females under the age of forty are prohibited from engaging in peddling and a list of prohibited items has been announced. A manager of the Soonchun Market said, “A list of prohibited items in the market was posted. Items manufactured in South Korea, U.S.A., a Joint Venture Factory, any electronics devices, toys, wooden furniture and any heavy equipment is prohibited in the market. Even among the manufactured items, one cannot sell five ready-made pieces of clothing to a person, and can only sell ten in total. The maximum amount of grain that can be sold is 20 Kg. All the prices of fruit are set.” The information board says that any items in violation of the regulations will be confiscated and transferred to stores run by the state. The Democratic Women’s Union (DWU) at Soonchun City has begun a widespread advertisement that states, “Stores in Pyongyang are full of merchandise. Prices are much lower than in the market. At this time of approaching a strong nation, let us transfer all merchandise to those stores.” Han Myung-soon (40s), a participant at the DWU meeting, said, “Everyone at the meeting laughed at the idea. No items are allowed in the market. What could we do? They peddle illegally at home. Those who need items do not have any choice, but pay whatever price is asked. People do not have any option in selecting items. What good do these tight controls do? For whom?”

[Food]
Pyongyang Issued an Advance Notice about Cutting Food Ration in Half Beginning April
It is known that the amount of April-May food ration will be cut down to half in the central district of Pyongyang city. An official of the Pyongyang said, “Currently, there are two cities, Pyongyang and Hoeryong, and military bases that receive food rationing. For Pyongyang (We) had been supplying to the central district but beginning April the amount will be decreased to half.” The department of food and its workers had several meetings, but there is no way to solve food problem for now. He said, “There is no foreign country either to import food from.” Officials of the Central Party asserted that the government has to guarantee some portion of food supply to the residents of central Pyongyang district without delay. Answering to this request, food department of Pyongyang People's Assembly decided to check whether there are extra grains from last year’s harvest. Officials of food department of Pyongyang even went to the area where National Planning Committee reported higher grain productivity to check the actual amount of food.

Hoeryong Distributed 7.2 kg of Corn in Early March
Hoeryong city supplied 7.2kg of corn to each household in early March. The city also allowed women who head the household to buy corn at 340 NK won per kg. As the corn is sold at 600NK won per kg at the market, the price is 260 NK won cheaper. However, the maximum amount to buy per household is 5kg. When the government distributes the corn, corns have to be dehydrated first and then grinded at a rice mill before rationing. But the corns purchased in a hurry were not dehydrated and not grinded properly due to lack of
electricity. Therefore the whole un-dehydrated corn is heavier than the powder, which means that the real food amount is smaller because the food is distributed by its weight. Furthermore, mistakes during the weighing process and loss during the delivery cause shortage of corn. The office of food distribution calculates the loss too high and reduces the amount of ration to the people. In this way, workers of the food distribution office in Hoeryong collected 600 kg of food and divided it among the workers.

**Kimchaek Steel Enterprise, No Ration for March**

Kimchaek Steel Enterprise made no rationing in March. The only rationing provided this year was 15 days worth of wheat and corn for 2.16 Holiday. At this time, high-ranking workers and laborers with full attendance record received 3.5kg of wheat and 3.5kg of corn. According to laborers at Kimchaek Steel Enterprise, many families have difficulties buying remnants of bean oil. Chung Jin-sung (30s) said, “Most families survive solely on corn noodles for their three meals and more than half of families are surviving on mixture of remnants of bean oil and corn powder.” Kim Pil-joong (40s) added, “They send us to training because of the political situation and we get nothing in return. Nowadays it is hard to buy even remnants of bean oil.”

**Residents at Chungju Mountainous Region Subsist on Sweet Potatoes**

Until recently Shim Young-hee (Alias, 40s) was a respectable citizen of Pyongyang. She lived in a plentiful and stable environment and had 6 months of food stored until her husband, a former Central Party Official was caught during an inspection. Her husband was sent to the Re-Educational Center and she was exiled to mountainous region of Chungju, North Pyongan Province, together with his aged mother, his unmarried brother, and her two children. This mountainous village has only about 70 households, of which only 5 are natives to this region. All other households were exiled here like Shim. Because it is a mountainous region, food is their main concern. Households who can afford soup are considered well off and there are several households surviving on steamed sweet potatoes. Shim shared her shocking first impression of the region, “It was unbelievable but this was the reality,” and continued, “Our whole family were able to get loads of firewood so we didn’t need to worry about firewood.” They were able to trade one load of firewood for 1kg of sweet potatoes. She said they would soon adapt to this reality of surviving on sweet potatoes instead of rice. Her main concern was children’s education. The eldest child, who attended 2nd year of middle school in Pyongyang, cannot go to school yet. “It is too expensive to buy uniform, backpack, school supplies and shoes. There is no method of earning money. It is not just my kids but most kids in this region cannot afford to go to school. There is no way to earn money at this point but I really want to solve my children’s education problem.” She forced a smile and said she wishes that “my husband took care of himself at the Re-Educational Center and that we reunite one day.”

**[Economy]**

**Women Under 40 Years with Living Hardships Are Allowed to Do Business in Markets**
Young women who have a hard time making a living in Chungjin and other areas in the Northern Hamgyong County are cautiously allowed to do business in market areas. One party official said, “So many people have raised the issue to the Provincial Party indicating that these young women will starve to death if they are not allowed to do business in market areas.” According to the official, other officials visited these young women and allowed them to do business after verifying whether they were badly off because they had to take care of their parents-in-law, couldn’t make wages because their husbands are college students, or they can’t make their living unless they do some business in market areas. These young women are relieved and happy about the news.

[Politics]
Internal Situation at Unease with Anticipated Missile Launch
With the expected missile launch, the North Korean government authorities have been talking to military executives on the essential matters of the currently tensed situation. The talk was mostly about North Korea’s stance that “In relation to our missile launch, the U.S., South Korea, and Japan are reacting very strongly. If the hostile countries disturb our launch, then we will not just sit back and watch.” The country is at a state of tension due to the missile launch. Along with the Reserve Forces, Civilian workers and farmers, and Red Flag Young Army are all getting ready for battle. All men except those discharged from military service, were ordered not to travel. Also, the People’s Army has been prohibited from leaving the military base. On one hand, there was a TV announcement from Department of the General Staff on March 9th that telecommunication with South Korea would be cut off. Kim, Kwang-Min (40s) who lives in Pyongsung said, “It feels like right before going to war”, expressing the heightened tension in the country.

The Country Should Make a Model of Hoeryong City
On February 24th, leader Kim, Jong-II said, “Out of all of the cities that have been inspected, Hoeryong City is the best well-managed.” Kim then said, “The country should make a model of Hoeryong City”, ordering others to follow this “exemplary” city. One party member said, “This would be something that is only said between the members, but the city looks better than when Yon, Hyong-Mook of the Jagang Province worked for it.” On the 8th, right after the 12th Supreme People’s Assembly was over, each member responsible for his/her city and province came to visit Hoeryong. The Hoeryong city council is quickly preparing for the visits by repairing old houses and buildings on the side of the roads and repainting buildings. With this new task on hand, the officers in the village office are getting citizens to help out to clean every morning, afternoon, and night.

A Fishing Boat in Chungdan County Faced With Hardships on the Suspcion of Escape to the South
On February 10th, a fishing boat in Chungdan County of the Southern Hwanghae Province rode out into international waters and was caught by the navy patrol boat. The boat belonged to the Marine Products Enterprise stationed at the Foreign Currency Earning Base under the 4th Corps and was used for foreign-currency earning business. The captain and
crewmembers of the boat were immediately arrested because they were considered heading toward the South. The Fourth Army Corps Security dealt with this incident very seriously. Thus, during the preliminary hearing of whether the ship was heading south or not, one of the crewmembers was severely beaten to death. In early March, six crewmembers were released, but the captain, the chief engineer, and the three boatswains are still under investigation.

**Laborers at Aquiculture Enterprise of Chungjin, Flee from Baekdoo Mountain Construction Shock Troop Brigade**

Laborers at Aquiculture Enterprise at Chungam District of Chungjin City, North Hamgyong Province joined Baekdoo Mountain Shock Troop Brigade and dispersed after 4 days. The Aquiculture Management workers invested huge sum of money and created a sea cucumber farm but their productivity level did not even reach 200kg last year. Last February 27th, the Aquiculture Enterprise Party Committee sent all laborers to Baekdoo Mountain Shock Troop Brigade with an exception of small number of workers necessary in maintaining the sea cucumber farm. However, most workers returned home after few days of overwhelming work from the Baekdoo Mountain Construction site. Because of this incident, the Aquiculture Enterprise Management Chairman and the Party Secretary were criticized and punished by higher department and were forced to close their enterprise as punishment for their lack of management skill.

**[Society]**

**Elders Waiting to Die**

Lee Jae-ok (70s) living in Bokcheon Town, Danchun City, South Hamgyong Province lost her husband during the Arduous March. She lives by herself since her son is in the army and her two daughters are married. Up until a couple years ago, she made a living farming on a patch of field. However, her aged and ill body is not responding well. When she had difficulty walking and working, she visited her eldest daughter but returned soon thereafter. After few days, she went to visit her younger daughter but could not stay for long. Their food troubles were unspeakable. She had to leave when she saw her grandchildren barely eating rice-bran gruel. She could barely walk with a cane and had to beg for food so her malnutrition worsened. She requested government aid but she only received few kilograms of raw corn from the Head of the Neighborhood Unit and nothing was provided after that. She is waiting to die because no one is looking after her. Cho Chum-soon (70s) from Naemoon-dong, Danchun was in similar situation. Her husband passed away long time ago and had no children. She had to live as a day laborer because the government did not take care of her. As she got older, she begged for survival but last year she was bed-ridden due to illnesses. She spent her last days sighing and regretting life, but no one took care of her. Everyone was having difficulties and was not able to look after her. She spent her last day home by herself starved to death. Her heartbroken neighbors commented, “The government neglected to help a poor elder. What happened to this world?”
A Whole family Becomes Homeless at a Train Station
There is a broad range of Kkotjebi (homeless) from kids to the elderly at the Wonsan train station in Kangwon Province. Included is an entire family begging at the station. Han Suk-ki (40) and his family are also begging for money at a station. Mr. Han came from Liwon County, South Hamgyong Province. He has been working for the automobile company for more than 10 years after being discharged from military service. He became a Kkotjebi last year. The following is his story: It seemed okay a few years ago. Things got bad since 2006. There were nothing to eat and nothing to wear. However, he had a job at a company at that time. He endured many days with nothing to eat. He couldn't help but quit his work and tried to do anything he could to make money. He washed for gold and sold trees in the beginning. Those did not go well. Then, he got into business. What he did was to carry around something heavy for a boss. He picked up corn from Sepo in Kangwon Province and sold them in a northern area. He also bought seafood in the Northern part and sold it in Shinuiju, North Pyongan Province. He did everything he could do to support his family. Nothing went well. He thought it cost too much for him to commute a long distance for peddling. So he did 'short distance peddling' by buying and selling to the local. But he barely made a profit. There were so many peddling people who were doing same type of trade. He and his wife were not able to make his business work well. In order to obtain some food he and his family made visits to his older brother's house in Danchun city and his parent's in law in Myungchun city, North Hamgyong Province. The last year was the worst. It was the toughest time for him to get some food. Some of his co-workers died from hunger last summer. As he lost money, he started leading a wandering life with his family. They have moved from one train station to another and ended up at Wonsan station. They could survive day to day where there were a lot of people. But recently, the authorities are getting stricter over the homeless. He was not even sure how long he could stay in Wonsan station. When the police chased them away, they just moved to other places. He felt there was no hope for the future. They barely lived from hand to mouth. He felt so sorry for his wife and two daughters.

Family Destroyed from Mistakenly Spoken Words
Kang Bong-rim who lives is Heochun town in Heochun County, South Hamgyong Province, had his family ruined because of wrongly spoken words. He lamented, “We are the only country suffering famine. Higher authorities are well off and do not care for their citizens. The world needs to turn upside down for us to survive. Even for a day, it would be a fruitful life to eat well, dress well and live well. Who would care when everyone starves to death?” After this complaint, Kang was arrested by the Security Agency who called this a ‘Verbal Rebellion’. His wife ran away after his arrest. His aged father took his own life worrying about his son. His young children had no one to look after them and died of starvation in the midst of cold. Kang yet does not know what happened to his family.

[Women/Children/Education]
They Say that "Kimkisong First Junior High School in Hoeryong City, Named the Role Model School Nationwide"
The Department of Education advised to follow the example of Hoeryong city Kimkisong First Junior High school. According to one central party official, the Dept. of Education presented a guideline on February 24 after Chairman Kim Jong-II made a visit to the school and was satisfied with it. As it was thought that Kimkisong First Junior high school was better than Kanggyesije First Junior high school in Jagang Province, The officials visited and observed the Kimkisong First Junior high school. Principals and vice-principals in South Pyongan Province observed the school on March 17. Principals and vice-principals in North Hamgyong Province made visits on the 15th and 17th of March. After observing the school facilities and educational material, they evaluated the school and commented that "Under the circumstances that people had a difficult life, but the educational level seemed higher than expected here."

An anonymous official mentioned "Sixty percent of the materials and facilities in Kimkisong First Junior high school were from extra contribution from students. The rest of them were purchased with City money. All were possible because the students of this school are from the wealthy family." "It would be impossible in other cities beside Pyongyang and other than the First schools." Another official said "It would be a good idea for this school to become a role model school. But it is not realistic or practical for most schools, which really concerns me."

Her Mother Left Home, Her Father Died, and Her Brother Left Home as well

Today Seo Hyo-rim(9) hangs around again at the market with her grandmother to search for her brother, Jang-sun(11) who left his house at the end of last year. After her father passed away in December of last year, her brother visited his grandmother and left home in a few days. Hyo-rim and her grandmother have worried so much about him that they have searched for him here and there, but they have had no news of him at all. According to the grandmother, as the economic crisis became extremely severe, Hyo-rim’s mom left home and went far away to peddle. Since then they have not heard any news from her. Hyo-rim cursed her mom, but she said that she misses her so much. Her father, who was a laborer at a quarry of Riwon County, South Hamgyong Province, starved, but he did his best to feed his children by gathering firewood in the mountain or picking seaweed on the seashore. However, last year brought the worst season of spring food shortage in the history. Because her father could not endure the difficulties, he sent her to her grandmother. The father searched with his son in all possible ways and looked around every place he could think of to get food. When winter began, he suffered from severe weather and malnutrition and became sick. Because he did not have money to buy even a single dose of medication, he did not get any treatment and finally passed out on the street last December 20th. He did not recover at all and soon passed away. Left alone, Jang-sun went to his grandmother and his sister. However, their living condition was not much better than his. In order to reduce their burden, Jang-sun left home. Hyo-rim did not mind eating thin gruel every day, but she really wanted to live together with him and her grandmother, so she anxiously searches for her brother again.

Three Devoted Kkotjebi Brothers Take Care of Their Mentally Ill Father
Three *kkotjebi* brothers, *Kim Dong-Hwan* (12), *Dong-Hyuk* (11), and *Dong-Cheol* (8), in *Danchun*, South Hamgyong Province are well known for their devotion to their father. The head of the Neighborhood Unit who knows them said that he wanted to help them because they are very commendable. The following story is what the head describes about these brothers. *Dong-Hwan*'s father was a laborer of a factory of caustic soda and his mother was also a laborer of a salt manufactory. He had an old grandmother who sold some trivial items at the market and took care of house chores. Meanwhile, since 2007 or around that, their living condition began to change for the worst. The head of the household and his wife could not go to work anymore and barely maintained their family living. However, their condition got worse in May and June of last year. The husband gathered firewood in the mountain and his wife fed their family by making food with grass and barks of tree. Meanwhile the grandmother who suffered from malnutrition died early July of last year. The children’s mother also suffered from malnutrition and could not move and became bedridden. The husband did his best to save his wife. Our Neighborhood Unit provided them with a few kilos of corn. He did not have money, so he was not able to provide any medicine for his wife. Although he did his best, he could not save his wife. After a while, she passed away. Eventually, due to his tremendous debt, he lost his house. Since then, the three brothers stopped going to school. When only their father was left to provide for them, the eldest brother, *Dong-Hwan*, led his brothers to leave home by saying, “We should not be a burden on our father because he cannot secure enough food for us even with his best efforts.” They began to beg for food here and there and wandered more than 10 kms a day in the effort. They told me later that they lived in a cargo train last winter. While the father worried about and searched them, the children tried to live by themselves in order to reduce the burden on their father. Early this year, when the children accidentally found that their father became insane and was wandering around on the streets, they brought him to the house. When I visited them last New Year’s Day, I found the three little children putting food they had gotten from their begging in their mentally ill father’s mouth. I cried, heartbroken from such a scene. When we gave the boys some used clothes and kilos of corn, they cried bitterly. Even with my best efforts, I could not help crying along with them. The sight of these boys, only barely school aged, begging on the streets to take such care of their sick father would touch anyone’s hearts.

**[Accidents]**

*Gold mine of Hoeryong, Inmates of the Discipline Center of the National Security Agency Involved in Safety Accident One After Another*

Safety accidents happen one after another in a gold mine that *Changdoo Daeheung* administration in *Hoeryong* of North Hamgyong Province manage. The mine is such a dangerous place that even laborers specializing in mining often get into an accident. Inmates in the Discipline Center of the Security Agency doing mining for the first time were called up for a drilling mining practice at the entrance, which is located at a 45-degree slope, therefore making the risk of an accident higher. Last March 10th, a woman 19 years old fell down being hit by a mound of stones pouring down on her head while training for
the digging mining at the entrance. It was a condition that safety helmets weren’t provided to students of the Discipline Center. In the afternoon of the 15th, two male inmates were pressed in the middle of working for erecting mine timber in the mines because two-meter sections collapsed. The sufferers broke limbs and they were transported quickly to a nearby hospital by large truck. Although it was fortunate that their lives were saved, they had to be transferred to the People’s hospital in the city because they were unconscious. Witnesses to the accident have a lot of words about the members of the executive of Changdoo gold mine. One miner (40) working in the Changdoo gold mine raised voice of his criticisms, “It was the fault of the chief of management and the secretary of primary party of Changdoo gold mine. They should let skillful miners do the initial mining operation. We who have been specialized in this work are really careful in working. It is much strange that accidents don’t happen although people who committed societal crime are forced to work without any preparations. Is it right that in a few days time, three young people became disabled person for the rest of their life?

[Commentary]
To Help the Residents Make a Living by Themselves
People clamor that there is not much trading in the whole country. The food price has not increased significantly, but nobody is buying. “The spring has come, but (people) can’t feel spring.” So, in North Korea, people’s sensory temperature is still below zero. As for the reasons for slow business, the first is the control on residents’ movement from one place to another. Moving around was not done freely in the past either. On top of that, dilapidated transportation and outdated system, and if you add high travel expenses, not many people can afford to travel to different places. But this time, the election of delegates to the Twelfth Supreme People’s Assembly conducted on March 8 served as the biggest variable. As the election drew near traveling from one place to another was strictly controlled for the whole population. Businesses can only thrive when people and money move around. When the movement is prohibited businesses stay frozen.
Second, as an extension to the first reason above, residents do not have money. Except for some moneylenders, farmers and workers have no sources of income. For farmers their cash receipt for the year is at most 2,000-3,000 NK won. They can’t even buy one kg of bean oil (5,500 NK won) with that money. They have to sell food to get money to buy other necessities, but food is not selling because city workers are not buying. Many of the city workers make a living by doing business. But the logistics of the traffic control was too strict this time. So, the merchandise could not be traded. In addition, a significant restriction on business merchandise (items) made the situation even worse. This is why people are not buying food, even though the price was not drastically increased.
Even though the election is over the market is still not gaining vibrancy. Right after the election, the North Koran authorities announced restrictions of the marketplace again. Throughout the nation, Hoeryong and Pyongyang are the only cities where people are receiving food distribution. They have announced that from April the amount of distribution will be cut in half even in the central district of Pyongyang. Other local residents have to take care of food problem on their own. The attempt to put restrictions on the
marketplace again doesn’t seem to be appropriate step under this circumstance. If they put restrictions on the market after having alternative solutions in place, it would not be too late. Repeated crack down on marketplace, even though it is ineffective, only creates difficulties in the livelihood of the people, and lowers the people’s trust in the Party. If people have to take care of food problem on their own, they should be allowed to do business for a limited time. It is reported that in some areas they are beginning to allow young women in difficult economic situations to do business. This is one step in the right direction, and we welcome it. Those women in vulnerable class that has difficulty earning a meal a day should be given room for breathing. Anyhow, people can only make living when the marketplace is alive. People’s survival issue is too crucial to sacrifice the function of the marketplace because of some partial problems. We look forward to a day when people feel the warm spring, the sooner the better.

[Investigative Report]

Tale of a Woman’s Relocation To A Rural Village; “The empty grain sacks were collected with the promise of being filled with rations, but that promise was a lie.”

Last fall, all of our family moved to Sungchun County of South Pyongan Province. This so-called move was really an exile. When I first found out about the exile, the whole world looked so gloomy. All I could think of was, “We are all dead.” I was born in Pyongyang and have lived all my life there. I performed well academically all the way through college. I expected to live in Pyongyang and never imagined that I had to leave Pyongyang. All of a sudden, the head of our household received an order committing him to exile because of some work-related problem in the field of foreign trade. There was nothing we could do. I thought that I could somehow survive wherever I might be. I was determined to survive no matter what. However, when I first arrived at the village, I quickly found that everyday brought its own new shocking development. The following are some examples.

It was just before harvest time. It was announced that the assessment of the expected crop output was good. There would be enough grain left for us after setting aside the military provisions. The leftover grain will be divided among the farmers like us. Everyone was happy and worked hard during the harvest.

We were greatly encouraged when we each received a bowl of white rice from the new crop. I really did not appreciate a bowl of white rice that much because I always had meals of white rice while living in Pyongyang. What I found out later was that during last spring, many people living in the area had lost their lives to starvation. I was told that there was no family that had not lost one or two members to starvation. It was hard to believe at first, but experience tells me that all the families were too poor to afford even corn porridge, not to mention solid corn meals. I thought I would probably end up like them. Anyhow, these are the people who could never afford white rice meals, and a bowl of white rice as an evening snack made them look really happy.

Something started happening. When harvest work started, soldiers came. They worked hard with us, the farmers, which made us think they volunteered to support us. When the harvest work was done and the filled grain sacks were stacked up, military trucks came and...
left with all the filled grain sacks on them. They even took some grain that the work unit manager hid in anticipation of a food shortage in the spring. It was scary and surprising. Was I the only one who saw this?

A few days later, we were asked to donate two empty grain sacks for a ration of 98 Kg of unprocessed rice that would last our family of three two months. We felt grateful and tried to give two new sacks, upon seeing which the woman next door said, “Why do you want to give up new ones? Give them old ones.”

“Isn’t the ration real?”

“That talk of ration is a lie.”

I followed her advice and gave the old ones. I could not believe it, but no rations appeared ever since we gave away those old sacks long ago. In the meantime, they handed us a pound of noodles made of rotten corn, and told us that it was in place of the ration. I was stunned, and asked the woman next door.

“How come nobody protests this?”

The woman looked really amazed and said.

“To whom? How? Watch your mouth. You might get arrested.”

I thought to myself, “Isn’t this a modern version of slavery?”

There is another thing. At around the time when general residents met for cash distribution, I asked several people how much they received. The most amount any family received from the annual distribution was 2,800 NK won after all the deductions. Some families even asked me not to mention it.

“Minus. Minus. What else is there to say? Don’t even talk about it.”

“Then where do you get the money to buy oil, soap, footwear, matches, and everything else you need?”

“Trade with corn. There isn’t even a single grain of corn left. A box to serve as furniture and a blanket, that’s all we need. We cannot afford the oiled-paper cover for the floor in the room.”

Things are happening which I could not imagine while in Pyongyang. These hardships are reality here. I was with my youngest daughter when she started kindergarten. She needed to be relieved and I took her to the restroom. There was no hygienic tissue. Do you know what you are supposed to use? You are supposed to wipe out with corncob.

I was stunned and didn’t know what to say. My child started whining and I ended up hitting her rear because I got angry with myself.

In another episode, the head of our work unit asked for a loan of 100,000 NK won. He promised to pay it back with 200 Kg of corn. I loaned him that amount because I thought I could trust him, and I could afford that amount. It turned out that I was naïve. All he paid back was 100 Kg of corn. It was useless to fight with him. He said he didn’t have any corn. I am worried. Our family needs at least 300 Kg to last until the next harvest time. While we lived in Pyongyang, I did not have any problem with two meals a day. But here, I feel so hungry. Working at a farm, collecting water and gathering firewood, all these chores make me really hungry. People say the scariest time is the spring. They say you should never fill your stomach even when you have enough to eat. You should save and save food. Because we do not know when our money may run out, we do not even dream of eating bowls of
white rice. And yet, we could not eat as others do. Other families have two meals of porridge made of ground corn and the third meal of three or four boiled potatoes.
Would you believe that there are so many thieves in this poor village? These days, there are many people coming to this village mining gold dust and gathering firewood. One day, a family reported a theft of a few boiled potatoes and corn porridge that was prepared for a family of five. Even the dried turnip greens for two puppies were stolen. Village residents whisper that the thieves might be the soldiers from the military hospital that treats soldiers suffering from malnutrition. We thought theft was someone else’s problem, not anymore. We understand why the thieves took corn, but can you imagine anyone wanting to take large cooking pot from the kitchen? Stunned and amazed, I did not know what to say. Everyday is a day of shock. Now I understand why people call our republic the “Pyongyang Republic,” and I feel it every day. I wrote a letter asking my sister who lives in the Joong District to send some money: “Older Sister, Be appreciative of living in Pyongyang. Do not become like me. You should never leave the city.” No matter what, I should survive. It does not seem easy to survive.
Good Friends: Center for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees

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Good Friends – An International NGO for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees

Good Friends provides relief works for international refugees to become all lives’ friend, peace movement to fundamentally resolve disputes and conflicts that human beings face, and human rights movement to protect human rights.

Good Friends has been providing information on food shortages in North Korea, raising funds for humanitarian assistance, dispatching activists to national border areas between China and DPRK and having them investigate local situations, and publishing reports on food shortages in North Korea.

Now Good Friends USA intends to improve humanitarian and human rights situation of North Korean residents and to inform this situation to the international community by

1) collecting information on severe food shortages and bad situations in health, education, and transportation and providing them to other humanitarian aids organizations so that they can support North Korean people effectively.

2) investigating current situations of North Korean refugees in China, and providing protections and aids for them.

3) assessing human rights violations occurring in North Korea, informing them to the international societies, and requesting the North Korean government for improvement on human rights and living conditions.

Also, Good Friends USA publishes the newsletter North Korea Today (English edition) to inform the international public.

You can make a difference by donating to Good Friends USA, Inc. Contributions to the Good Friends USA, Inc. (a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code) are tax deductible.

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For more information, please contact us.

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