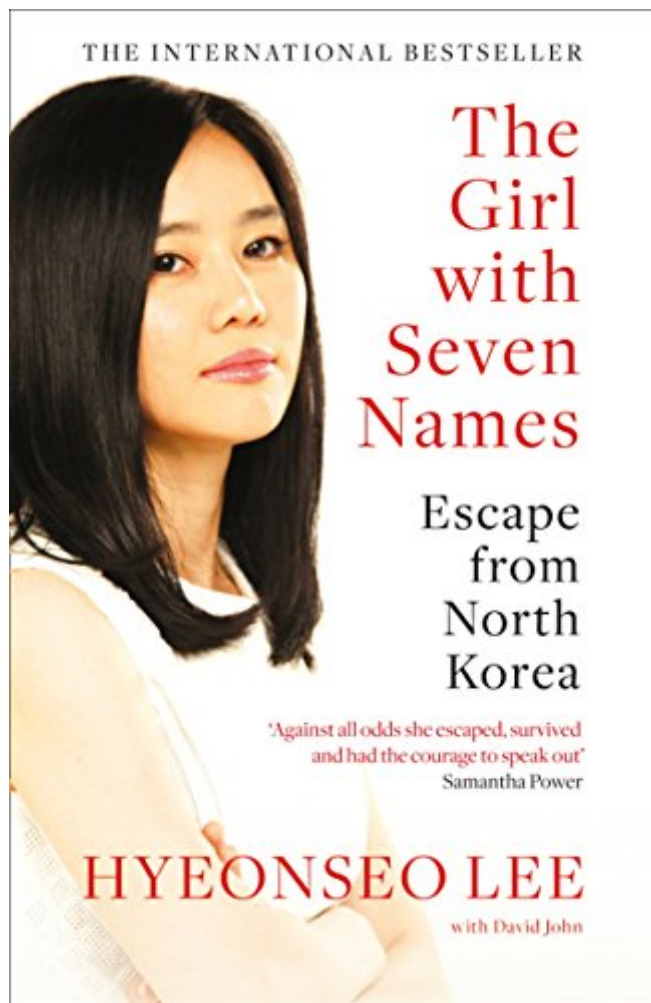


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# The Girl With Seven Names: A North Korean Defector's Story



## Synopsis

**NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER** An extraordinary insight into life under one of the world's most ruthless and secretive dictatorships and the story of one woman's terrifying struggle to avoid capture/repatriation and guide her family to freedom. As a child growing up in North Korea, Hyeonseo Lee was one of millions trapped by a secretive and brutal communist regime. Her home on the border with China gave her some exposure to the world beyond the confines of the Hermit Kingdom and, as the famine of the 1990s struck, she began to wonder, question and to realise that she had been brainwashed her entire life. Given the repression, poverty and starvation she witnessed surely her country could not be, as she had been told "the best on the planet". Aged seventeen, she decided to escape North Korea. She could not have imagined that it would be twelve years before she was reunited with her family.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I've read several accounts of escaping from North Korea. This is a good one because it covers several subjects that are not covered in other books. For example Hyeonseo grew up right on the border next to the Yalu river. There is extensive discussion of cross border smuggling in the book as her mother and other relatives were participants in this trade. Being so close to the border they could also get Chinese cell phone service and calls could be made to North Korea using Chinese cells. The other thing that is quite different about her story is that she spent more than a decade in China and was continually hiding from being discovered as an illegal there. In one period she mentioned to others that she was from North Korea and it's clear somebody reported her. She withstood an interrogation by the Chinese police and was able to convince them she was Chinese due to her ability to speak Mandarin and her mastery of Chinese characters, which she attributes to her father pushing her to study while she was in school. She has dangerous interactions with gangs, which she survives, was assaulted badly by an unknown assailant with a 1 liter beer bottle, an incident that did put her in the hospital and other adventures. One learns a bit about China and North Korea in this book. She has relatives which span several classes of North Korean society and one can get a feeling for what those strata are like. She also talks about the great amount of indoctrination she received during her education, of course this is common among the accounts of DPRK defectors. Different that most of the defectors books she does describe the challenges facing defectors in South Korea. Their education is worthless and hence most of them severely struggle to obtain a college degree, which is important in South Korea. She also describes the process by which they vet defectors as well as the interrogation techniques of the Chinese police. Once she has made it to South Korea she brings her mother and brother out of North Korea. This activity has several difficult twists which meant that the plan had to change in major ways on the fly and the challenges of getting through China to another country to defect to a South Korean embassy are shown. They chose Laos, a backwater whose insufferable bureaucracy and corrupt civil service made things hard. A very helpful Australian saves the day. The story is interesting and one learns a fair bit about North Korea and China.

Few people that live outside North Korea (myself included) can fully understand the brutal horror that is a daily reality for the average people who are enslaved there. This book goes a long way toward offering us outsiders a closer glimpse. Written by someone who lived in North Korea during their youth, escaped to China, then went through the near-impossible, fourteen-year process of helping her mother and brother successfully escape to the freedom of South Korea; this electrifying account of the struggle against one of the most chilling dictators alive on the planet today is a must

read for anyone to come to grips with the stark terror that can be created by a psychopathic dictator.

I ordered this book after I saw her TED Talk on YouTube. I will admit that I haven't been reading as much as I would like to, as it seems there is always something else that takes my time. However, I cruised through this book in a couple of days. This brave young woman's story needs to be shared to the whole world. Her journey to freedom is just incredible, and that is just part of this amazing story. How she helped free her Mother and Brother is gripping as well. I highly recommend this book, as it is a real page turner.

A very well told story of a country so foreign and out of our time it is hard to believe, but I do! I was so amazed to find how terribly difficult it is for North Koreans to escape the clutches of their country; both physically and mentally. We were so shocked at the display of grief after the death of Kim Jung- Il and now it makes more sense. It is so hard to imagine being brainwashed and deprived of knowledge as they are when we have access to such riches of information swirling around us daily and take it for granted. A must read to help those of us fortunate enough to have been born free to realize the depth of need in other countries still. Highly recommend for teens and up.

"The Girl With Seven Names" is a fascinating, yet horrifying look behind the curtain of despotic rule that is communist North Korea. From the start, readers know that the author has successfully defected and lived to tell about it, but the tension and suspense in the story come from a never-ending series of obstacles, bad coincidences, and narrow escapes. Bribery is everywhere for everything, including safe passage and fake identification papers. After sneaking across a river into China at the age of 17, Hyeonseo Lee (her seventh name) pretended to be a Chinese Korean. She lived in fear of being deported to North Korea if authorities found out she was an illegal immigrant. Discovery would mean that she and her whole family would be sent to prison camps and tortured or executed. After 11 years of this charade, Hyeonseo could take the pressure no more and decided to flee to South Korea, where she would immediately be given asylum and full citizenship rights. Getting there was only the most dangerous part of the challenge. Adjusting to life in a democracy was more difficult than it would seem, and she longed to be reunited with her mother and brother who were still in North Korea. The family developed an escape scheme, but nothing went according to plan. Don't be surprised if you find your heart pumping as you read of Hyeonseo's heroic improvisations when things go wrong. After finishing the book, I watched the author's TED Talk on YouTube. I recommend both the book and the video.

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