



Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea

By Barbara Demick

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A National Book Award finalist and National Book Critics Circle finalist, Barbara Demick's *Nothing to Envy* is a remarkable view into North Korea, as seen through the lives of six ordinary citizens

Award-winning journalist Barbara Demick follows the lives of six North Korean citizens over fifteen years—a chaotic period that saw the death of Kim Il-sung, the rise to power of his son Kim Jong-il, and a devastating famine that killed one-fifth of the population. Demick brings to life what it means to be living under the most repressive totalitarian regime today—an Orwellian world that is by choice not connected to the Internet, where displays of affection are punished, informants are rewarded, and an offhand remark can send a person to the gulag for life. Demick takes us deep inside the country, beyond the reach of government censors, and through meticulous and sensitive reporting we see her subjects fall in love, raise families, nurture ambitions, and struggle for survival. One by one, we witness their profound, life-altering disillusionment with the government and their realization that, rather than providing them with lives of abundance, their country has betrayed them.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. A fascinating and deeply personal look at the lives of six defectors from the repressive totalitarian regime of the Republic of North Korea, in which Demick, an *L.A. Times* staffer and former Seoul bureau chief, draws out details of daily life that would not otherwise be known to Western eyes because of the near-complete media censorship north of the arbitrary border drawn after Japan's surrender ending WWII. As she reveals, ordinary life in North Korea by the 1990s became a parade of horrors, where famine killed millions, manufacturing and trade virtually ceased, salaries went unpaid, medical care failed, and people became accustomed to stepping over dead bodies lying in the streets. Her terrifying depiction of North Korea from the night sky, where the entire area is blacked out from failure of the electrical grid, contrasts vividly with the propaganda on the ground below urging the country's worker-citizens to believe that they are the envy of the world. Thorough interviews recall the tremendous difficulty of daily life under the regime, as these six characters reveal the emotional and cultural turmoil that finally caused each to make the dangerous choice to leave. As Demick weaves their stories together with the hidden history of the country's descent into chaos, she skillfully re-creates these captivating and moving personal journeys. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review In spite of the strict restrictions on foreign press, award-winning journalist Demick caught telling glimpses of just how surreal and mournful life is in North Korea. Her chilling impressions of a dreary, muffled, and depleted land are juxtaposed with a uniquely to-the-point history of how North Korea became an industrialized Communist nation supported by the Soviet Union and China and ruled by Kim Il Sung, then collapsed catastrophically into poverty, darkness, and starvation under the dictator's son, Kim Jong Il. Demick's bracing chronicle of the horrific consequences of decades of brutality provide the context for the wrenching life stories of North Korean defectors who confided in Demick. Mi-ran explains that even though her "tainted blood" (her father was a South Korean POW) kept her apart from the man she loved, she managed to become a teacher, only to watch her starving students waste away. Dr. Kim Ki-eum could do nothing to help her dying patients. Mrs. Song, a model citizen, was finally forced to face cruel facts. Strongly written and gracefully structured, Demick's potent blend of personal narratives and piercing journalism vividly and evocatively portrays courageous individuals and a tyrannized state within a saga of unfathomable suffering punctuated by faint glimmers of hope. --Donna Seaman

Review

"The narrow boundaries of our knowledge have expanded radically with the publication of *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Barbara Demick's *Nothing To Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*...Elegantly structured and written, *Nothing To Envy* is a groundbreaking work of literary nonfiction."--*Slate*

"Excellent... lovely work of narrative nonfiction....a book that offers extensive evidence of the author's deep knowledge of this country while keeping its sights firmly on individual stories and human details."--*New York Times*

"A deeply moving book."-- *Wall Street Journal*

"Superbly reported account of life in North Korea"-- *Bloomberg*

“There’s a simple way to determine how well a journalist has reported a story, internalized the details, seized control of the narrative and produced good work. When you read the result, you forget the journalist is there. Barbara Demick, the Los Angeles Times’ Beijing bureau chief, has aced that test in “Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea,” a clear-eyed and deeply reported look at one of the world’s most dismal places.” – *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

“The ring of authority as well as the suspense of a novel.” – *Washington Times*

“Excellent new book is one of only a few that have made full use of the testimony of North Korean refugees and defectors. A delightful, easy-to-read work of literary nonfiction, it humanizes a downtrodden, long-suffering people whose individual lives, hopes and dreams are so little known abroad that North Koreans are often compared to robots... The tale of the star-crossed lovers, Jun-sang and Mi-ran, is so charming as to have inspired reports that Hollywood might be interested.” – *San Francisco Chronicle*

“In a stunning work of investigation, Barbara Demick removes North Korea’s mask to reveal what lies beneath its media censorship and repressive dictatorship.” – *Daily Beast*

“In spite of the strict restrictions on foreign press, awardwinning journalist Demick caught telling glimpses of just how surreal and mournful life is in North Korea... Strongly written and gracefully structured, Demick’s potent blend of personal narratives and piercing journalism vividly and evocatively portrays courageous individuals and a tyrannized state.” – *Booklist*

“A fascinating and deeply personal look at the lives of six defectors from the repressive totalitarian regime of the Republic of North Korea... As Demick weaves their stories together with the hidden history of the country’s descent into chaos, she skillfully re-creates these captivating and moving personal journeys.” – *Publishers Weekly*

“These are the stories you’ll never hear from North Korea’s state news agency.” – *New York Post*

“At times a page-turner, at others an intimate study in totalitarian psychology. Demick... takes us inside the minds of her subjects, rendering them as complex, often compelling characters – not the brainwashed parodies we see marching in unison in TV reports.” – *Philadelphia Inquirer*

“The last time I read a book with something truly harrowing or pitiful or sad on every page it was Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, and those characters had the good fortune to not be real.” – *St. Louis Magazine*

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jesus Novak:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important action, like looking for your favorite guide and reading a e-book. Beside you can solve your short lived problem; you can add your knowledge by the reserve entitled *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*. Try to face the book *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* as your buddy. It means that it can to be your friend when you experience alone and beside associated with course make you smarter than ever before.

Yeah, it is very fortunate for yourself. The book makes you considerably more confident because you can know almost everything by the book. So, we should make new experience as well as knowledge with this book.

Charles Davis:

Spent a free the perfect time to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their free time with their family, or all their friends. Usually they doing activity like watching television, gonna beach, or picnic in the park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Might be reading a book could be option to fill your free time/ holiday. The first thing that you will ask may be what kinds of guide that you should read. If you want to try look for book, may be the publication untitled Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea can be very good book to read. May be it could be best activity to you.

Mattie Regan:

Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea can be one of your basic books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that could increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort that will put every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea but doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest along with based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be one among it. This great information could drawn you into new stage of crucial pondering.

John Edwards:

In this era globalization it is important to someone to receive information. The information will make a professional understand the condition of the world. The healthiness of the world makes the information much easier to share. You can find a lot of references to get information example: internet, magazine, book, and soon. You will see that now, a lot of publisher that print many kinds of book. Often the book that recommended for your requirements is Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea this reserve consist a lot of the information on the condition of this world now. This specific book was represented so why is the world has grown up. The terminology styles that writer make usage of to explain it is easy to understand. Typically the writer made some study when he makes this book. This is why this book suited all of you.

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