



# Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea

By Barbara Demick

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**Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea** By Barbara Demick

**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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**Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea By Barbara Demick Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #3042 in Books
- Brand: Spiegel Grau
- Published on: 2010-09-21
- Released on: 2010-09-21
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.99" h x .77" w x 5.16" l, .57 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 336 pages



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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.)

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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:

#### Charles Felton:

The reason why? Because this Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea is an unordinary book that the inside of the guide waiting for you to snap the idea but latter it will shock you with the secret this inside. Reading this book next to it was fantastic author who all write the book in such awesome way makes the content within easier to understand, entertaining way but still convey the meaning totally. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this anymore or you going to regret it. This book will give you a lot of

rewards than the other book have such as help improving your skill and your critical thinking approach. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I had been you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

**Raymond Murray:**

Do you one of the book lovers? If so, do you ever feeling doubt when you are in the book store? Attempt to pick one book that you find out the inside because don't assess book by its protect may doesn't work here is difficult job because you are afraid that the inside maybe not because fantastic as in the outside look likes. Maybe you answer can be Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea why because the great cover that make you consider concerning the content will not disappoint anyone. The inside or content is definitely fantastic as the outside or maybe cover. Your reading 6th sense will directly direct you to pick up this book.

**Carolyn Rodriguez:**

Are you kind of active person, only have 10 or even 15 minute in your morning to upgrading your mind proficiency or thinking skill possibly analytical thinking? Then you have problem with the book compared to can satisfy your short time to read it because this time you only find book that need more time to be examine. Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea can be your answer as it can be read by anyone who have those short spare time problems.

**Dixie Jones:**

Many people spending their time by playing outside along with friends, fun activity together with family or just watching TV the whole day. You can have new activity to spend your whole day by looking at a book. Ugh, you think reading a book really can hard because you have to use the book everywhere? It all right you can have the e-book, getting everywhere you want in your Smart phone. Like Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea which is having the e-book version. So , try out this book? Let's view.

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