

*Every Falling Star: The True Story of How I Survived and Escaped North Korea* by Sungju Lee

This biography, an Illinois Teen Reader Choice for the Lincoln Award 2021, caught my eye because I couldn't remember reading a first-person account by anyone who escaped North Korea, though I know the country is known for its extreme form of Communism and the suffering of its people. Now I feel I've had a glimpse into just how awful the conditions were and continue to be for nearly everyone there. Lee tells how he and his parents, once part of the military elite, were suddenly sent out of the capital city and resettled in a poor area where work is not paid and food is harder and harder to get. Both of Lee's parents eventually leave him, risking illegal travel to China to ensure their family will survive. Hearing nothing from them for years, Lee has to face life as a street boy and eventually as part of a gang in order to eat. An excellent account for teens and adults as well, covering the history of North Korea and life during famine, it ends on a brighter note as Lee manages a harrowing escape.