

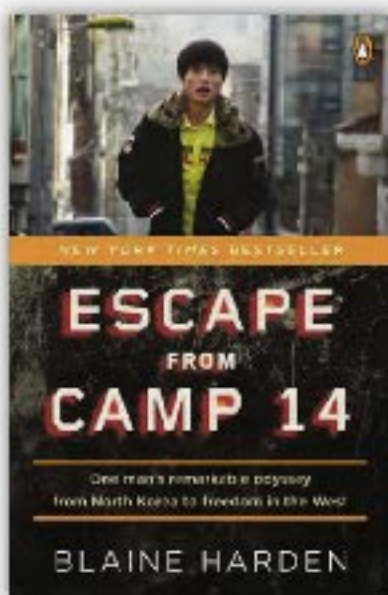
Against All Odds

Camp 14's only known escaped prisoner finds redemption

REVIEW BY CRAIG SMITH

As the noose was placed around her neck, Shin Dong-Hyuk's mother searched the crowd for her son. When she finally made eye contact, Shin averted his gaze while his struggling mother took her last breath. Just then, Shin heard the firing squad open up on his brother, who had been tied to a post. In a matter of seconds, Shin lost two of his three family members. Under normal circumstances, this abandoned son would be the object of sympathy. But in this case, the lonely boy was the cause of the executions.

This remains one of Shin's earliest memories of Camp 14, his birthplace and one of six North Korean political prisons where citizens are sent if they are considered enemies of the state. A person can be declared an enemy simply for speaking out against the North Korean government, and if a person is charged with this crime, his entire family—including extended family—is



detained in abysmal conditions.

Escape from Camp 14 chronicles Shin's life before and after his escape from the infamous prison. He is the only prisoner known to have escaped, but before he did, he lived a life of dishonesty, unable

to trust anyone. His childhood consisted of stealing, snitching, starvation and frequent beatings. After decades of hardship, Shin fled to China before spending time in South Korea and the United States where he learned what constitutes civility, compassion and friendship. His heart drastically changed, Shin truly regrets his transgressions while living in the camp and is now a human rights activist.

Shin's story is one that needs to be heard, and author Blaine Harden tells it well. In graphic detail, the book describes the horrendous conditions of the camp and Shin's demoralization.

Shin's rediscovery of his humanity is truly moving—a testament to the fact that despite how far a person has strayed from the path, it's never too late for redemption.

Craig Smith was a summer intern in The Salvation Army's editorial department.