

THE BUSINESSMAN: A PATRIOT

**Foreign Languages Publishing House
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Song Tae Gwan
(August 29, 1912- January 11, 1994)

PREFACE

Someone said, “Writing is not reserved for anyone.”

But I dared to write this book; it was not because my life experience was extraordinary nor my writing skills were outstanding.

Once a young journalist came to me and said that he was going to write about my father.

As soon as I heard what he said, I thought that the book which another man would write based on my memory would not be better than a book written by me though I am not good at writing.

I also remembered that many had written about their mothers, but not about their fathers.

This urged me to take a pen with the thought that I also could write, not just to boast about my father, but to describe his career without any affectation.

My father lived all his life to earn money.

“Do it today, tomorrow never comes,” this was what I heard often in my childhood.

I saw in my childhood that he was working pressed by time.

How could such an ordinary man, a private businessman, who lived for money, become a patriotic martyr?

I just want to write in this book how this businessman greeted a turning point in his career and led an honourable life.

Song Song Hui

Preface

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1. My Father

There were seven children in my family. But among my siblings my father loved me best, and would take me with him wherever he went. Whether it was because I was the last one of his children or whether it was because I bore a striking resemblance of him, I don't know.

When I began to know the world, he would say, "Whatever you do, be the first one" and "The time gone never comes back," combining these instructions with the stories of his past life.

In those days I came to know his life of the past and its "secrets" one after another, which even my elder brothers did not know.

The "secrets" never implied anything dreadful like world-startling events, murder or robbery.

He had nothing hidden in his life; he even refused to take a wallet with him.

He had no time to look backwards; as he had to think what to do in the future, he was always busy.

Some people may think he had inherited a large fortune

from his father, but he was the son of a Buddhist monk. As this fact is related with a very strange story, I am going to start his story from here.

Son of a Monk

In the mid-19th century a baby was born in a peasant family in Hoedok County, Chungchong Province, Korea.

The baby was a source of happiness for the poor family, and it grew up to be a healthy boy.

But the happiness did not last long; his parents died, leaving their children behind.

The boy, together with his sister, became a wanderer; to make the matter worse, his sister died on the road.

The boy went on his way without any destination. When he reached at last at Hyangsan in North Phyongan Province, he was so ill and starved that he fell down on the road.

At that time a monk who was passing by took him to his temple out of pity.

That boy was my grandfather, Song Kyong Hwan. This is how he became a monk.

With the passage of time, the boy became an old man in his 60s.

One spring day, when he was passing Janghung-ri in Sukchon County, he felt thirsty, so he asked a woman, who was cleaning rice by a spring, a cup of water. The woman dipped water with a gourd, and gave it to the monk. He was attracted to her. He was 63 years old at that time.

He kept missing her and at last he returned to secular life, so to speak.

He bought land and an orchard, begetting two daughters first and then a son, my father (August 29, 1912), when he was 68 years old.

How happy my grandfather must have been as he fathered a son in the twilight years of his life! He went from house to house to ask for honey.

Everyone was surprised to see my grandfather asking for honey.

“Honey? Another baby?”

“Yes, a boy this time,” he would say proudly.

Because of his unfamiliar start of his life, his mother’s love for him was extraordinary. She had three sons by her first marriage, but the boy she mothered with an apostate monk was somebody peculiar for her, apparently because he was extremely clever from his childhood.

When he graduated from a primary school, she enrolled him at Sungdok Middle School in the far away Nyongbyon County. In his third year at the school, his mother called him to the house.

The earnings from the small orchard would go away any moment by gambling of her sons from her first husband. She decided to pin her last hope to the clever and honest-minded last son.

So after leaving middle school mid-course, my father returned home and launched into business with 40 apple trees. How to make money with the orchard and to make that money beget money depended entirely on him.

Formerly the apples had been taken and sold in Sinuiju. But my father took the apples to Kanggye and sold them at much higher price; the earnings almost doubled. Apple was a rare fruit in the inland area north of Kanggye. He chose a method, which was contrary to the peddler’s style employed by his stepbrothers.

He never wasted even a penny; he gave all the earnings to his mother. His mother, who had been waiting for him on the hill in the village, was so surprised sometimes that she wondered whether he had stolen the money.

My father was a man of economy; he refused to go to a restaurant or a pub. He thought it wasteful to buy even a pancake.

He never spent even a penny for a luxurious life or for a project without any interests.

For Grandet from the novel *Eugenie Grandet* by Honore de Balzac, it was a pleasure of his life to listen to the clattering sound of the gold coins in the sack. As for my father, he earned money with all his might, and he knew where to spend it. (I will describe it in the latter part of the book.)

His first transactions were successful. He seemed to have an inborn talent in earning money.

Later he put his hand to various wholesale trades, laying solid foundations for business.

Another cornerstone of these foundations was his marriage to Kim Thae Bok, my mother, in 1935. My mother was a daughter of a clergyman.

My maternal grandfather, Kim In Gu, a hot-blood soldier guarding the royal palace of the feudal Joseon dynasty, went to a seminary in East Pyongyang to obtain the identity of a priest when the army of the dynasty had been dissolved by the Japanese imperialists.

Having grown in such a family, my mother was quiet, clean and considerate. When she heard the talk of her marriage, she went to my father's village, only to find that the poor village and the young merchant were not to her liking.

When she was going back to Pyongyang, my father checked her. This scene gives a glimpse of the temperament of my father, who made decisions when he was interested.

My father, a man possessed of wisdom and determination, said to her: Let's go to Pyongyang. If you don't like this place, I'll go to Pyongyang. I'll sell my land and orchard.

My mother did not say anything, dropping her head and scratching the earth underneath her with her shoe toe.

Although he was a man of dark complexion with a square face and thick lips, he had a masculine temperament of making important decisions related to his life at once, which bound the fair and clean-faced girl, my mother, with an invisible stay.

This was how my parents struck roots in Pyongyang. The marriage story of my father and mother had something in common with that of my grandfather, I think.

I still feel curious how a son of a Buddhist monk and a daughter of a Christian clergyman could leave side by side

for Pyongyang with one aim—business.

I cannot explain it appropriately. It is a pity that I am not a professional writer.

My father's decision of that day to leave for Pyongyang was the beginning of his new career.

He first set up a rice-cleaning business in Taephyong, which was followed by hosiery business and wholesale business.

His businesses flourished; he made lots of money, had many acquaintances and was well known as a successful businessman.

But that did not last long; the war in the Pacific reached its height and accordingly the exploitation of the Koreans by the Japanese imperialists got more brutal.

The Japanese imperialists cruelly exploited the Koreans; they extracted oil from castor beans and even from pine resin, shouting at the top of their voices, "One drop of oil is precisely one drop of blood."

My father's business was not an exception; it got deteriorated day by day and he was driven to despair.

It was at that time that Korea was liberated. The liberation of the country brought about a dramatic change to his fate.

The joy of liberation made the whole country seethe with dancing and singing; people joined the parades in the streets, shouting, "Long live the liberation of the country!" and speeches crying for the road a new Korea should take were heard in the rallies, social gatherings and open-air meetings. Every one was a self-acclaimed hero and patriot. Even undesirable elements and reactionaries, who disguised themselves as "patriots" and "revolutionaries," shouted for "proletarian dictatorship."

The joy of my father did not last long; there was a rumour that the communists would liquidate all the private property and distribute them among all the people, and the reactionaries who quickly disguised themselves as "chiefs of the security stations" and "heads of the self-defence corps" threatened, blackmailed and walked away the businessmen. My father began to estrange himself from the people.

There was a rumour that the medical doctor, Ri Pyong Hun, who was his acquaintance, was arrested. Ri was charged with being well off with a private hospital and being a "pro-Japanese" living with a Japanese woman as his wife.

My father who was known to have made a lot of money would not be safe.

One day the chief of the supervisory section of a security station (accountant at the Pyongyang Tax Authority before liberation) came with soldiers touting rifles and searched my father's house. He threatened my father, saying that the communist party would liquidate even private businessmen as well as landlords, capitalists and pro-Japanese and forced him to hand over the hidden gold and list of assets.

Even though the country was liberated, it was in disorder.

Frightened at such situation, my father decided to run away.

He wanted to go to Seoul, south Korea, to set up a business there.

He hired two machine boats and loaded cement, corn syrup and even the gold he had hidden, and left for the south.

When he arrived at the Port of Incheon, he called on his old friend, a businessman, recruited workers, hired trucks and transported the things he had brought with him to Seoul.

In Seoul he got much help from his friends.

But something unexpected happened; the US military government in south Korea which took place of the Japanese imperialists after liberation issued a warrant to arrest my father for embezzling the enemy property.

With the help of a friend, my father could avoid the danger and hide in an attic on a back street.

At that time the US military government confiscated large amounts of private property in the name of enemy property, and threatened people, saying that anyone who laid their hands on the enemy property like medical supplies, machines, cement and explosives would be shot to death.

It was of no use to reason with them.

His friend recommended that he should run away, saying that he may be imprisoned.

Then where could he go? He had already run away from the north. My father who had known only money and had to hide even in the liberated country was at a loss.

At that time Seoul was seething with the rumour that General Kim Il Sung who had made a triumphant return to the liberated country would come there.

A preparatory committee to welcome General Kim Il Sung was formed and Mr. Hong Myong Hui became its chairman.

Almost every day many people in Seoul went to the railway station.

One day my father followed those people to the railway

station, only to be shocked to see a notice on a wall of the railway station. On the notice was a list of the wanted, and he was one of them. The notice read that he was a “secret agent” dispatched by the north. They certainly wanted to arrest him without fail.

He had no place to go for help. He really did not know what to do.

One day, his friend shouted, “Mr. Song, come down. Be quick.”

My father thought that was the last day for him, for he conjectured the police had found out his whereabouts.

There was a noise down there. He had to follow his friend.

Those who were laughing and shouting all looked like policemen with shackles and ropes, he recalled later.

In fact, they were waiting to listen to Radio Pyongyang.

They were saying that General Kim Il Sung was going to make a speech. He hurriedly sat down among them.

At last General Kim Il Sung made a speech.

It was October 14, 1945.

My father listened to the speech with bated breath. He did not even know that he was shedding hot tears. When

he heard the great General Kim Il Sung saying that all the people should make contribution to the building of a new nation, those with strength devoting their strength, those with knowledge offering their knowledge, and those with money contributing their money, he shed hot tears.

Whenever he recalled that day, he would say: I felt my eyes opened, as if I suddenly saw a bright sunshine in a dark place; you may not understand it; you may not take it seriously when you read in a book or see in a film, but it is quite different for those who had personally experienced it; it is regrettable that I cannot fully explain my feeling of that day; I wonder how I can explain the moment when we were so moved that we only shed tears.

Kim Il Sung’s appeal of love and trust widely opened the hearts of the millions of the Korean people and illuminated the road a new Korea should take.

My father did not merely shed tears. He decided to go to Pyongyang and make a contribution to the building of a new country.

He headed for the north.

At first, he tried to take a train for Kaesong, but changed his mind when he learned that the police on the train were

checking the people one by one with the photos of the wanted. He was one of them.

He turned back and went to Kanghwa Island, from where he swam across the sea with the help of the ebbing tide.

What made him make such a courageous decision? I believe that he had left for the north remembering Kim Il Sung's speech that all the people should make contributions to the building of a new nation.

On that day a friend who had accompanied him as far as the island bid my father a farewell in tears, "Take care, Mr. Song."

The two friends took different directions; one to the north and the other to the south. They must not have imagined what kind of fate would await them.

My father did not know until he died whether his partners in the south as well as the friend who had bid farewell to him in tears were alive.

It is really a pity; if they were still alive, they would find this passage about his trip to Seoul quite moving.

Following the Shining Light

The first spring after the liberation of the country was coming step by step, bringing a new hope to the people.

My father, who swam across the rough sea with his life at stake to come back to Pyongyang, began his business with pencil production. He thought that schools would be set up and many children would learn how to read and write in the liberated country. Pencils would be in big demand.

Pencil is a small thing but a very valuable one.

My father put his fate on this small pencil.

There were raw materials; the Japanese left piles of timber in the freight stations when they were fleeing.

He was lucky; when he was taking a shelter from the rain under the roof of a house on his way back from a freight station he saw a carpenter, a lathe operator and a worker, who used to make carbon rods at an electrical factory, talking about the ways to find jobs. My father was glad to see them.

My father thought aloud, *Great. I can produce pencils with them.*

And the three men welcomed his proposal.

My father rented a building in a western district in

Pyongyang, bought a wood working lathe and a ventilator, employed eight men and bought graphite from Kanggye.

Some days later his team began producing pencils; he put the brand name *Samcholli* on the pencils, naming after our country which had been called a land of silk embroidery of three thousand *ri* (*samcholli* in Korean).

Samcholli-brand pencils were small things, but no one ever thought that it would record the life of my father in golden letters.

The number of pencils produced in the factory in a day was 300.

A rumour that pencils were under production spread, and many people came to the nameless factory.

But my father never thought that the rumour had been reported to Kim Il Sung.

It was known later that Kim Jong Suk, the anti-Japanese war heroine, reported to Kim Il Sung about the pencils.

Kim Jong Suk told Kim Il Sung that she would go to the factory herself, and visited the pencil factory by the Pothong River with her young son, Kim Jong Il.

The official who accompanied them to the factory recalled later that Kim Il Sung was very pleased to hear the news that

my father had started pencil production.

February 3, 1946 was the very day, when my father's fate was decided.

It was lunch time of that day.

When my father was about to walk out of the gate of the factory, a car stopped by a road near the factory.

A gentleman got off the car and walked towards him, but my father did not realize that the man was General Kim Il Sung, whom the whole nation admired.

He was a young, tall man wearing a coat over a black single-breasted jacket; he looked unusual with sparkling eyes, bright face and impressive dimples.

My father thought he had seen the man somewhere before.

The gentleman approached him, who was nervous, and asked whether it was the pencil factory.

My father said it was.

He asked where Mr. Song was to be seen.

My father was surprised; the gentleman knew his name.

"I am Song Tae Gwan," answered my father.

"Oh, you are Comrade Song Tae Gwan. It's so nice to meet you," said the gentleman with a bright smile on his face.

It was at that moment that my father realized that the gentleman was General Kim Il Sung; the face full of a humane spirit and a broad smile, sonorous voice, sparkling eyes, and ennobling personality It was General Kim Il Sung.

There was a flash light in my father's eyes, and his heart was beating.

When Kim Il Sung shook hands with him, he was so moved that he even failed to say hello to him.

He could hardly breathe because of a shock, he recalled later.

Kim Il Sung said he had come to see the pencil factory and asked him to show him the production site.

It was a factory in name only and was not clean: eight employees were working amidst graphite powder and coal dust.

Kim Il Sung moved his steps to the production site where machines were running.

My father had to follow him in haste.

Kim Il Sung looked at the production site for a while, went to the workers, said hello to them and asked about the number of workers.

My father said eight workers were working.

Kim Il Sung asked about the size of the production site.

My father said the production site was about 350m².

Kim Il Sung went to another place and asked where they brought timber and graphite from.

My father said the wood came from various places and the graphite from Tongbang Mine in Kanggye.

When Kim Il Sung found that the holders of the pencils were made with bass wood, he said they could use red pine as well.

Kim Il Sung asked how many pencils they produced a day.

The answer was 1 500.

He continued: Our country is abundant in graphite; it is nice that we could produce pencils on our own with the materials rich in our country; graphite from Kanggye is good.

He picked a pencil and said: When we were fighting in the mountains, the guerillas wrote on sand because they could not obtain pencils; pencils are valuable; when we returned to the country we worried about the pencils; I was

glad to hear from Mr. Kang Ryang Uk that this factory was producing pencils.

He said he wanted to go to the place where they produced black leads for the pencils.

My father said the place was too lousy to show.

Kim Il Sung said: I have come to see how the pencils are made; I would not mind to see the lousy place.

Kim Il Sung went to the furnace where black leads were fired, and told the workers who greeted him that the coal furnace should be replaced with an electric furnace.

While looking at the black leads coming out from the furnace, Kim Il Sung said to my father and the workers: You are patriots indeed; to solve the problem of pencils is a very important political issue to successfully realize the building of a new democratic Korea, not just a technical issue; owing to the Japanese imperialists' colonial enslavement policy, there are many illiterate Koreans, 2.3 million in the north alone; we badly need pencils since we have to make millions of our valuable children study; even though our people had not been able to learn how to write the Korean language because of hard life under the cruel colonial rule of the Japanese, they hoped to provide their children with pencils;

it was the lifetime wish of our people like the wish of our peasants who wanted to do farming on their own land; we should make sure that their wish come true; the work of educating our children should not be hampered because of lack of pencils.

Frankly speaking, my father was not confident in the future of the factory while operating it.

But Kim Il Sung personally came to the factory, appreciated its production, praised my father and the workers as patriots and encouraged them to make a contribution to the cause of nation building, saying that pencil production was an important undertaking for the future and prosperity of the country, not just a technical issue.

He stepped over to the place where pencils were completed.

The place was full of bad smell of glue and lacquer.

Kim Il Sung went to the workers without caring about such bad smell.

After exchanging greetings with a worker, he picked one pencil out of the pile of the pencils of various colours and looked at it carefully. He asked for a knife to sharpen the pencil.

My father gave him a knife.

Kim Il Sung sharpened the pencil and wrote a few words in his handbook with it.

But the black lead was too hard to write.

Then he said with pleasure: Although there are some shortcomings, these are the pencils made by the Koreans themselves; it is a success.

My father looked up to Kim Il Sung with tears in his eyes.

Kim Il Sung gave an encouragement to my father, saying: As the saying goes, you should not expect too much on your first try; if you continue to try hard, you can make better ones.

My father said he would try hard to make better pencils.

Kim Il Sung asked how the pencils were sold.

At that time the businessmen from different provinces were buying the pencils from the factory but the products were not sufficient in amount.

Kim Il Sung asked what the state could do to help them produce more pencils.

My father suggested that he needed a lorry, a state approval to cut red pines in Kanggye and a building where

a Japanese businessman had been producing pickled turnip.

Kim Il Sung listened to what my father had to say to the last, and said: The state will provide you with a big building, lorry, electric furnace and other equipment, graphite and a certain area of forest for timber so that you can produce good pencils; you can launch into other businesses as well.

That day Kim Il Sung stayed for a long time in the factory even after the lunch time, giving valuable teachings and caring about my father and the workers.

My father felt a lump in his throat as he bade farewell to Kim Il Sung until his car was not seen.

Some days later, on February 20, 1946, Kim Il Sung convened the historic First Session of the Provisional People's Committee of North Korea, where the problem of pencil production was on its agenda.

Later recalling that historic meeting, Kim Il Sung said: You need to know clearly what our Party has done to solve the problem of pencils since the liberation of the country; when we were waging the armed struggle in the mountains, we never thought that we would run into a serious problem of pencils after liberation; pencils were in great demand for

the anti-illiteracy campaign; at that time there was not a pencil factory in our country; that was why we discussed the problem of pencils on the agenda of the First Session of the Provisional People's Committee of North Korea.

Kim Il Sung, even though he was busy building a new country after liberation, attached great importance to the problem of pencils.

And my father paid attention to that problem.

I once asked my father what made him pay attention to the pencils.

He replied with a smile on his face, "I saw money."

He saw money in the pencil!

All businessmen run after money.

My father added in tears: When I listened to the radio speech of Kim Il Sung saying that all the people should contribute to the building of a new society, those with strength devoting their strength, those with knowledge offering their knowledge, and those with money contributing their money, the road in front of me looked very bright; so I swam across the rough sea and came to Pyongyang.

A month later, on April 16 of that year, Kim Il Sung asked Mr. Kang Ryang Uk, the then secretary general of the

Provisional People's Committee of North Korea why a lorry had not been sent to the pencil factory yet, and told him to provide the pencil factory with a lorry first.

Later he called Mr. Kang Ryang Uk again, told him to make sure a lorry was sent to the pencil factory and asked him to convey to my father his message to improve the quality and produce more pencils. Then he assigned for him a certain portion of forests in Mt Oga and provided him with graphite from a mine. He even made contributions to my father's business.

Actually, my father had set up the factory to make money, or at least to donate some of the earnings to the state. For my father, a businessman, money had been all that he had wanted.

But after Kim Il Sung had visited his factory, showed his trust on him and given prominence to him, he turned from a businessman, who had known only money, into a patriotic businessman with national conscience; his eyes which had been focused only on money could see the road of true life, and he was able to follow a broad avenue of life.

Almost every day dealers from all over the country came to the Pyongyang Pencil Factory to get pencils; there used

to be no more pencils left for shops; the dealers took pencils in packages, sacks and suitcases, and came back to get more.

The production increased and the pencils were piled like a mountain every day. And money was piled as much.

But my father handed the factory over to Kanggye because the timber, graphite and other raw materials all came from there, and this was in the interest of the state.

Then he buckled down to the glass and rubber business as he knew that Kim Il Sung was worrying about the shortage of glassware and footwear for the people.

My father set up a glass factory and rubber factory.

Although he was not familiar with them, he recruited experienced workers and technicians and started production. He earned a lot from those businesses, too.

The big demand brought money and that money begot money. The demand increased and the production increased as well.

My father was sitting on the piles of money.

Didn't the money mar his eyes, or drive him back to the past when he had been pursuing money only?

Anyway, some people came to see my father.

One even brought a letter of invitation to come to Seoul,

saying: Please forget the warrant of arrest from the US military government; it was a misunderstanding caused by the indictment by an ill-minded guy; a businessman like you will become a rich man overnight in south Korea; let's work together for a big adventure.

The answer was no. My father turned it down.

He was attracted to the world of obligation that he had to fulfil with all his might.

He did not waver even during the days of the Korean war; hard trials finally tested him—bombing and machine gun fire by the enemy, temporary retreat, and then massacre by the enemy

The enemy arrested and killed at random anyone who supported the DPRK with national principle and conscience, be they religious men, businessmen or medical scientists. They promised to save the lives of those who would say something against the DPRK. It was indeed the days which tested the people's conviction and moral obligation.

There was only one road to take, either that of wealth or that of death.

My father did not think the road for his motherland would mean death.

He believed that victory was assured as long as there was Kim Il Sung, so he worked defying death to make a contribution, though small, to the victory in the war.

He frequently bought food to assist the workers of the munitions factories and war refugees.

In order to make sure that production continued, he did not leave the glass factory even under the enemy's intensive bombardment.

The glass factory turned out various types of syringes and vials and millions of electric bulbs, and the rubber factory produced rubber goods like footwear for the front.

Towards the end of the war, he moved the rubber factory to Kaesong.

Later he recalled: I wanted to show off the smoke of the chimney of my factory before the enemy and shout, "Look at the smoke over there. The DPRK led by General Kim Il Sung is breathing even on the debris."

So in the days of the war, the chimney of the rubber factory blew out smoke in Kaesong.

What would the enemy have thought, seeing the smoke from the chimney?

My father counted this as one of the proudest things he did in his life.

When he was talking about the smoke from the chimney of the factory in Kaesong, he would say with his fists clenched.

I have not seen the smoke, but when I tried to imagine it, I would picture in my mind my father burning piles of "money" to keep his conviction.

My father, a private businessman, became a patriotic businessman, who burned his "material profits" to show off the spiritual will of our people.

After the war, he handed the rubber factory over to the Kaesong City People's Committee as his aim had been achieved.

He would say: I didn't feel tired at that time; I had the belief that we would always win as long as we were led by General Kim Il Sung, and this belief always encouraged me.

During the war he obtained food and clothes with a huge amount of money and donated them to the front as well as money. The following is the amount of money he donated to the front.

300 000 *won* in August 1950

350 000 *won* in December 1951

1.5 million *won* in December 1952

3 million *won* in April 1953

Total 5.15 million *won*

Kim Il Sung was very glad to know about his patriotic deeds. He met my father one day in August 1953. He shook hands with my father, and said: You must have suffered a lot during the war; I was told that you donated millions of *won* to the front even under very difficult conditions of the war; you did a wonderful thing.

When my father was perplexed by his compliments, Kim Il Sung asked him: How could you donate such a large amount of money to the front every year under the difficult conditions of the war?

My father told him the firm conviction he had always kept in his heart: Dear General, I thought that an individual's wealth is not worthy of it without his motherland; what is the use of a large amount of wealth after one has become a slave?

Kim Il Sung was very satisfied to hear that, and said: We

could win the war because patriotic businessmen like you and the entire population supported the front both spiritually and materially.

Later, my father recalled that he had felt as if he had won the whole world at that time, and that he was so excited that he could even hear the beat of his heart.

Indeed, he won the whole world; with patriotic mind, he won the world of great love and trust which could not be bought with gold.

Although he passed away without engraving that truth of life in the sky, I am now telling this in his place.

2. Don't Look Back

Nothing is easy in this world; everything depends on how hard one works. When one is forced to do a thing against one's will, however easy, it is felt to be disgusting, but when one does a thing which one really wants to do, however difficult, it is not that hard.

You should love what you do.

I am not sure whether that is the right expression but if you love what you want to do, you do not feel tired.

My father used to tell me when I was young: Don't say you are tired.

I heard this for the first time when I was eight years old.

When I was under school age, he ensured that my age was registered to be one year older and enrolled me at the dance class of Pyongyang School of Arts, the only one in our country at that time.

The students of the school also participated in the music and dance epic *Our Glorious Motherland* as guest artistes, and the guidance by the famous dancer, Choe Sung Hui, was very strict or rather cruel.

The whole day of running with sweat would make me exhausted.

My father used to say, "Don't complain about the hard work," like the refrain of a song.

I guess it was the concentration of his lifetime experiences and lessons like the saying, "He who does not work shall not eat."

Actually he was a workaholic. I think he loved what he did.

As I look back upon his life while writing this book, I think that the severest period for him was the days of the Korean war and the most difficult trying period was the postwar days.

At the Crossroads of Destiny

The three-year war reduced everything in the country, including my father's factories, to ashes. It was not a problem to set up their buildings again—collecting bricks and building walls with them, setting up chimneys, covering the buildings with roofs and plastering them.

The most important and difficult problem was to equip them with machines. It was next to impossible to obtain generators and motors when the factories and enterprises across the country had been devastated.

However, my father thought of an idea befitting a witty businessman. On hearing a rumour that several vessels had sunk in the sea off Wonsan during the war, he went with lunchbox to the Taedong almost every day, and practised swimming and diving from morning until dusk fell.

The whole city of Pyongyang was vibrant with postwar reconstruction. Everyone toiled, always trying to do more work. In such circumstances, he looked like a blot in the city. Up until then he had been renowned for diligence. People started to say that he must have gone crazy. Even our neighbours who had been kind to him seemed nervous and embarrassed to see him.

To make matters worse, he started to commute to and from the river shortly afterwards carrying a bundle of queer gear—something that looked like a warrior's helmet in a fairy tale, an overall made of rubber and a pair of heavy boots.

This gave rise to an outbreak of many conjectures. Some quick-witted people said that my father was trying to find the gold nuggets which they believed he had hidden under the river during the war. Another rumour had it that he had hidden gold nuggets weighing a total of dozens of kilogrammes around a place where the river joins the Pothong. No matter what others might say, he kept practising diving for more

than a fortnight before leaving for Wonsan. Some readers may wonder why he tried to enter the sea by himself instead of hiring divers.

The reason was quite simple. As a businessman, he just had to check by himself if there were something useful in the vessels and, if any, how they could be taken out. He suffered a lot for another fortnight in Wonsan. As he had no experience in diving, he occasionally had his ears bleeding. However, he finally managed to discover what he wanted, and confirmed their locations. Only then did he hire divers and motor vessels.

The biggest and most valuable among the equipment thus obtained were motors.

Then he set out on a long walk taking a long stick with him. He wanted to measure the heights of all the tunnels on the road from Wonsan to Pyongyang.

He noted on his pocketbook their heights, as well as the heights of the loading platforms of different trucks and the equipment to be carried (the biggest motor in particular). When he found that two places posed a problem, he planned to select suitable trucks and decrease the height of the supporting chocks.

As he walked more than a hundred kilometres to Pyongyang

on foot, his feet blistered, the cracked lips were bleeding and the face was bushy with black beard. You can imagine how surprised the people must have been to see him. No wonder they were astonished to see him with a broad smile on such a face.

The machines, however, were valuable things that could not be easily obtained at that time. His factories were revitalized soon and surpassed their peak production levels, earning more money.

I want to stress here that an increment of a private businessman's income in the difficult postwar economic situation meant that so much contribution had been rendered to the people's living and reconstruction of the damaged economy. However, there were some who did not think this way.

At that time, the country was proactively pushing ahead with the drive to transform the capitalist commerce and industry along the socialist lines.

Most of the businesspeople and merchants were infringing upon the interests of the masses of the working people by various means and methods. While some of them bought fruits and meat at a low price in the rural areas and sold them at a higher price in the urban areas, others handed their products

over to private merchants at a high price instead of delivering them to the state. Still others were busy lining their pockets in conspiracy with impure elements lurking in the government organs and even had no scruples about evading taxes by counterfeiting ledgers. While resorting to speculation and frauds by using price levers, they avoided joining producers' cooperatives.

At the Third Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea in April 1956, Kim Il Sung advanced the policy of transforming the capitalist commerce and industry along the socialist lines as required by the developing revolution.

With this as the background, it was not very surprising that some people looked on my father's business activities with jaundiced eyes.

Some officials raised a doubt as to him, saying he should naturally be the first to respond to the WPK's policy of socialist transformation and join a producers' cooperative because he had enjoyed more care of Kim Il Sung than any other businesspeople since immediately after the country's liberation.

When Kim Il Sung was reported on this, he sent an official of the WPK Central Committee to my father's factory in mid-October 1957 on a mission to grasp its actual situation.

Later Kim Il Sung said: Some people may wonder why Mr. Song has not yet joined a cooperative, still clinging to private business, when he should have done so before anybody else; since the end of the war our Party has vigorously promoted socialist transformation of the private commerce and industry as well as co-operativization in the rural communities; unlike in the private peasant economy, people engaged in the private commerce and industry differ from one another in family background as well as in the economic basis and level of ideological consciousness because there are varied types of business in that field; that is why our Party had to define three types of producers' cooperatives as ones which conformed to the reality of our country's businesspeople; however I was told that Mr. Song could not join either the second or third type, to say nothing of the first one; as the first type is a cooperative for impoverished handicraftsmen, it is not suitable for him who has a certain amount of property; since the second type is semi-socialist in that it takes one's contribution into consideration even when paying according to the quality and quantity of work done, Mr. Song would receive more than those who joined the cooperative with bare hands, and so he could not join the second type because of his conscience; as

for the third type, it is fully socialist in that it takes the means of production and funds contributed as common property of the cooperative and pays only according to the quality and quantity of work done, so the private businessmen who are not prepared politically could not join it without hesitation from the outset; Mr. Song could have joined the third type, but it was not possible for him alone to form a cooperative.

Then he added: When our Party advanced the policy of co-operativization, he volunteered before anybody else that he would offer all his money and means of production to the state without receiving any rewards; but in consideration of the possible repercussion on other men of the private commerce and industry, I told him to continue with his private business for the time being and make necessary preparations for running a relatively big producers' cooperative when cooperatives would develop onto a higher level.

That day he spoke highly of my father, saying: Mr. Song contributed to the provision of war materials by supplying medical syringes and ampoules during the war; he has rendered an active help to socialist construction by building a paper factory and supplying oiled paper sheets for seedbeds when cold-bed rice seedling was applied in the rural areas and by producing various kinds of glass ware.

When my father was informed of what Kim Il Sung had said about him, he was deeply moved.

Once I determined to contribute to nation building as a “man with money.” But now I am not merely a “man with money” but also a “man with strength.” The better my factory runs, the more faithfully I can support the intention of Kim Il Sung. I will redouble my efforts. I will organize a cooperative as soon as possible and thereby actively contribute to socialist construction.

True to his determination, he organized the Pyongyang Manufactured Goods Producers' Cooperative. And later he donated to the state the five million won he had contributed to the cooperative as his share.

Thus, he developed from a private businessman into a socialist worker, another big stride in his career.

However, this big stride was not all plain sailing. In fact, he had agonized a lot before he decided to donate the money. It was all he had.

In the past although he had donated millions of won to the state, he had still some asset left for a new business. But his joining a producers' cooperative, a socialist economic form, put an end to his private business activities. This meant he did not need capital for himself any more.

But as a father of seven children, he must have wanted to share out his property among them.

He must have wanted to provide his children, when they got married, with furniture and kitchen utensils which they would badly need for their new homes. And it was not a shame because all other parents would do the same.

When he took the floor at the National Conference of Activists of Local Industry and Producers' Cooperatives held in mid-October 1959 in the presence of Kim Il Sung, he described his agony of those days in this way:

“As the chairman of a cooperative, I pursued socialism at the cooperative in daytime and did things capitalist at home at night—agonizing over the share worth millions of won. But when I donated all of it to the cooperative, I was greatly relieved so much so that I felt as if I could fly.”

On hearing him, Kim Il Sung praised him, saying with a hearty laugh: “You did a right thing in donating your share to the cooperative.”

Then he gave him a handclap, which was followed by an enthusiastic applause from the audience. The applause implied the highest praise for what he had done for his country and a hope that he would continue to follow the road of patriotism.

Afterwards, he never seemed tired. He used to tell his

children that they should love work, that if they loved work they would never feel tired, and that they should not complain about doing demanding work.

This is how my father worked. Although he donated all his money and worked devotedly and conscientiously for the good of his country and fellow people, he never sought personal fame or position. He worked diligently only for his country and fellow people.

In this way, the private businessman, whom many people regarded as a man to be purged, became a member of the Workers' Party of Korea. In other words, a once-famed businessman became a patriot.

Even in the Twilight of His Life

In 1961 the cooperative, where my father worked as chairman, was renamed Optical Glass Producers' Cooperative, specializing in turning out glasses for spectacles, various lenses and other glassware.

One day in early March 1969, Kim Il Sung called an official of the Party Central Committee on the phone, and said: Now the elderly Party members are saying that they could not read books without glasses, and reading glasses are not available anywhere; please go to the Optical Glass

Producers' Cooperative, find out how many reading glasses they could produce, what they need to produce the glasses and how many more they could produce if they are provided with the necessary materials.

On hearing what the official conveyed to him, my father was so moved on the one hand and scolded himself on the other. As a producer of optical glass, the cooperative should have paid a due concern on the problem of spectacles that were urgently needed by the people. However, my father, who was more sensible to the market demand than anybody else, failed to do so as regards the spectacles.

In those days, factories and enterprises across the country were building trucks, tractors, bulldozers, excavators and electric locomotives, some of them having to rebuild their old and small front gates so that the vehicles built could pass them.

Iron works melted iron at electric furnaces, new fleets of fishing vessels were seen on the sea and presses of thousands-of-tons capacity were produced, demonstrating their might. So nobody had shown concern on spectacles; they had been regarded as a trifle and secondary commodity.

Only after receiving Kim Il Sung's instructions did he think that he was not fully prepared to support his high

intention. And he wrote Kim Il Sung's instructions about the reading glasses for the people on the first page of his handbook for reference.

Always keeping in his mind his instructions, which gave a glimpse of his benevolent image and personality and his earnest request which he had made while always being among the people and sharing weal and woe with them, my father worked day and night to obtain necessary equipment and find out relevant technicians.

At this moment, Kim Il Sung sent him competent technicians and valuable facilities again to lay a cornerstone for my father for launching into a new business.

My father made redoubled efforts to produce spectacles. He was so busy that he could not pay any attention to the future of his youngest daughter he loved most.

I have already mentioned that my father insisted on making an artiste of me. At first he had pictured me dancing on the stage of a large theatre amid the thunderous applause and receiving bouquets of flowers from the audiences. But he had never tried to see me getting fat.

One day when he visited my school, he learned that I had no prospect of becoming a dancer. So he had me moved to a music class.

He had invited a cello player of the National Symphony Orchestra (Ri Yong Su, who was then the best cello player in our country) to my house every evening to teach me. In this way, he had been so meticulous about my future. However, he had directed no concern on me even when I was about to graduate from the Pyongyang School of Arts.

I wonder if he had thought that I must have grown up as a top cello player as I had been taught even at home by a tutor. Apparently because of this, he once told me in passing that I should enter the university of music.

Shaking my head, I said, "No, I won't."

It must have been a great surprise for my father, but he looked calm. Perhaps, he had no time to be surprised by my answer.

That year he was leading a 24-7 campaign to produce a million spectacles; he was concerned only about the production of spectacles. So he might have heard my answer "No" as "Yes."

If it was what Kim Il Sung wanted to be done, he did not hesitate to do anything to perform the task as a Party member.

A month later, while writing down something like figures on his handbook, he asked me about the university life. He

looked to be not so serious with my answer.

I answered that it was not so bad. It was an ambiguous answer, but he asked me no more question, and went on writing. Another month passed. (I guess more than that passed.)

It was around the time when the target of turning out a million spectacles was near to completion. Only then did he learn that I was studying at the Moran Medical College. This fact surprised him. He asked me, "Not the university of music? Then, your cello?"

I explained the reason why I had changed my major; it was a ridiculous answer. "Please imagine the day when I am returning to the homeland after giving performance abroad as an excellent cello player. It is horrible to imagine a fat girl walking down the air plane's staircase together with slender girl artistes. The mere thought of it makes me shudder."

It was not me but my father who was speechless. "Tut, tut!" he clicked his tongue, and continued: "So all of you are for medicine."

He went straight to the factory as the campaign for production was at its height. At last, the cooperative produced one million spectacles.

My father received a compliment and thanks from Kim Il Sung.

On coming back home, he told us: Spectacles are not a big thing nor are they a valuable thing; but I felt as if they were a treasure the leader values; now I feel my eyes becoming clearer; I can see a great affection for the people through the ordinary spectacles.

Over ten years later, when I began to specialize in making spectacles, I used to think about the spectacles and a great affection he had told me then. He must have wanted to say that Kim Il Sung had enlightened him to work sincerely for the good of the people.

In the past Kim Il Sung had helped him, who was only seeking for money, follow the road of genuine patriotism, and now he encouraged him to work sincerely for the good of the people with the bright eyes of a Party member. Under his warm love, my father glorified the remaining days of his life.

I greeted the nineteenth spring that year when I was on the eve of graduating from the medical college. When I was engrossed on preparing for the graduation examination at home, my father abruptly came home. He was quite excited.

I asked him how he came home earlier.

He said that he dropped in at the house on his way to the cooperative, and that he wanted to see me playing the piano.

I could not but be surprised for he asked me to play a musical instrument for the first time after I had chosen the road of becoming a medical doctor like my elder brothers.

I sat in front of the piano and thought for a while what piece I would play. I started playing Beethoven's *Fur Elise* to make him happy.

He shook his head.

As he always loved folk songs, I played *Yangsando*.

He again shook his head and closed his eyes, sitting against the back of the armchair.

I couldn't understand why, but anyhow I could see that he was trying to calm himself down.

So I took the cello and watched him in silence.

He still kept his eyes closed.

Only then did I think that he was trying to hold back his tears.

So I asked quietly, "What happened, pa?"

"Something happened," he answered briefly.

Opening his eyes, he gazed at me and said, "Today the Party Central Committee entrusted me with an important task."

I came to understand the reason why his face turned red with great happiness and pleasure; as he grew older, his complexion had looked unhealthy.

He gasped for breath and said silently, "You know my favourite song, don't you? The song begins with *When the glow appears*. I want to listen to that song."

Only then did I come to know that my father wanted to listen to the song *We Will Remain Faithful Generation after Generation*. I tuned the cello, and applied resin on the bow. Then I saw tears streaming down his cheeks.

I don't know why, but I felt tears gathering in my eyes, too.

I began playing the cello silently.

When the glow appears at dawn

We think of his benign smile

When the stars sparkle at calm night

We yearn for his warm affection

He and I were shedding tears. Nay, all the people in the

country would not be able to hold back tears whenever they sang this song.

Whenever they thought of Kim Jong Il's benevolent and benign smile, they were moved by the surging emotions.

My mind was filled with pleasure and happiness stirring in my father's hearts.

Although my playing was over, he remained on the armchair. After a while, he rose up and put his big hand on my shoulder, before saying: President Kim Il Sung has trusted and given prominence to me so much; now the great Comrade Kim Jong Il trusts me; I have to prove myself worthy of his trust; I must go now to wage a campaign; don't wait for me until I come home again.

He went straight to the factory.

Then why was he so excited?

At that time the problem of producing the glass beads for a monumental edifice was under discussion. A number of officials had claimed that the best option was to import the glass beads from other countries, saying producing them might take much time as it was the first try in our country, and if it failed, the inauguration of the edifice might be delayed.

When Kim Jong Il was told about this, he said to the officials: Let's entrust this task to the Optical Glass Producers' Cooperative where Song Tae Gwan works; he has never failed to perform the tasks Comrade Kim Il Sung gave him since the country's liberation.

This was an expression of great trust in him. Kim Il Sung had taken meticulous care of my father, and now Kim Jong Il was leading him.

Old as he was, he regained youthful vigour. His health got recovered; he greeted springtime of his life.

That year I became 19 years old and my father, 62. There is a saying that an old tree gets hollowed, but my father greeted springtime of his life at 62.

That was why he shed tears of emotion, hearing the song, *We Will Remain Faithful Generation after Generation*. It is regrettable for me that I cannot describe his emotions fully now.

Full of vigour, he embarked on the campaign. Together with the workers and technicians, he drew designs and processed the products with hands and files. Through their 24-7 struggle, they were able to produce one hundred thousand glass beads.

I always see with pride the torch on the top of the

Tower of the Juche Idea, burning rain or snow, for it is also associated with the great trust of Kim Jong Il on my father.

At that time officials were trying to import transparent tempered glass for the torch when a certain factory failed to produce it.

How can we make the torch of the grand monument, which will add eternal brilliance to the immortal Juche idea, with foreign-made glass?

A nominee Kim Jong Il had in mind was none other than my father.

So my father was assigned to produce transparent tempered glass for the torch of the Tower of the Juche Idea.

Kim Jong Il was convinced that my father, though he was nearly 70 years old, would live up to the Party's trust and expectation with loyalty and obligation.

As is known throughout the world, the torch of the Tower of the Juche Idea is an enormous glass structure, as high as a five- or six-storied apartment house. This task was beyond the capacity of my father's factory.

At that time, there was the Nampho Glass Factory, incomparably larger than my father's cooperative, in terms

of equipment and production capacity.

Kim Jong Il, however, gave the task to my father's cooperative with a belief in my father.

He answered without hesitation that he would carry out the task without fail.

Many senior officials were surprised to see my father answering so easily. They were rather wondering whether he could produce it in time.

So many people visited his office, I was told. They all worried about him, but my father's answer was the same: This task was assigned to us by the great leader Comrade Kim Jong Il; we will carry it out, and without fail.

He burned midnight oil with the workers every night. Those days were a season for sports, so football games between the premier league teams were at their height.

Let me make a brief remark of a story about football. To be frank, my father was a workaholic but had one enthusiastic hobby, football. He was not good at playing football. Nay, he did not know how to kick a ball.

One holiday his producers' cooperative arranged a picnic. Officials of the cooperative competed in penalty shootout, one kicking the ball and the other one keeping the goal.

A makeshift goalpost was built on the grass field. The ball

had to be kicked about five metre away from the goalpost. The first kicker was the chairman (my father) and the goal keeper was the Party secretary.

All thought that my father would kick the ball excellently as he was a football fan. The onlookers cheered him enthusiastically. To their surprise, they burst into laughter to see his ball-kicking.

He kicked the ball so hard that his shoe head got stuck in the grass field and earth was scattered in all directions with the ball failing to reach the goalpost.

The earth went into the mouth of the Party secretary, and he lost his bearing.

Since then, my father was nicknamed *football chairman*. As the chairman was a football fan, the cooperative's players could not enter the compound of their cooperative if they had lost a game.

Once he said he was going to an important meeting, and instead went to see the final of the premier league games.

The fact was revealed later as he was seen on TV sitting on a spectator's seat in a stadium; he was so enthusiastically cheering the players that the cameraman turned the camera to him several times.

He liked the high spirit of attack, perseverance and

stamina of the football players. He might have discovered a temperament, something like a thing suitable to his character, in the football players who run tirelessly to the end of the game.

But he never watched a football game of the premier league during the period of the campaign; nay, he never tried to see it. Whenever he was asked to go to see a game, he would say, "That is none of my business. Right now I am driving a ball, too. Only kicking the ball towards the goalpost is left."

Finally, he "shot," and it was a "goal," and it was the ninth test production. They succeeded in producing tempered glass with even stress distribution.

The test was to drop a glass ball (900g) as big as a tennis ball from a point 102 cm high. The ball neither broke nor cracked.

Another test was carried on. A plate glass as wide as one square metre was placed between two bricks, and a man as heavy as 70kg stood on it, but the glass did not break. It was the same case even when another man stepped on it. Lastly, my father mounted on it. Only then did it sound like cracking, so my father got down from it.

The day when they reported it to Kim Jong Il, my father

had a photo taken with the workers and technicians. By nature, he disliked posing for a photo. He always avoided the photographers and cameramen.

Thinking proudly that the efforts of his cooperative and his whole life were enshrined in the production of the torch of the Tower of the Juche Idea, he had a photo taken.

My father used to say with tears in his eyes, "How can I forget the benevolence as long as I live!"

Still now, I never see carelessly every glass bead, chandelier and glass block decorating the monumental edifices.

Especially, whenever I look up at the torch of the Tower of the Juche Idea, I cannot suppress the surging emotions.

I proudly say that the life of my father who led a brilliant life was a proud one.

3. Blessed Life, The Businessman's View of Value

Once overseas Korean businessmen saw tears in the smiling eyes of my father and asked him, "You look leading a genuinely happy life, Mr. Song. It is a matter of fact that a businessman cannot live even a moment free from worry, and how come do you live in comfort and without any worry?"

My father began with witty remarks: Ancient people said that there is a reason why people have two eyes, two ears, two hands and two feet—the two eyes for distinguishing truth from falsehood; the two ears, one for hearing and the other for letting what was heard go away; of the two hands, one for giving and the other for taking; and the two feet for helping each other because if one stands on one foot, one may feel unsteady.

On hearing this, the overseas Koreans laughed cheerfully. One of them said: It seems that is not what the ancient people said; isn't that what you, Mr. Song, say with businessmen in mind?

My father replied with a smile on his face: The

businessmen were always like the candle in front of the wind in any period; it is a usual practice that they always feel uneasy wondering whether their enterprises may go bankrupt any moment like the candle in front of the wind; they are always concerned not to be swindled by others and try hard to win reliable partners even though they are criticized by others; it is no exaggeration to say that the tale about two eyes, two ears, two hands and two feet refer to the businessmen; but I have no fear to be swindled by others because I am running an enterprise in a socialist country, not a capitalist one; mothers don't cheat their children; my motherland would not cheat and extort me; I don't worry if I would be criticized by others for my business activities are aimed at bringing greater profits to the socialist country; and I have no worry about expropriation though I earn a lot of money; I have never lived in suspense with fear like the candle in front of the wind and it is because the great leaders have personally led my life; if a child walks hand in hand with his father, he never falls down; I have followed my road straight forward all my life without falling down.

And he recounted how the great leaders had trained him, once a private businessman, as a patriot and a member of the

Workers' Party of Korea and given prominence to him. He continued that he had not only earned a large sum of money but donated it to his country and fellow people, earning in return the national leader's trust and people's affection, great glory and honour, which could not be bought with millions of tons of gold.

The overseas Koreans gave him a big hand, saying, "You've become the one and only 'socialist millionaire' in the world, a 'millionaire' of socialist Korea, who has earned wealth, both material and spiritual."

From then on my father was called a "socialist millionaire."

This love and trust, the happiness and glory were not all that he enjoyed. Being well over seventy, he was appointed an advisor to the cooperative to help it with his skill and experience.

Not satisfied with just giving advice, he rushed forward vigorously shouldering important tasks upon himself. For him, living was inconceivable separated from working.

He would go to the factory thinking, and come home without saying anything.

But Comrade Kim Jong Il was still remembering him.

On learning about my father, Kim Jong Il saw to it that he was appointed the chairman again.

That day my father held a cup of liquor that his children had filled. This was the first time for him to do so after quitting drinking. I still remember the tears welling in his eyes as he looked at his seven sons and daughters and grandchildren, his hand holding the cup trembling.

He, then seventy-four years old, did not try to conceal the tears. He drank the liquor with the dropped tears. After a few days, he gathered us, and said;

“They say that an old horse knows the way, but to look back upon my past I found I have failed to fulfill my obligation. I have no heir to my job.”

His words had a tremendous impact on us. I felt the past days when I would put on airs as a doctor shameful.

I asked myself whether the job of my own choice was right for me.

Didn't I think that I was free from the duty to inherit his job because I was a daughter, not a son?

It was a matter of conscience and duty before being a matter of obligation.

My father wanted so much that anyone among us would

follow him. He must have wanted to repay for his blessed life from generation to generation.

I decided to become a spectacles repairer.

It took several months until I put my thought into practice.

I had been called “Doctor Song” or “Ms. Song,” but now I joined the Moran Public Service Cooperative, processing glasses and fixing them to frames with men who were repairing fountain pens or engraving seals.

Many people wondered if something had gone wrong with me.

They would look at me with pity as if I had been punished.

It was easier said than done, and I had made the determination not with easy mind.

My father was pleased and satisfied with me. If there was anyone who did not understand me, he would shout, “She is right. Don't disturb her.”

I worked as a spectacles repairer for three years.

Finally, I decided to open a spectacles repairer's.

It was my father who supported my decision before anybody else. He said, “Don't change your mind whatever others may say.”

I obtained materials myself, and asked carpenters and plasterers for help. I would stay in the house at night, making preparations for the next day's work.

At last I built the repairer's and hung up a small signboard, reading Kaeson Spectacles Repairer's on the newly-painted wall.

For three years we served hundreds of thousands spectacles for workers, farmers, scientists, teachers, journalists and street cleaners across the country.

Kim Jong Il spoke highly of our deeds and saw to it that a spectacles shop was built at the foot of picturesque Moran Hill to meet the people's demand for spectacles.

Now the shop has become a place which our people and foreigners frequent and to which overseas Koreans render material and spiritual assistance. There is no end to writing about it.

We have more things to do than we have done so far. It is just the beginning for our shop.

Thanks to the love and trust of Kim Jong Il, my father became chairman of the management board of a large enterprise with thousands of employees at the age of 74, and worked with vigour until he was well over 80.

The traces of his life were imprinted throughout the country, including Pyongyang, the capital city; he could see with the pride and happiness of being a "socialist millionaire" the Kanggye Pencil Factory, the rubber and glass factories in various parts of the country, the torch of the Tower of the Juche Idea, the furnishings in the Mansudae Art Theatre and Pyongyang Subway, the apartment houses on Changgwang, Kwangbok and Thongil streets, the optical and experimental instruments at scientific and educational bases, the illuminating lamps on stages, the binoculars and the spectacles worn by millions of people.

He used to say, "Socialism is good, indeed."

When he looked at the workers moving to the houses on newly-built streets, the children wearing water glasses in the swimming pool at the Changgwang Health Complex and the subway stations, he would say so.

It must have been the expression of his praise to the benevolent socialist system associated with his whole life and of the dignity of his life that was glorified under the warm care of the great leaders.

Suddenly, his health began to deteriorate. He was over

eighty years old and his health was in bad condition.

At that time I was attending a national conference of models of communist virtue.

My father watched me on TV while lying on the bed.

After the conference was over, I went to see him.

Tears welled up in his eyes when he was holding my hands. He said: You've glorified my life again; many people called me on the phone and said I have a laudable daughter; they said you were the first recipient of the Order of the National Flag 1st Class at the conference; like father, like daughter, they said.

Feeling the Order of the National Flag 1st Class with his hand, he said: You should know how heavy the commendation is; General Kim Jong Il commended you with the belief that you would work harder; don't forget it.

He told me to go and work, saying that I should not remain beside him as I had participated in and taken the floor at a national conference. He continued that he would soon rise from the sickbed.

But the day finally came when he had to stop working.

In January next year, when the intense cold of midwinter was raging, he fell.

I could see from the complexion of his face, the eyestrain and sleepy eyes that his end was nearing.

But he said to us, "Go back and work, please." This was the way he was.

When a person realizes that he is at death's door, he usually wants to be with his close friends, his wife or his sons and daughters.

He must have wanted to be so, too, but he did not allow that because he only knew working and hoped that his sons and daughters would work hard to repay the affection and solicitude of the great leaders for himself.

He was such a man on my wedding day, too.

Many people, who had grown tipsy, toasted to the newlyweds, me and my husband, saying we should be faithful to each other to the end and bear many sons and daughters; many people were shocked to hear my father saying to me, "You have to go to work tomorrow."

So we went to work the day after the wedding day.

When we went to the hospital again after hearing about his state, he was in a coma.

All of us sat around the head of his bed.

When he regained consciousness, he called us with his

eyes, and said with a clear voice: But for the great leaders, I would have remained a slave of money, unaware of his country and nation; the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung said that he would take me as far as the communist society, but my life is so short; I don't feel regretful for having come as far as today following him.

The man, who had lived for money, the man who had then become aware of his country, his fellow people and his national leaders, the "socialist millionaire" who had lived a dignified and happy life enjoying the affection of both his national leaders and fellow people, passed away in this way.

People say that it is only when one's hair has turned grey that he understands the world, and my father must have breathed his last not with a light heart, with the feeling that he had failed to fully repay the love and care bestowed by the great leaders on him.

The great affection for my father continued, and it was beyond what my family had imagined.

On hearing that my father had died, Chairman Kim Il Sung had a wreath sent to my father's funeral.

Kim Jong Il ensured that his remains were entombed in

the Patriotic Martyrs Cemetery to hand down his exploits for the motherland and the revolution, and that history and the nation would not forget him.

In his lifetime he had chosen the site of his grave like other people had done, but Kim Jong Il glorified his life even after his death.

We all cried; so did the condolers.

The time came when the funeral procession had to leave for the cemetery. The National Military Band played the funeral music. The funeral car was accompanied by many cars.

Following the motorcade, I looked at the hill, the Patriotic Martyrs Cemetery, where my father's remains would be entombed.

My father, who had been a private businessman, was heading for the cemetery as a patriot.

I said in tears, "Do you know, father, where you are going? You are going to the Patriotic Martyrs Cemetery. Do you hear me? Open your eyes just once and look."

It was the coldest season in the year, but the sunshine was warm. The sun shone brightly over the cemetery covered with snow.

Conclusion

The life of my father, who followed a straight road under the warm care of the great leaders, ended gloriously.

But the warm care continued.

In September 1998, on his way back from an inspection tour of the front line, Kim Jong Il visited the reconstructed Patriotic Martyrs Cemetery

Looking at the photographic images on the tombstones of his unforgettable comrades for over four hours until it became dark, he recollected their patriotic loyalty, explaining their exploits etched in history.

In front of my father's photographic image, he said: Song Tae Gwan was a patriotic businessman whom Comrade Kim Il Sung knew well; he did a lot of work in his lifetime.

When the news was reported by mass media, we, his sons and daughters, went to the cemetery with bouquets of flowers.

First we walked along the course Kim Jong Il had taken,

seeing one by one those who had worked at important posts of the Party and state, those who had contributed to building the Party, state and army, martyrs who had sacrificed their lives to the sacred cause of national reunification, personages who had rendered outstanding contributions in the fields of science, art and literature and others well known across the country.

We felt impressed by the fact that my father was entombed in this cemetery, which the overseas Koreans call a "martyrs cemetery reserved for persons of high positions."

We stopped in front of the photographic image on our father's tombstone.

His image looked grave.

Offering a bouquet of flowers before the tombstone, I said: What are you thinking about now and what are you saying to us?

I was communicating with my father.

I felt as if I was hearing his request:

Song Hui, I want you to support General Kim Jong Il faithfully in my place; you must repay his favour with loyalty

from generation to generation; and remember that anyone who devotes his or her conscience to the motherland and the fellow people can be embraced by the warm love and can enjoy the worth of life.

I believe that anyone who visits the Patriotic Martyrs Cemetery will learn the eternal truth of life, whoever he or she may be.

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