

The Hum Podcast

Episode 10: “After 735 Days I’m Finally Free”

[Theme music fades in]

Kenneth: I got little bit of a hint from the prosecutor’s office and say, “You will be convicted no matter what.” But he said, “Don't worry about numbers of years, not important.” I said, “What do you mean by that?” And he said, “Well, after your conviction, it all depend on the attitude of United States government and how they deal with your case will determine what's gonna happen to you.”

[Music increases in volume]

Speaker: You're listening to The Hum.

[Music fades out]

Gilad: Gilad Cohen here with The Hum Podcast, joined by my co-host today, a very special co-host, Katy Swailes, who's our podcast co-producer and editor.

Katy: Very glad to be here.

Gilad: So stoked you're here. And we're joined here today by a very special guest who spent, is it right 735 days in a labor camp in North Korea?

Kenneth: That's correct.

Gilad: Kenneth Bae. My first question would be how does it feel to be the most dangerous American that North Korea has seen since the Korean War?

Kenneth: When North Korean authorities told me that, I didn't know what to make of it. Because not only I was trying to do mission work in North Korea, but I encouraged and mobilized people around the world to go to North Korea, do the work, mission work, and therefore they said that we have to label you as one of the most dangerous, the worst criminal we ever apprehended in our history.

Gilad: Wow.

Katy: And Kenneth, what was the crime that they were alleging you had done?

Kenneth: Well they charged me with two counts. One is, they said I was trying to overthrow the government through two things: one is prayer and the other one is worship, which means taking people into North Korea as tourists, but having them to pray and worship in North Korea. They found it very threatening, so they said, "We have to charge you because you're trying to overthrow the government through the prayer and worship."

Katy: Just to be clear, you weren't handing Bibles to people or really trying to convert anyone. You were just simply bringing people into the country to pray.

Kenneth: That's right, all the work involved that I brought about 300 people into North Korea just to walk around and meet the people and pray and love the people over there. And they still thought that was very threatening.

Gilad: You've got a book out. It's called *Not Forgotten: The True Story of My Imprisonment in North Korea*. And on the back of the book, I'm just gonna read something really quick. It says, "As a black sedan rolled up in front of the hotel, I knew this was it. Two men in dark suits emerged from the car, one man asked, 'Are you Mr. Bae?' 'Yes,' I said. 'You need to come with us.'" What happened next?

Kenneth: Well, I was walking around the parking lot over the hotel and then the car pulled over and two men came out.

Gilad: Which city are you in?

Kenneth: This is a city called Rason and this is northeast corner of North Korea. Then they just came out and said, "You need to come with us." And I hesitated for a moment, but they reinforced in a way that is, "You need to come." I got in the car and then car drove up and took me to a remote location. It was one of the hotels hidden in the back of the mountainside. And then from there, I spent about a month being investigated before I was taken to Pyongyang for indictment to happen from there.

Gilad: It's a really interesting quote because you say, "I knew this was it." Why did you know something was it, what happened? It's not every day that-

Kenneth: Because earlier that day, as was usual, I brought people into North Korea as a tourist. But this time, it was different because I accidentally brought in external computer hard drive into the countries to contain some Western media covering, some footage covering North Korea. And they did offend them because there were some sensitive material about North Korea they didn't like for people to see. And therefore, they confiscated my hard drive, but they let me go on with my tour. I was very nervous. Not only they found those clips, but this hard drive

contain all my mission work report and newsletters and photos and video clips of my work in China and North Korea was in there. I knew that once they discover those, they will come for me.

Gilad: This is just so insane, right? It's not every day that we get to sit with someone who is going through this very experience. Let's go to the hotel. They take you into the hotel. You must be so nervous.

Kenneth: Yes, I was nervous and I didn't know what was gonna happen next. And usually, when I hear this kind of report before it doesn't turn out that great [inaudible]. I was just waiting to find out, anxious to find out what's gonna happen to me and then to the people I brought in, and I was starting to panic from there.

Katy: You said you endured about a month of investigation, interrogation. Can you tell us a little bit about what that actually entailed?

Gilad: Is it as bad as we think?

Kenneth: Well, it was extremely difficult to endure during those four weeks that I had to go through. Usually start from early morning, maybe 7 or 8 in the morning until 10 or 11 o'clock at night. I had to write whatever they asked me to confess, and then it doesn't work. And they don't like the answer that I was writing.

Gilad: Was it honest?

Kenneth: In the beginning, there are a couple of things that I had to do. One is I need to protect the people who came in, and that the work that I was involved in China and North Korea, I wanted to make sure that everybody else who was involved with me, they will have some time for them to be able to find out what was happening to me. In the beginning, I only give out the limited answer to whatever the question they were asking. Instead of volunteering for information, I just waited as long as I could so that the people they were involved in, our ministry and our network would be able to inform and they would be able to find a safe route.

Gilad: Right. Walk me through a little bit about the actual experience. Was it one guy that was investigating? Were there several people? Did he have a sense of humor? Were you able to get along with him?

Kenneth: Well, I didn't think he has sense of humor at all. There were about three or four people involved in doing investigation, but there was one main guy, I later found out his name is Mr. Park, and this guy was maybe late 30s, early 40. He's just very short, very skinny guy. But he's been investigator for a while, that's what he told me. And then pretty much in the morning until the night, he come in and

ask questions and then ask me to write it down, the answer, and go back and forth for all day long. And obviously most of time he didn't like the answer that was given, because I was telling them is, "I brought the hard drive as accident, not purposely. It was just honest mistake. I didn't mean anything harm. I didn't want to cause any trouble." But they didn't take that for answer. They pretty much say, "You are lying. We don't believe you." And the more time go by, they start discovering more thing about me and my involvement as mission work, as missionaries and so I have to later on to confess that, "Yes, I'm a missionary and I brought people here to pray and worship. I love the people." And then from that moment on things went really, really difficult because they started to see me as someone who was sent by US government to tear down their country or something like that.

Gilad: Now it's getting way, way worse?

Kenneth: Yeah, was worse then. First it was just about video clips I brought in. Later on they thought that there was somebody behind the scene that's orchestrating all these things, and they've been asking, "Who sent you? Who's behind you?" And I said, "God. I'm just a missionary and I'm not ..." And then they say, "There got to be somebody above you." And they later on found out that I was working with the Youth with Missions.

Gilad: Youth With A Mission, YWAM.

Kenneth: YWAM. And then I was sent from Kona, Hawaii and this is where the founder of Youth With Mission, Loren Cunningham is. And then they said, "Above you is Loren Cunningham, and above Loren Cunningham is President Obama. Because President Obama told Loren to send you to terrorize our country by injecting the Christian virus into the countries."

Gilad: And for those who don't know, I mean, saying God to the common North Korean person is not something that they are very aware of. North Korea is a country where most people don't believe in a religion.

Kenneth: You know, in about 100 years ago North Korea, especially capital city of Pyongyang is known to be ... It was known as Jerusalem, the Far East. There are more Christian living in the city than any other city in Asia at the time. There are more churches there than any other places. But now people living there, they have no idea what it's like to live outside. They have no access to outside, therefore they never heard about anything special about religion from outside. One person asked me very sincerely this question, "I heard about that before, but never heard about Jesus before, so where this Jesus live, in China or North Korea?"

Gilad: He's in Toronto actually, and everywhere.

Kenneth: And therefore, and I thought he was just kidding, but he was very sincerely asking.

Gilad: Right.

Kenneth: But this is what North Korea is like. They never even heard the name Jesus before. This is something we take it for granted every day, but over there it's just something new.

Gilad: This whole process goes on for about a month?

Kenneth: Yes.

Gilad: And for our listeners who probably already know, North Korea is very closed off. While you're there, do you have any idea of what's happening with the rest of the world? Do you have any inkling that the rest of the world is wondering where you are? Does anyone know that you are going through this process as you are going through it?

Kenneth: No, I didn't think that anybody outside knew what I was going through, because I was taken from ... I was walking by myself, another person was walking with me, but not from our tour groups. Therefore, simply people didn't know what happened to me. And then once I figured it out that my tour group left the country, I hoped that someone from other side either contacted US government or at least our family members, and so that informed them what was happening. But later on I found out they had no idea really what was happening to me at the time, especially for about four weeks. They thought that I would be coming home in maybe a couple of weeks. That's what the North Korean government informed the rest of the group that I'll be home soon, and they sent them off. And so my wife was actually waiting patiently, hoping that I would come home any time. But for four weeks that she never heard anything from my side or anything like that.

Katy: But you were also worried about your wife and your family and your assistant and people who you work with. What was that like, having absolutely no way of communicating with them, but being completely isolated and worried about their safety?

Kenneth: I was worried more about my family and people involved in my ministry more than myself. Because I thought that because of my careless mistake, now I'm putting many people in danger. But there was a moment, like third day of my detainment, they made me stand on the middle of the room all day long without

moving. And I was standing for hours, so six or seven hours at least. And then I just had kind of like a supernatural experience with God. And it's almost like I feel like He's saying there is no one will be harmed through this, and I'm with you. Do not worry about anything else. I was holding on to the promise that no one will be harmed, so I was hoping everybody will be okay and not only my family members, but other people involved in the ministry. After a few months later, I found out everybody was fine. And then when I came home, all the people involved in ministry were kept safe, because I found just like God promised, no one was harmed through this. That could be a disaster for many people, but everybody kept safe.

Gilad: Thank goodness. That whole thing ends in the hotel room and now let's go forward a bit. Was there a fair trial? Were you assigned a lawyer? How long did that whole process go through, because I know that eventually you were convicted and charged with 15 years of hard labor, right?

Kenneth: Yeah.

Gilad: Did you ever think you had a fair chance?

Kenneth: Well, from the city of Rason I was taken to Pyongyang, and when I got there they told me that I'm going to be tried and then most likely I'll receive either death penalty or life in prison. And when I heard that, which was unreal because I thought that I'll be actually released by cooperating with them, but later or rather they were actually, they're gonna put me on the stand. It took about four and half month waiting and doing more, verifying everything before the actual trial happened. The trial happened in end of April 2013. I received 15 years of sentence. Actually I was glad to only receive 15 year compared to life or death sentence.

Gilad: You were glad?

Kenneth: I was glad that at least I didn't, you know, they are not gonna go out and shoot me.

Gilad: That's very positive. I guess they had to not shoot you-

Kenneth: There were a couple of times they have threatened that they may just skip the trial, just take me out on the square and shoot.

Gilad: Why?

[Theme music fades in]

Kenneth: Because at the time there were tension between US with North Korea, because right after they did a missile launch and third nuclear testing. And the tension between two country was extremely intense. And they just couldn't do anything to US, but I am American in custody, so they took that on me in a way that is, "If you don't cooperate, we can just end it now."

[Music increases in volume then fades out]

Gilad: I wanted to touch more upon your time now in the labor camp. What was it like?

Kenneth: My day started at 6 in the morning. This is when I wake up. They'll actually wake me up at 6 and then I get ready and wash up and then have breakfast at 7.

Gilad: Were you in your own cell?

Kenneth: Yes, I was in my own cell. Turned out that my prison was only for foreigners only, therefore I didn't see any other inmate. At that time I was the only prisoner at the camp, and there were about 30 some guards working in the camp. I received a lot of attention from many people.

Gilad: It was the Kenneth Bae camp.

Kenneth: I was staying in the room three of the camp. There were about seven or eight different room. It wasn't really a big facility for where the inmate supposed to stay. My room, there's small bathroom building and then there was room divided into two section. One is like a living section with a desk and chair and TV. The other room has another desk and bed in there. I get up at 6 in the morning, wash up and get ready. Have breakfast at 7. They let me keep my Bible. I had my Bible with me.

Gilad: It's interesting.

Kenneth: I was able to read Bible and pray, and just spend time and worship and then get myself ready to go at 8 o'clock. And from 8 to 10, I worked two hours at the farm. In the beginning, I was working at the bean field and planting the seed and later on in the winter time, I was shoveling the coal and digging the hole and just doing many different hard labor odd jobs. And about a year later and they let me do some carrying rocks and, what kind of hard labor supposed to be.

Gilad: Did you have any days off?

Kenneth: I had a day off on Sunday, so I worked six days a week from 8 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock in the evenings. Worked eight hours straight, but there's two hours, like had two 30-minute break and one-hour break.

Katy: 10 hours a day?

Kenneth: 10 hours a day, six days a week. And then Sunday I get to rest, but the resting means not sleeping or laying down, but I had to sit in the chair all day, watch their TV, propaganda TV for all day from 10 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night.

Katy: You have to, those things?

Kenneth: I have to, yeah. I didn't have choice to do anything else other than sit at the chair, stare at the TV for 12 hours.

Gilad: Oh gosh!

Katy: Which was worse.

Kenneth: Yeah, I prefer going to work.

Gilad: Right. I was gonna say I lived in South Korea for two years and that work schedule just reminds me of a typical South Korean person's work week anyway. Six days a week, 10 hours a day. I'm seeing here while you were there, quite a number of things happened. You lost 50 pounds. There was concerns that you were beginning to go blind, diabetes, high blood pressure, fatty liver and back problems that you had before. I'm just gonna say this, because obviously our viewers can't see you, but you look great today. You look healthy and great. Are you healthy? Are you doing okay?

Kenneth: Well, I'm doing much better. I did lost about, closer to 60 pound or so. And then after I came home, my wife was so glad that I'm home, but she wasn't glad that my weight came back with me. Slowly I cut up with the older weight that I lost now, so.

Gilad: I understand that you were put in a hospital. You were there for quite a bit. I remember seeing that in the news. What was that like, and also while you were in prison did you have any opportunities to see anyone, to speak to any family, to send any letters? Was there any opportunity to do anything like that?

Kenneth: Yes. I was working at the labor camp for about three months, and then because of my health issues and lost a lot of weight they decided to send me to hospital. I was hospitalized for a few months, and then was sent back to labor camp, going back and forth about three times. Meanwhile, my family were able to write to me. I was able to write them back, but sometimes it take about a month or two before I get another letter. But we are able to exchange letters, so that really help and knowing that my family is doing everything they can to secure my

release. And also that how they are doing was really encouraging me that to stay focused and stay healthy.

Gilad: I understand also that your mom, was she able to?

Kenneth: Yeah, my mom visited me when I was in hospital, after being at the hospital for a couple of months. I recovered quite a bit. I was resting, and suddenly one of the prosecutors came to me and said, "Your mom is here and she'll be walking into room."

Gilad: Just like a surprise like that?

Kenneth: Yeah, about 20 minutes.

Katy: Wow.

Gilad: Oh my gosh!

Kenneth: We had a really emotional reunion as you can imagine. We embraced each other. Apparently, they let my mom come in to show how humanitarian they are in treating the prisoner, even though I was supposed to be the worst criminal ever.

Gilad: In history.

Kenneth: Yeah, in the history.

Katy: It was kind of like a publicity stunt.

Kenneth: I believe so, but it was ... I'm grateful, because they allowed my mom to come and visit. My mom was there for about three days. We visited for about two hours each day, for about three day in a row. One amazing thing that happened is that when I was in labor camp I was hungry, I was tired, so I was thinking about food.

Gilad: What were you thinking of?

Kenneth: I had a list of food that I wanna eat. One was Hawaiian chocolate with macadamia nut. Second thing was Kit Kat.

Gilad: Just chocolate.

Kenneth: Yeah. Third thing was beef jerky.

Gilad: Beef jerky.

Katy: It's a bit fair.

Kenneth: And then fourth thing was protein bar. And then fifth thing was mixed nut dessert.

Gilad: No kimchi on this list.

Katy: Lots of proteins.

Kenneth: These are the things, but where can I get these items from the North Korean labor camp?

Gilad: That's the most random list I've ever heard in my life. I did not expect that.

Kenneth: And then when mom came to visit me, and the second day she said, "I brought you something." She opened her bag and first thing she take out was Hawaiian chocolate with macadamia nut.

Gilad: Oh my God!

Kenneth: And the second thing was Kit Kat. Third thing was beef jerky. Fourth thing was protein bar. Fifth thing was mixed nut. It's almost like I called her and asked for those items, but never called and never wrote to her. Not even pray for these items.

Gilad: I had those five items for you and Katy told me not to bring them today. I had a feeling.

Kenneth: In a way, it was God's reminder that He care for me and that He's with me, and that was His way to show that I'm in good hand.

Katy: What were you eating in the labor camp? What-

Kenneth: Labor camp, the food was very simple, mostly soup and rice and some vegetable. And first year they actually gave me some egg, a little bit of meat also, but starting from second year maybe they ran out, they didn't have budget for it or they didn't have enough. I just figured out later that even prison guards did not have much to share. Therefore, the quantity and the quality of food dropped from the second year.

Gilad: Were you able to develop any relationships, because you were the only, you said prisoner in this camp? Just spending time with these 30 different guards

throughout the day, throughout your time there, were you able to develop any sort of relationship with these North Korean guards and maybe were you able to have any honest conversations with them about anything?

Kenneth: Yes. For first year or so, I didn't have much meaningful conversation with them. They're very tough on me and then they thought that, you are Korean but you are American. You are working with American. They thought that I was CIA, and they thought there was somebody really there to tear down the country. It was for their attitude to show that, but after being there for about two or three, four months they started to open up to see as who I was. They'd see that I was missionary and pastor and just there, and they said I was there because of my conviction in God, not anything else. And so they started to open up more. When we are alone, they would say pastor instead of 103. And then they say, "Can I talk to you?" And they talk about their marriage problem, kids problems and so I was doing like a pre-mental counseling to parenting and different things, and talking to them. And they-

Gilad: We've got to talk after.

Kenneth: Yeah. They were just ... I just kind of see them as just real people living, we had the same problem like we do, just they are ordinary people going through same things, except the only thing difference is that they are living in a different system, different countries and they have to live that way. That's what I was finding out more.

Gilad: You were talking about watching that TV and Katy, you asked what was worse. While you were watching that TV, did you at all see anything about Dennis Rodman, because there was a whole circus happening on this side of the world with Dennis Rodman going over. He tweeted at one point that Kim Jong Un ... What was it again?

Katy: He wanted Kim Jong Un to do him a solid and release you.

Kenneth: Yeah.

Gilad: Right. And he was gonna go there and say, "It's not easy, but I'm gonna try." Were you aware that any of that was happening, and what are your thoughts now that you are out on that whole thing?

Kenneth: Well, I wasn't aware of anything, but I just ... Maybe Kim Jong Un has his personal Twitter account he check every week.

Gilad: Kim Jong number Un.

Kenneth: Yeah. But this is when, it was 2014 I believe, 2014 January. I was actually in hospital, just watching TV and one evening I saw Dennis Rodman on TV and he was there with ex-NBA players and he had exhibition game with the North Korean athletes and he was saying a birthday song to Kim Jong Un.

Gilad: So horrible.

Kenneth: It was unreal to see him there. But I was hoping that maybe if he's so close, then maybe then he knows I'm in custody, so maybe something can come out from it. But in couple of weeks later, prosecutor came to see me and very, very upset. Telling me that Western media coverage about my case is getting worse. And so, "What do you mean by that?" And said, "When Dennis Rodman came, he apparently did an interview with CNN and turned out he was little drunk and he kind of rumbled, and then he told the CNN crew that I pretty much deserve to be there." And that created media frenzies and people were talking about me being held as innocent. North Korean government said, "What are you gonna do about this?" I said, "What can I do about it?" Then finally, I agreed that maybe then I'll do a press conference admitting that I'm guilty. I apologize one more time. I ask for mercy and asking US government to do everything they can. "Would that please you?" Then, "Would you let me go home?" That was my suggestion, and then they put me under press conference. After the press conference's over, they actually sent me to labor camp just to make sure that people know that they mean business. The only thing out of that is they said when you talk about your statement, do not mention anything about Dennis Rodman. Leave him out of it.

Gilad: Right. Good idea, as a general rule.

Kenneth: Because his special relationship with Kim Jong Un, they wanted to make sure that anything negative about Dennis Rodman is not good for them.

Katy: You talk about in your book when you were in the hotel, you had a kind of a day dream about Barack Obama giving an order to have marines or to have a special envoy come and rescue you. Were you aware at any point that he was talking about your case, that he was trying to have somebody come to North Korea and ask for you to be released? What were you aware of about what was happening and who was trying to figure out how to get you out?

Kenneth: Not until a year later, that's when my sister wrote to me then she's doing everything possible. She visited the White House, she visited State Department with Secretary Kerry. And so I knew the US government was working in behalf and then trying to get me released. But I didn't know what president said until I got home. I was just very, very surprised and I was very grateful to know that the US government was trying their best to get me home regardless of delay of

timing issue. But I believe it was a timing issue rather than anything else. But they were sincere, they were trying their best. There were few attempts by US government, trying to get me out those two year period of time, even though they weren't successful.

Katy: And that's really interesting, because Pastor Lim who is a Mississauga man from just outside Toronto, currently being held in what we know is the same labor camp and possibly even the very cell that you stayed in, he's been there for 15 months. What do you think that the Canadian government should be doing to try to help Pastor Lim?

Kenneth: Based on my experience, I do believe that, because now Pastor Lim's already convicted, he was sent to labor camp. He's serving life sentence, and therefore only way he'll be able to go home is receive special pardon from Kim Jong Un himself just like I received. Therefore, that means that government level talk need to be arranged in order for any progresses to made. So far, my understanding is Pastor Lim received a couple of councilor visits from the Canadian embassy in South Korea, but as far as I know is no higher level official visited them or tried to negotiate for his release yet. I do believe that now is time for more action. The fact that they have put Pastor Lim on the stage, on CNN, kind of giving indication that Northern government is willing to talk. And then the family members are really asking the Canadian government to really step in and take action, because more they wait it will be very difficult for Pastor Lim to recover. Even he come back, then I think it'll be very difficult for him to readjust to everything.

Gilad: I wanna go back to your day of release. What happened? Did you know that you were being released ahead of time? How were you told and what was it like to get out?

Kenneth: Night before I was released was, which one, November 7th 2014. Later in the night, the prosecutor came to see me and say, "You have interview tomorrow with the Western media, so get ready for it." But normally he doesn't visit me that late in night, so I asked, "Did somebody from US government come?" And then said, "No, it's pretty much say just another interview, but do this well. Maybe this is the last one you need to do." And the next day, 7:30 in the morning he came to take me to one location in a hotel and I was transferred there. I waited a little bit and then that one doctor and two American officials came in to door and told me that they are just there to check up my health. They spent about 15, 20 minutes and they say, "Good luck to you sir," and they left. I had no idea what was happening. I was waiting from 9 in the morning until 3 o'clock in the afternoon, sitting alone in the room. And then 3 o'clock the prosecutor came back and said, "Let's go." I couldn't say anything. I just followed them. I thought I was going back to labor camp. And then the car door opened

and I found myself in front of the Koryo Hotel, was the largest hotel in the city. They took me up to second floor. This is when I found out that I was actually being pardoned-

Gilad: Wow.

Kenneth: -by Kim Jong Un himself. That was around 3:15. They asked me to write another confession and apology letter to Kim Jong Un himself, and then 3:30 I was taken into another big larger room. A few minutes later American delegation came in a set, and then a few minutes later a one-star general walked into the room shouting everybody to stand up. And then four-star general came in to room. He's the director of National Security Bureau, the one who was responsible for Kim Jong Un's uncle's death, Jang Song Thaek. He walked in, probably meanest looking guy ever that I saw. And he had his declaration from the Kim Jong Un himself, as that hereby give a special pardon for American criminal, Kenneth Bae. And it was signed by Kim Jong Un. And then after that they hand me over to US delegation. And then I arrive at the airport at 4 o'clock, and then we left after that. I had no idea. Turned out that even the American envoy did not know until the last minute that they were able to take us home.

Gilad: What was it like going home? Getting out of there, seeing your family, and knowing that you were now safe?

Kenneth: When they took us to the airport, the bus did not stop at the front of the airport. They went all the way into the runway, and saw the big plane say "United States of America". That's when I finally realized that I'm going home. And then I got on board and we flew out for a couple of hours and then they say, the meal was served. It was grilled cheese sandwich with a French onion soup.

Gilad: How was it?

Kenneth: It was so good.

Katy: It wasn't a Kit Kat.

Kenneth: It was like a taste of America. Finally say, "Wow, I'm with bunch of American. They came all the way here to get me. Now I'm finally going home." When we arrived in Seattle I saw my mom walking toward me. I just embraced her and my sister and rest of the family came after. It was such a, just a joyful and just grateful moment that after 735 days I'm finally free. And you know, freedom is such a, something that I never appreciated as much, but because my freedom was taken away for 735 days, because of that I have more heart and more compassion for those people who live without freedom in daily lives. And this is when I realized that my 735 day compared to people in North Korea living day to

day for entire of their life as a prison of their own system. I was able to have more compassion, and I was able to see that as we need to remember these people.

Gilad: I'm so, so glad that you brought up the North Korean people, because I think that's why I got involved in this work. That's what also got you involved in the work. Do you have a message for the people of North Korea?

Kenneth: When I was in North Korea, I received letters from the people around the world, and they were saying that, "Kenneth, you are not forgotten. We are standing with you. We are praying for you. You'll be free. You'll be coming home soon." So my message to the people of North Korea and the people who are listening is that we need to remember the people in North Korea and they need to know that the people outside care. We need to stand with them and remember them, so that we can say some day that when you see them face to face is that, "You matter to us too." And this is the message that we need to carry, because if we don't care, then no one care for them.

Katy: You've said that you hope you can go back to North Korea some day. Why would you wanna go back?

Kenneth: If I go back and others to be able to be going back and forth, more interchange happen between North Koreans and outside world will bring some sort of closeness and harmony and they will be able to have more understanding, broader perspective about life even though we live in such different societies. If I can be the bridge, then, and that was my calling and desire, and that desire and calling has not changed yet, even I come home after being detained for such a long time.

Gilad: You've got such an incredible story, and there's so much more to learn. I just have one final question. *[Theme music fades in]* That grilled cheese sandwich, was it the best grilled cheese sandwich you ever had?

Kenneth: Well, definitely. It wasn't just a grilled cheese sandwich, it was just taste of home, taste of America, and just saying that wow, now I am going home.

[Music increases in volume then fades out]