

A Father's Heart

On Saturday, Sept. 18, 1982, the U.S. government released the results of a sad investigation.

The government determined that an Army soldier – Joseph T. White, a native of St. Louis, Mo. – stationed in Korea had been a defector to the Communists. According to the investigation, on Aug. 28, 1982, this 20-year-old private willingly crossed the Demilitarized Zone into North Korea “for motives that are not known.”

His fellow American soldiers pleaded with him to turn back, but he did not respond.

North Korean authorities refused a request by United Nations Command representatives to meet White and ask him about the reasons for his defections. North Korean officials released a video in which White, looking uncomfortable, denounced the United States’ “corruptness, criminality, immorality, weakness, and hedonism,” claiming he had defected to demonstrate how “unjustifiable (it was) for the U.S. to send troops to South Korea.” As White’s speech was written in stilted, unnatural-sounding English, it is widely considered that it was prepared by North Koreans and not by him.

The day after the findings were released, the parents of the young man held a press conference on the lawn of their St. Louis home. Wiping tears from his eyes, the father said that they had accepted the fact that their son was, indeed, a defector. “He has lost his credibility in this country, even with me,” said the man. But then he showed the heart of a father. “I still love my son,” he said, “and want him back.”



In February 1983, White’s parents received a letter from their son, stating that he was happy in North Korea and working as an English teacher. Then, on Nov. 5, 1985, the day of White’s 24th birthday, his parents received a letter penned by one of White’s North Korean friends, stating that their son had died by drowning in Ch’ongch’on River earlier that year in August. Despite the family’s requests, White’s body was never returned; the letter did mention that his body was never recovered from the water.

God is like this father. Perhaps your life is not where you want it to be, and maybe you have turned away from Him. But if you will come back, the door is open, and the light is on.

Come home, says the Father. Please come home.

– Beecher Hunter